

Appendix A: Cross Creek Calling

Cross Creek Community Church is called to be a theologically progressive church where people can intentionally and continually seek new understanding of their faith. We journey together to strengthen our knowledge and faith, minister to each other, and reach beyond our local church into the community and the world with the message of Jesus. This message of love, grace, peace, justice and compassion moves us to a way of living and acting that reflects our understanding and experience of God, allowing us to work with God in the world. Our progressive theology supports the model of our faith – that God welcomes all people to God’s table. If ever there was a church where you can be yourself, Cross Creek is that place. We will continue to be a beacon of hope in these difficult times.

We express this calling in the following ways:

1) Still-Speaking God

God speaks to us today in ways that are relevant to our age and time. We find more grace in the search for understanding than we do in dogmatic certainty. “No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

2) Extravagant Welcome

We honor the rich perspective each person brings to our community as they journey in their faith, and we adhere to the principle of radical inclusivity.

3) Affirmation of Theological Diversity

We honor the many faiths that bring us all closer to God.

4) Concern for Justice

We extend gifts of compassion, justice and peace through unselfish service, especially to the marginalized among us.

5) Commitment to Children

We journey together with the young people among us in a way that allows us all to grow in the experience, message and mission of God.

6) Relevant Worship

We strive for worship that is authentic, safe, and relevant, and that plants a seed of reflection that continues beyond the church walls into every aspect of our lives.

We hereby reaffirm our Purpose Statement and Vision Statement (both found on www.crosscreekchurch.org) as remaining the relevant expressions of our identity.

Appendix B: Cross Creek Historical Calling

It was 1997. The economy was strong and people were taking risks in the prevailing climate of optimism. At the same time, religious fundamentalism continued to rise. Churches were regularly discriminating in various ways against GLBT persons, overtly and covertly.

Our pastor was fired when he was revealed to be a gay man. With a small group of founders, and the support of the United Church of Christ, Cross Creek Community Church was born to provide a safe and inclusive worship environment to all people, including the GLBT community and those concerned about injustice. It was a grand experiment. We chose a name that promoted 'community', and we had the first openly gay leadership of a mainline denomination in the Dayton, Ohio, area.

From the start, we were a forward-thinking program-based church, operating a bit over our means, but retaining a sense of intimacy. Our founding values were more important than our building and were reflected in our contemporary, non-traditional worship service and our storefront worship space. We identified strongly with HIV/AIDS issues. As a place where you could be yourself (and could not hide), GLBT persons, and many others, finally had a church home.

By 2001, the economy had considerably worsened: the tech bubble of the 1990s had burst, and the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred just as we were preparing to move into our first church building. In addition, conservative Republicans had taken control of government at all levels through alliances with fundamentalist religious groups. Anti-gay voices emerged across the country. Churches were unsure how to respond; votes were being taken; discussion of gay marriage was in the public square.

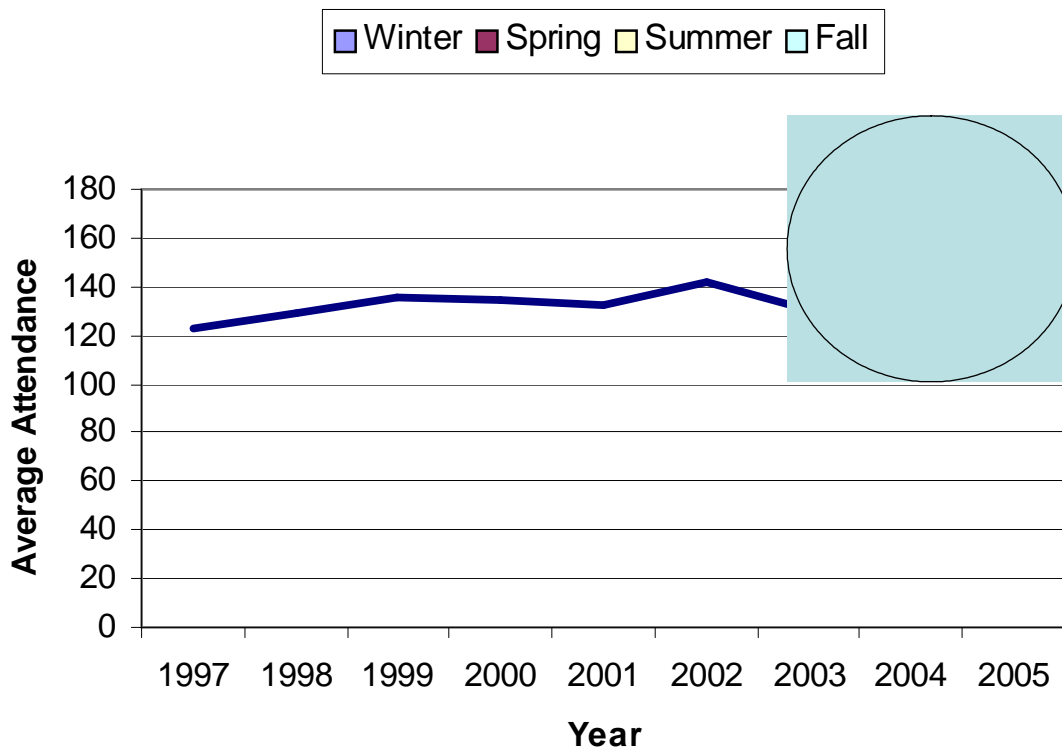
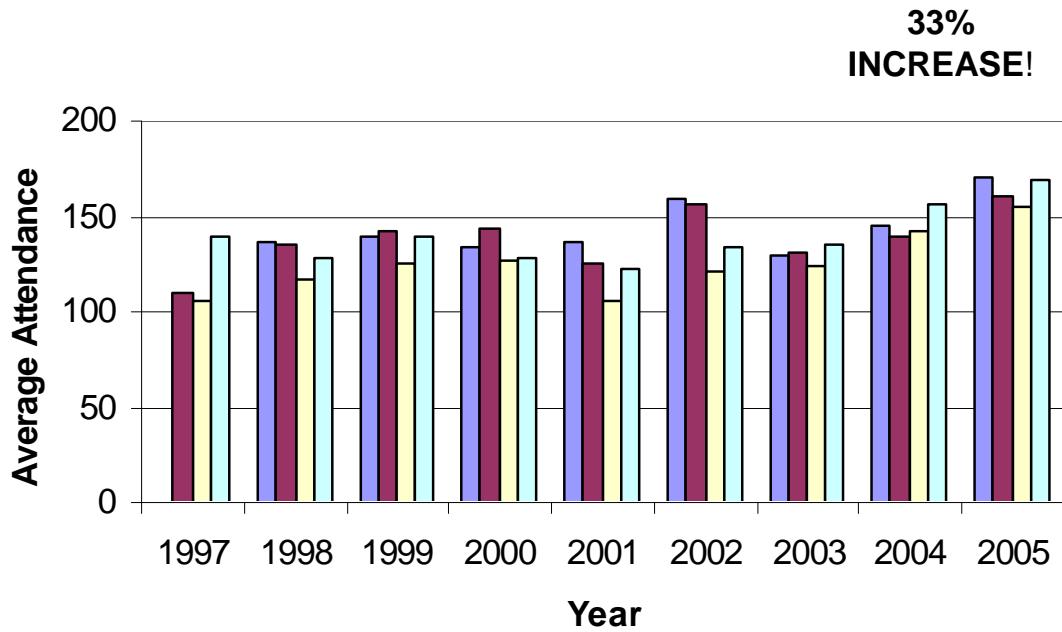
Our worship, meanwhile, began to align with the emerging progressive theology movement best represented by Dr. Marcus Borg and the Jesus Seminar; through the process of completing his doctoral work, our pastor exposed us to this new way of seeing our Christian heritage. We were encouraged to ask questions – to seek – as a way of growing spiritually. There is some sense this shift may have cost us in attendance. We continued to be 'open and affirming', but broadened our calling from personal healing to more corporate justice – we were finding our unique voice in this work.

The demographics of the church changed from a largely adult constituency, many of whom were single adults, to one of more families, resulting in a subsequent shift in our programs. With our new building, made possible by our partnership with the UCC and our first capital campaign, we transitioned from a transient congregation to one of permanence. Our worship service became somewhat less contemporary with the addition of more traditional worship elements. We were seeking less and journeying together more. With a small number of children to care for, our new church felt like just the right size.

Today, religious and political groups continue to be polarizing with their anti-gay message. Local economic concerns loom in the greater Dayton area, including possible job losses, health care and homeless issues. But Cross Creek Community Church has emerged as *the* leading voice of progressive theology in the area, and is a beacon of hope to many in these difficult times.

Our denomination's synod, in typical historic fashion, was the first in the nation to take a public stand in favor of marriage equality, and we continue to support equality issues within the context of our broader theological and social justice commitments. With one quarter of our church consisting of children and youth, our children's program is exploding, and we find hope in the impact we're having on families and our younger members. We are putting our building up for sale in order to find a new worship space where our programs can thrive and accommodate those known and unknown needs. We are embarking on an internal realignment of programs and purpose, and working to establish the structure to support them. The right size for us is the one that best enables us to fulfill our goals.

Appendix C: Cross Creek Historical Attendance



Appendix D: Cross Creek Congregational Survey Results



2006 Cross Creek Church Congregational Survey

	Yes	No	Total
1 Do you consider Cross Creek your church home?	96	2	98
	98%	2%	

	Yes	No	Total
2 Are you a covenant member?	77	21	98
	79%	21%	

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
3 If yes, for how many years?	14	17	5	5	10	4	5	6	8	3	77
	53%				18%		29%				

	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+	Total
4 How many miles do you live from the church?	35	35	9	8	11	98
	36%	36%	9%	8%	11%	

	Faith	Count	%
7 What religious tradition were you raised in?	Methodist	24	24%
	Baptist	15	15%
	Catholic	15	15%
	Presbyterian	8	8%
	UCC	8	8%
	Pentecostal	6	6%
	None	7	7%
	Episcopal	5	5%
	Other	5	5%
	Lutheran	2	2%
	Congregational	1	1%
	Fundamentalist	1	1%
	Church of God	1	1%
	Total	98	

	Not involved				Somewhat involved		Strongly involved				Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
8a Indicate the level of involvement in your faith now?	4	3	1	3	11	6	16	16	22	16	98
	11%				17%		71%				

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
8b Indicate the level of involvement in your faith 10 years ago?	25	9	6	3	10	6	3	5	12	19	98
	44%				16%		40%				

	Inc	Dec	Same	N/A	Total
9 Has your overall involvement increased or decreased in the past 2 years?	46	12	29	11	98
	53%	14%	33%		

	Reason	Count
9a If increased, what are the reasons?	Stronger faith	22
	More positive attitude toward Cross Creek	15
	Accepted volunteer/paid position with the church	15
	Because of children	8
	Other	7
	More time available	5
	Better health	3
	Total	75

	Reason	Count
9b If decreased, what are the reasons?	Less time available	8
	Gave up volunteer/paid position with the church	4
	Because of children	4
	Health problems	2
	Less positive attitude toward Cross Creek	1
	Faith struggles	1
	Other	1
	Total	21

2006 Cross Creek Church Congregational Survey

10 Which four programs and services offered by many churches are most important to you and your family?

Program/Service	of Total	%	Count
Justice programs	53%	14%	52
Adult theological talks	44%	11%	43
Family activities and outing	44%	11%	43
Children's ministry	38%	10%	37
Spiritual retreats	37%	10%	36
Bible study discussion and prayer groups	31%	8%	30
Youth programs	28%	7%	27
Personal/family counseling	23%	6%	23
Mission projects	17%	5%	17
Marriage enrichment	13%	3%	13
Grief/divorce recovery	11%	3%	11
Sports or camping	11%	3%	11
Active retirement programs	7%	2%	7
Food pantry and clothing resources	6%	2%	6
Care for terminally ill	6%	2%	6
Parent training programs	6%	2%	6
Church sponsored day school	4%	1%	4
12-step recovery programs	3%	1%	3
Day care services	2%	1%	2
Total			377

What are your preferences?

11 Worship which is:

Emotionally uplifting			Intellectually challenging		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
10	11	50	13	14	98
10%	11%	51%	13%	14%	
21%		51%	28%		

Traditional, Formal, Ceremonial			Contemporary, Informal		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
4	4	26	39	25	98
4%	4%	27%	40%	26%	
8%		27%	65%		

12 Music which is:

Traditional			Contemporary		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
3	9	38	28	20	98
3%	9%	39%	29%	20%	
12%		39%	49%		

Performed by others			Participatory		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
3	9	45	26	15	98
3%	9%	46%	27%	15%	
12%		46%	42%		

13 Involvement and mission emphasis which is:

Community focused			Personal spiritual		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
5	24	60	3	6	98
5%	24%	61%	3%	6%	
30%		61%	9%		

Global mission			Local mission		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
1	25	48	4	20	98
1%	26%	49%	4%	20%	
27%		49%	24%		

14 Church architecture which is:

Traditional			Contemporary		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
2	7	30	36	23	98
2%	7%	31%	37%	23%	
9%		31%	60%		

Somber/serious			Light & airy		
1	2	3	4	5	Total
0	2	17	37	42	98
0%	2%	17%	38%	43%	
2%		17%	81%		

2006 Cross Creek Church Congregational Survey

		of Total	%	Count	
15	Among the following items, select 6 of greatest concern to you.				
	Concern				
		Social injustice	67%	18%	66
		Racial/ethnic prejudice	42%	11%	41
		Good church	38%	10%	37
		Stress	37%	10%	36
		Life direction	37%	10%	36
		Spiritual teaching	35%	9%	34
		Personal health	29%	7%	28
		Time for recreation/leisure	23%	6%	23
		Long-term financial security	23%	6%	23
		Fulfilling marriage	22%	6%	22
		Parenting skills	21%	6%	21
		Companionship	20%	5%	20
		Good schools	17%	5%	17
		Satisfying job/career	16%	4%	16
		Teen/child problems	15%	4%	15
		Health insurance	15%	4%	15
		Aging parent care	14%	4%	14
		Day to day financial worries	11%	3%	11
		Abusive relationships	10%	3%	10
		Divorce	7%	2%	7
		Employment opportunities	7%	2%	7
		Retirement opportunities	7%	2%	7
		Better quality healthcare	6%	2%	6
		Child care	6%	2%	6
	Educational objectives	6%	2%	6	
	Problems in schools	5%	1%	5	
	Alcohol/drug use	4%	1%	4	
	Affordable housing	3%	1%	3	
	Neighborhood crime & safety	2%	1%	2	
	Adequate food	1%	0%	1	
	Neighborhood gangs	0%	0%	0	
Total				539	

2006 Cross Creek Church Congregational Survey

16	Read each statement and indicate the degree of your satisfaction or dissatisfaction.	Not	Very				Very	Total
		Applica	satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	dissatisfied	
		9	1	2	3	4	5	
a	Relationship with God	13	17	53	11	4	0	85
			82%		13%	5%		
b	Personal spiritual growth	1	9	56	22	8	2	97
			67%		23%	10%		
c	Personal Bible study and prayer	4	5	15	41	32	1	94
			21%		44%	35%		
d	My health	1	11	41	20	23	2	97
			54%		21%	26%		
e	My job/career	10	18	34	17	11	8	88
			59%		19%	22%		
f	My personal financial situation	2	19	31	16	25	5	96
			52%		17%	31%		
g	My family life	3	36	24	24	9	2	95
			63%		25%	12%		
h	Relationship with my extended family	3	23	35	18	14	5	95
			61%		19%	20%		
j	Relationship with my spouse/partner	25	41	19	9	3	1	73
			82%		12%	5%		
k	Relationship with my children	32	26	20	13	5	2	66
			70%		20%	11%		
l	Spiritual development of my family	12	6	37	28	13	2	86
			50%		33%	17%		
m	Sharing my faith with others	3	4	40	35	14	2	95
			46%		37%	17%		
n	My actual ministry involvement in church	1	7	49	26	15	0	97
			58%		27%	15%		
o	Personal relationships with people in church	3	15	44	23	13	0	95
			62%		24%	14%		
p	General satisfaction with the church	3	33	52	8	2	0	95
			89%		8%	2%		
q	Relationship with former spouse/partner	50	5	11	19	9	4	48
			33%		40%	27%		
r	Relationship with stepchildren	76	3	8	8	2	1	22
			50%		36%	14%		
s	Quality of life in my community	2	10	52	20	12	2	96
			65%		21%	15%		
t	My education	3	29	43	12	9	2	95
			76%		13%	12%		
u	My children's educational environment	48	12	22	10	6	0	50
			68%		20%	12%		

2006 Cross Creek Church Congregational Survey

17 What is your relationship status?

	Single	Married/partnered	1st time Separated	Divorced	Remarried/repartnered	Widowed	Total
	29	35	8	9	16	1	98
	30%	36%	8%	9%	16%	1%	

18 What is your race/ethnic origin?

	Caucasian	African-American	Cuban	Total
	97	3	1	98
	99%	3%	1%	

19 How would you rate the following programs and ministries of our congregation?

	Don't Know	Very negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral/Neither	Somewhat positive	Very positive	Total
a Retreats	9	1	2	3	4	5	48
	50	0	0	7	4	37	
		0%		15%	85%		
b Our Whole Lives	52	0	0	8	6	32	46
		0%		17%	83%		
c Weekend Intensives	30	0	0	6	10	52	68
		0%		9%	91%		
d Music Ministry/Choir	20	0	1	3	25	49	78
		1%		4%	95%		
e Fellowship events	22	0	1	6	37	32	76
		1%		8%	91%		
f Great Adventure	45	0	0	4	6	43	53
		0%		8%	92%		
g Vacation Bible School	48	0	0	3	3	44	50
		0%		6%	94%		
h Justice and Witness	33	0	1	4	18	42	65
		2%		6%	92%		
j Youth programs	60	0	0	3	15	20	38
		0%		8%	92%		
k Member Care programs	62	0	1	7	12	16	36
		3%		19%	78%		

2006 Cross Creek Church Congregational Survey

20 Pastors emphasize different roles in their ministries. Based upon what you perceive to be the needs of our congregation, rate the importance of the following characteristics of a senior pastor.

	Don't Know	Very unessential	Unessential	Neutral/Neither	Essential	Very Essential	Total
a Minister of the Word/teacher of the congregation - finds primary fulfillment in preaching and teaching. Is attracted to a congregation with strong educational emphasis.	3	0	1	13	27	54	95
	1%		14%	85%			
b Church administrator - fulfillment comes in administering and managing a productive, varied and effective church program.	5	1	9	20	44	19	93
	11%		22%	68%			
c Social activities - ministry centers on relating the Gospel to the social context. Enjoys being on the cutting edge of social concerns and involvement in community affairs.	1	0	0	14	48	35	97
	0%		14%	86%			
d Enabler/Facilitator - centers ministry around work with small groups of people, helping them relate to particular needs and interests.	6	0	4	29	33	26	92
	4%		32%	64%			
e Celebrant/Liturgist - most at home leading the congregation in worship. Appreciates ritual and ceremony in both formal and informal settings.	7	1	8	28	34	20	91
	10%		31%	59%			
f Spiritual Guide - encourages development of the spiritual life by all in the congregation. Own spiritual life is exemplary.	2	0	2	14	43	37	96
	2%		15%	83%			
g Witness/evangelist - focus of ministry is sharing the Gospel with those in and outside the church.	1	0	9	28	36	24	97
	9%		29%	62%			
h Counselor/healer - spends major part of each week in pastoral counseling and visiting in homes and/or hospitals. Enjoys helping people through crises.	2	0	9	22	43	22	96
	9%		23%	68%			
j Community chaplain - finds fulfillment in civic roles and leadership. Often serves on community committees and task groups.	1	0	6	30	41	20	97
	6%		31%	63%			

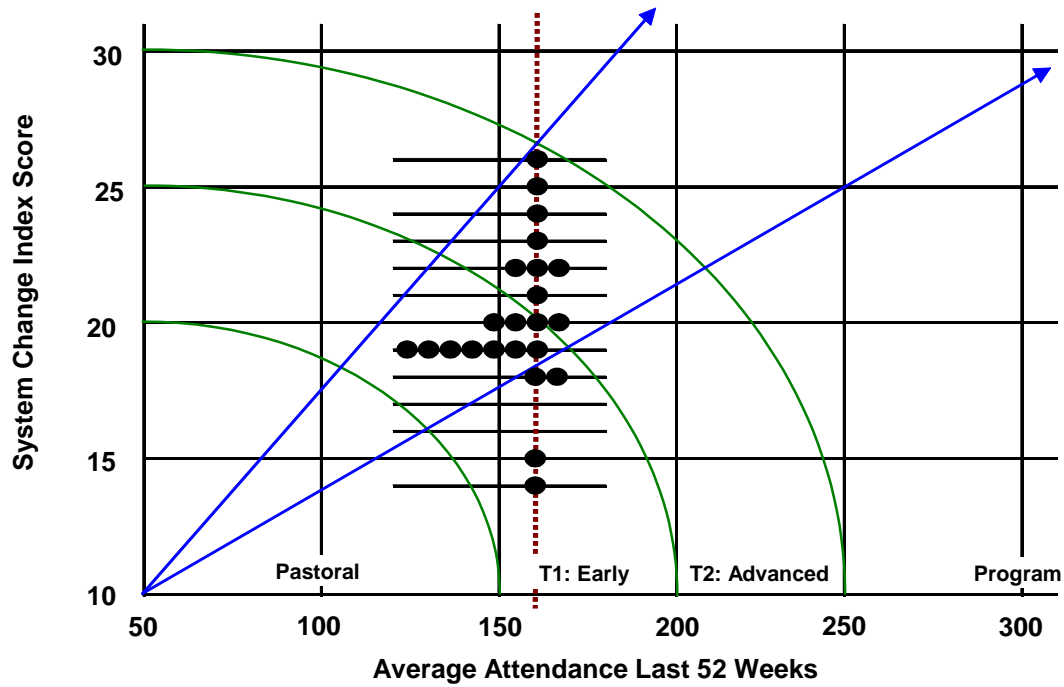
2006 Cross Creek Church Congregational Survey

21 Style of ministry varies by pastor. While you would probably agree that all of these characteristics are important, if you had to choose, in which direction would you lean?

	Strongly Prefer	Slightly Prefer	Neutral	Slightly Prefer	Strongly Prefer	
a	14	17	31	17	19	High degree of spirituality
	32%		32%	37%		
b	23	32	16	12	15	Tends to be comforting and assuring
	56%		16%	28%		
c	5	6	33	32	22	Preaching emphasizes contemporary issues
	11%		34%	55%		
d	30	35	20	5	8	Deep appreciation and commitment to tradition
	66%		20%	13%		
e	3	8	33	38	16	Encourages decision making of other Pastors and/or lay leaders
	11%		34%	55%		
f	0	4	30	37	27	Has relaxed style
	4%		31%	65%		

Appendix E: System Change Index Results

Avg Attendance 7/05-6/06

$$\begin{array}{r} 126 \\ + 34 \\ \hline 160 \end{array}$$


Factor	Low	Med	High
1	4	13	7
2	3	15	6
3	7	11	6
4	15	9	0
5	5	11	8
6	1	15	8
7	0	13	11
8	3	18	3
9	0	10	14

Appendix F: The Seven Laws of Assimilation

By Allen Ratta

Law #1 -Visitors Represent 100% of Your Church's Growth Potential

This first law sounds so simplistic and self evident that one could reasonably wonder why it is mentioned at all. Nevertheless, this first law is the beginning point for effective visitor retention and ironically; it is the one that is most commonly ignored by churches. While it is highly likely that pastors give mental ascent to the first law, it is far less likely that they conduct ministry as if they truly believe it. Churches that fully buy into Law 1 will focus the appropriate level of energy and resources on attracting and retaining visitors. Others will tend to focus more of their resources and energies inward, towards their congregation. Sustained church growth requires a sustained investment outwards, towards your visitors.

Law #2 -Visitor Retention is Far More Significant than Visitor Volume.

The mathematics of church growth, like all mathematical constructs, is unyielding in its objective reality. Those who embrace the veracity of this law will enjoy effective visitor assimilation with predictable long-term results. ConnectionPower's Church Growth Calculator™ clearly demonstrates in scenario after scenario that visitor retention is somewhere between 10 to 20 times more significant, in terms of church growth, than visitor volume. Yet churches tend to put all of their outreach resources into "the one basket" of increasing visitor volume and very little into visitor retention. Most churches allocate their church growth resources into Yellow Page ads, purchasing demographic data, conducting large community events and mass mailings, all of which are very expensive and only target visitor volume. This one-sided investment is often due to the difficulties inherent in developing and sustaining an effective visitor retention ministry.

Law #3 - It Takes People to Reach People

Programs do not reach people. Mass mailings, impassioned pulpit announcements, multimedia and slick advertising collateral are not enough to reliably connect newcomers into "places of belonging" in your church. While these kinds of materials can be helpful in assimilation, they are no replacement for the person-to-person connections where visitors experience personal care and the love of God. Accordingly an effective visitor retention methodology must incorporate a plan to recruit, train, mobilize and motivate church adherents to personally care for outsiders.

Law #4 - Set Expectations and Meet Them

People do not like surprises, excepting the occasional party from very close friends or family. Be honest with your visitors about your intentions from your first contact with them. Set clear expectations. Visitors are generally very appreciative and happy to receive a phone call from the church if the church has been forthright about their intentions. While it can be argued that filling out a visitor card is a tacit permission slip

for follow up contacts, it is always best to be upfront about your contact intentions. This candor begins with expressing your desire to connect newcomers to your church while asking them to fill out and turn in visitor cards to the way they are addressed at your guest center. Set expectations that you are a caring church and then fulfill them with loving contacts. It works!

Law #5 - Be Proactive to Connect People

Visitor assimilation begins as a matter of stewardship towards those whom God brings to the front doors of your church. Without intentional effort, a church will become more and more focused inward on its congregants. This is a natural sociological phenomenon. Laypersons and leaders in a church will never automatically prioritize their attention on outsiders. It takes intentional leadership to transform a church from a passive mindset to a proactive posture towards outsiders. This transformation takes more than a good ministry methodology. It requires a new belief system and enough faith in that system to translate belief into actions. The pastor is the key to this transformational process. A proactive/outward focus takes time to develop precisely because it is a process. It requires a journey to move from mere mental ascent to true faith, in Law One. True believers will then care enough to divert attention away from longstanding comfortable relationships and begin to invest time in the strangers who come to their doors.

Law #6 - It Takes Time to Win People

The research shows the more a visitor visits a church the greater the odds are that they will eventually become a part of that church. Yet, churches consistently behave in ways that ignore this critical fact. For example, churches often place all of their efforts in the first time visitor. Reality is that churches will receive a far greater return on investments that they make in 2nd and 3rd and subsequent visitors. What is lacking in many visitor assimilation efforts is the ability to direct and mobilize key resources to repeat visitors. Sustained follow up is essential to effective visitor assimilation.

Law #7 - Listen to Your Visitors

The adage is true that it is impossible to see yourself in the same way that others see you. The same principle applies to a church, only in greater measure. Over time churches become places that are comfortable to insiders and future direction is largely driven by their needs, wants and desires. Insiders feel at home so they assume that outsiders should feel the same way. It is no wonder that there is often a stark contrast between the way insiders and outsiders view the same church. Insiders cannot possibly have an accurate view of the way outsiders see them without a solid and reliable feedback mechanism in place. The information that this kind of mechanism generates helps church leaders to understand the context and the makeup of their local mission field. This in turn provides an informed basis to manage for growth.

Appendix G: The Mathematics of Church Growth

By Allen Ratta

Leading Growth Indicators

There are three factors, no more and no less, that determine whether a church is growing, declining or staying the same. They are the Visitor Volume Rate, the Visitor Retention Rate and the Backdoor Rate. We call these a church's Leading Growth Indicators. Most pastors could calculate their Visitor Volume Rate by simply adding up their visitor cards for a given month. Far fewer pastors have a handle on their Visitor Retention Rate and it is a rare pastor indeed who has any idea of the value for their Backdoor Rate. The Visitor Retention Rate is the number of visiting family units, on average, who are becoming a part of the church every month. The Backdoor Rate is the number of family units, on average, who are leaving the church every month. These factors together determine whether or not a church is experiencing a net gain or loss in attendance.

A church's Leading Growth Indicators can also be used to forecast the future growth or decline of a church. Such forecasting is accurate so long as the Leading Growth Indicators remain constant over the time period. The good news is that a church can do a lot to impact and to change its Leading Growth Indicators.

ConnectionPower's Church Growth Calculator™ provides an easy to use tool to predict the future attendance of a church, if nothing changes. It also provides the ability to run "what if" scenarios. Want to know what would happen to your church's attendance in years one through five if the Visitor Volume Rate were increased by one family per month? Simply enter the data and see the instant results. Want to know how much your Visitor Retention Rate will have to increase to reach a certain attendance goal in three years? The Church Growth Calculator™ makes this a painless process.

Churches, large and small, rarely have the kinds of ministry systems in place to drive critical information regarding a church's Leading Growth Indicators into the hands of church leadership. Various systems are required to gather this kind of information. Initially, a church needs a well designed guest center with an effective strategy to drive a high percentage of visitors to it. It also requires a visitor tracking system that accurately tracks and follows visitors until their final status is determined and dutifully recorded. Finally, it requires a manager to continually run calculations on running attendance numbers against the visitor retention rate so that Backdoor Rates can be averaged and plotted. Then, if a church has any aspirations about increasing visitor retention, they will have to have a well-designed and sustainable assimilation ministry. How valuable would it be for churches and pastors to have all these systems bundled together into one easy to use and implement ministry package?

These are the solutions that ConnectionPower offers in its PowerVisitor™ module.

Mathematic Essentials to Managing for Church Growth

Accurate data on a church's Leading Growth Indicators, as hard as it can be to come by, is, in some cases, critical information to manage for church growth. The indicators give leaders the fundamental diagnostic capability they need. This becomes an invaluable big-picture aid for navigating obstacles to church growth.

For example, a church might have a visitor volume problem or a visitor retention problem or a back door problem or a combination of the above. Each distinct problem requires a radically different solution. To apply a solution for low visitor volume when the real problem is low visitor retention misses the mark. It is a poor use of limited church growth resources, leads to frustration and fails to advance the church. Yet church leaders often launch church growth initiatives with little or no reliable information on their three basic Leading Growth Indicators.

Leading Growth Indicators are the starting point for good growth management. Once it is determined which indicator(s) are impacting church growth a more refined strategy can be developed to determine the best solution. If the church's major growth obstacle is visitor volume, one or more short and/or long term initiatives may be planned. The leader can move with confidence knowing that they are applying the right cure for the affliction.

One of the most powerful applications for long-term data on your Leading Growth Indicators is the ability to spot downward trends well before they significantly impact a church's attendance. At least one year of previous data are required to provide a baseline that will allow you to account for seasonal fluctuations. It is most helpful to see this data plotted out in line graph form with the current year and the previous year running concurrently. Early identification empowers leaders to make early interventions and to stay ahead of the power curve in managing for growth.

Leading Growth Indicators provide "all important" context. Strong visitor volume may be meaningless within the context of low visitor retention and a high back door rate. The question is often asked, how high does my Visitor Retention Rate have to be for my church to grow? The answer is, "that depends." It depends on the other Leading Growth Indicators. It is impossible to draw definitive conclusions about church growth without taking all three indicators into account. ConnectionPower's PowerVisitor™ solution pushes the right information to the fingertips of church leaders so they can manage for growth.

Appendix H:

The Seven Laws of Member Retention

By Allen Ratta

Law #1 – Love Them or Lose Them

Are the right messages being conveyed and the proper ministries developed so that members/adherents feel loved? The old adage is true, perception is reality. Words are important. Wise pastors praise their congregations at every turn and repeatedly celebrate their strengths and achievements. This is a trait common to every healthy and functional family unit whether it is a home or a church. While words are important, the pastor's actions will speak even louder. Do members have confidence that their needs will be known and timely pastoral care will be available in their time of need? Have adequate efforts been made to develop care ministries within the church or does the focus seem to be directed at other matters? The pastor who takes the development of pastoral care ministries seriously is the pastor who will enjoy the stability of a congregation that sticks around because they feel loved.

Law #2 – Invest in Member Retention

Member retention is far more significant than visitor volume. Depending on your church's visitor assimilation rate, it takes a lot of visitors to make one church adherent. Know the math. Member/adherent retention is somewhere between 10 to 20 times more significant, in terms of church growth, than visitor volume. Yet churches tend to put huge investments in visitor volume through advertising and large events and a disproportionately low amount of their resources into retaining their members/adherents. There are a number of reasons for this. Adherents slip out the back door largely unnoticed in the first few months of their attendance, making this a silent enemy of church growth. Few churches have adequate systems in place to monitor back door attrition. Very few churches indeed have a proactive member/adherent retention ministry that identifies early symptoms of attrition and mobilizes interventions in time to make a difference. Balance the church's investments to provide adequate resources for member retention.

Law #3 – Empower Members to Care for Members

The level of pastoral care that a professional pastor can provide, except in the smallest of churches, always pales in comparison to the kind of care that a church body can provide for itself through small groups and well executed care ministries. This truth reflects a biblical principal that is clearly taught in Ephesians Chapter 4. "...the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body" Notice that it does not say "by what every pastor supplies." A church's body, by design, dispenses life from joint to joint as is patterned in nature. The "joints" are the contact points or relationships between member and member. This decentralized functionality runs

counter to the intuitive instincts of many pastors who view the pulpit as the focal point for dispensing life to the church. Increase your member retention by using your pulpit to empower members to connect in meaningful relationships where they can share the life of Christ. Promote the biblical pattern/mandate of small group involvement, “Day by day...breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.” Acts 2.46

Law #4 – Define Assimilation Expectations

Everyone in a church needs to know what it means for a congregant to be fully assimilated into their church. Make the end objective and the processes involved to get there very clear. This is one of the more successful aspects of the Purpose Driven Church model. The graphical depiction of a baseball diamond is easily communicated and unforgettable. Whatever your model, make the pathways to assimilation painfully clear and continue to use every opportunity to promote them. Everyone in your church should be able to recite the pathways. The difference between excellence and mediocrity in assimilation lies in ministry design and implementation. Do you have a bombproof and automated methodology in place that monitors and drives your congregants through every stage of assimilation? The task of assimilation is not over until all the steps have been completed. You have to fully assimilate them before you can retain them. Churches that would enjoy high member retention must first invest significant energies and resources into the assimilation process. Once assimilated, the task of member retention is never over. You need a well designed early monitoring system to target those who are disengaging from full assimilation so they can be proactively re-engaged.

Law #5 – Use Them Or Lose Them

It is essential to the spiritual health of every believer that they develop into a functional member of the Body of Christ. Functional means that they are not just passive consumers of Kingdom resources but they become active in service which in turn makes them a valued Kingdom resource. Nature teaches that members of a body that cease to function atrophy and become a burden to the whole system. When this reaches critical mass congregational morale plummets in the few who feel they are “doing all the work.” This is an environment that leads to member attrition. There is no greater thrill for the Christian than to discover that God created them for a specific purpose in life. Purposelessness is the bane of hopes, dreams, joy, and contentment. Want a happy and contented church with high levels of member retention? Help your congregants find a place of meaningful Kingdom service and experience the incredible fulfillment that comes from making a difference for eternity. Help them to discover their God-given gifts and where they can best fit in the ministries of the church. Work ceaselessly to create new ministries and ministry positions that provide an ever increasingly rich environment for Kingdom service. Develop marketing channels and a strong competency to market ministry opportunities to your congregants.

Law #6 – Grow Them

Nothing closes the back door more firmly for people than the conviction that they are making real spiritual progress at their church. These people become raving fans that not only increase member retention but also visitor volume by communicating their excitement with outsiders. Churches that provide an atmosphere that is highly conducive to spiritual growth have a few key commonalities. Growth means that the Bible becomes relevant to the daily lives of congregants. Maintaining the weekly discipline of sermon preparation has to be a top priority of the pastor. The message is not complete without a practical sermon application that integrates truth into the daily lives of your congregation. Practical issues such as relationships, conflict resolution, temptation, the workplace, etc. need to be addressed. Growth means that congregants are growing in biblical literacy. A world view begins to emerge that has its foundations in Judeo Christian values which permeate every area of life and thought. Perspectives change as a broad awareness of biblical history provides context for the present. The broader themes and principles of the Bible have been absorbed and are being integrated into attitudes. Teaching and study opportunities need to be made available in addition to the weekly sermons. Growth means that worship fills the heart of the believer as they grasp the personal nature of God's love for them. Spiritual awareness blossoms and worshippers begin to change from the inside out. The church needs to provide heartfelt corporate worship that fans this spark into a flame. Growth means that the believer has become engaged in spiritually meaningful relationships with other Christians on a regular basis. These relationships provide mutual support, accountability and opportunities to minister. The church needs to earnestly foster the ongoing development of small groups that facilitate this kind of interaction. Finally, growth means that congregants have become active in service to others as outlined in Law 6 above.

Law #7 – Speak Clearly and Often

Pastors need to communicate clearly and often to their congregations. Three formidable monsters live in the realm of poor communications. They are called assumptions, intentions and expectations. Say what you will do, when you will do it and how you will do it. Then do it that way. Be predictable. Jesus put it this way, "Let your yes be yes." Accept the consequences of your words especially when circumstances make it uncomfortable to follow through. When the pastor communicates clearly, in a timely fashion, and always follows through, it builds trust and confidence in leadership which greatly increases member retention. Pastors are generally gifted at oral communications. Yet regular written correspondence from the pastor is an indispensable channel of meaningful communication. Be positive in everything you say or write. The effort to formalize one's thoughts into writing invariably adds to the clarity and breadth of thoughts shared. Letters, newsletters, e-newsletters, emails and website postings are all effective. Make your intentions, plans, priorities and your vision clear by repeating them over and over using every available means at every opportunity.

Appendix I: Strategies for Building Community

By Allen Ratta

Why do some churches enjoy a profound sense of community while others seem to lack coherence? What are the dynamics that lead to a deep sense of belonging and high congregational morale? How can a pastor intentionally lead a church into an increased sense of community? While there are no simple answers, I have come to believe in a unified theory of community based on 25 plus years of pastoring and dialoguing with thousands of pastors, through pastoral seminars over the years.

Consistency

A strong sense of church community, at its core, requires a very high degree of consistency between messages and actions throughout every aspect of an organization. This cohesive unity of thought and deed should permeate from big picture theorizing down to the details of daily functions. Many church leaders do a relatively good job of vision casting but the global message rapidly loses potency when it fails to translate into discernable real-world relevance. It is critical to draw clear intra-organizational linkages between vision, strategic planning and ministry execution.

Linkages

Wherever these linkages are masterfully communicated, congregants can themselves clearly articulate the corporate identity of their church. This is bedrock for the formation of community. When people know what they are a part of in inspiring and concise, terms, there is a far greater likelihood they will passionately identify with others who are also a part. This is a built-in competency that both the Purpose Driven Church model and the Seeker Driven, Willow Creek Church model give to churches. The Purpose Driven “Discovery CLASS” approach, “Christian Life And Service Seminars” has been widely adopted with the effect of bringing a much needed cohesion between purpose and ministry activities. Their use of slogans provides context and a framework for understanding the community.

Raving Fans

A corollary in the corporate world is the concept of branding. The process is simple. Know who you are or want to be, and then maintain an intentional and tenacious marketing focus that communicates it thoroughly through every means available as often as possible. In time people come to see the vision as an inseparable part of the organization. If companies can create raving fans with deep brand loyalty, surely the Church, with its transcendent purposes and opportunities for real-life service, can do even better.

Integration

The Community Building model below illustrates the stair-stepped and inter-related process of community building. Start at the top and work your way down, answering the questions as you go. The questions are meant to provide an aid in leadership brainstorming and retreat settings where definitions are codified, strategies are hammered out and ministries are envisioned. The first key is to understand the absolute necessity for linkages between abstract principles and concrete reality. The next key is to discover and successfully market those linkages which provide practical relevance to your vision.

The Community Building Strategic Process

- 1. Vision Casting
 - Purpose “Why we are here?”
 - Mission “What we are called to do?”
 - Core Values “Who we are?”
- 2. Strategic Plan
 - Ministry Design “How will we do it?”
 - Sequencing “When will we do what?”
 - Resourcing “Where will it come from?”
- 3. Ministry Execution
 - Promoting “Why are we doing this?”
 - Training “How do we equip?”
 - Launching “When will it start?”
 - Supporting “Where do we need to strengthen it?”
 - Evaluating “Who needs help?”
 - Re-engineering “What needs to change?”

Stopping Too Soon

Much has been said and written about the need for churches to craft a mission statement, a purpose statement and, more recently, to identify their core values. These are good academic exercises but they will prove futile, in terms of value, without cementing them into a broader context of ministry. I know churches that have expended great energies to define their purpose and mission statements where it had zero impact on their actual behavior and congregational morale. Why? They stopped too soon. The process needs to go from the sublime, “Why are we here?” all the way down to the tedious, “Who can we get to do this?”

You are well on your way to a well defined sense of community when everyone knows why they are doing what they are doing and can clearly communicate it to others in

lingo that everyone understands. This in turn creates a setting where people can passionately belong. Raving fans are the antidote for congregant attrition.

Appendix J:

Learning From Nonprofits: How Church Boards Can Benefit From Secular Practices

The board meeting has already been underway for two and a half hours when the chairperson stifles a yawn and glances at her watch: 9:30 p.m. “Does anyone have any new business?” she asks.

“I have something,” says one board member. “Several church school teachers have complained to me about the back door. Without a key, you can’t set it so it opens from the outside. We ought to fix that, and while we’re at it we should consider a glass door to reduce the risk of hitting a child when we open it.”

“Is this really a board issue?” asks another board member. “Shouldn’t we leave it to the building committee, or the church school staff, or the custodian?”

“I think it is the board’s responsibility for several reasons: First, a glass door can easily cost \$2,000. Second, this year’s building budget is already spent or committed. Third, as board members we’re all personally responsible for children’s safety. And fourth, the Building Committee reports to us, the church school is under the authority of the Religious Education Department, and the custodian reports to the administrator. Only the board is over them all, so only we can choose to delegate this to one of them.”

And they’re off. Someone knows a contractor. Someone has a funny story about doors. Someone read somewhere that glass doors are vulnerable to burglaries. At 10:15, a member moves to refer the question to the Building Committee with instructions to come back if the cost would add more than \$2,000 to the building budget. After much debate and one amendment the board approves the motion, 8 to 2.

What is wrong here? From the point of view of bylaws and legality, probably nothing. The law gives governing boards total power over business matters large and small, which gives them the right to “micromanage” to their heart’s content.

Effects of Micromanagement

Most board members know micromanaging is bad. Boards criticize themselves all the time for long meetings, trivial agenda items, and an inability to delegate: “We should be making policy, not managing the operation.” Staff and volunteers chafe at the need to bring projects back to the board at each point along the way. A seemingly innocuous report can be a red flag in the board’s face, provoking it to meddle.

Board members don’t like it, either: A year or two of late-night meetings about door latches, complaints from members, reports from staff and committees, and “policy” decisions that address one-time events will drain most board members of the passion that caused them to say yes in the first place.

Board-member burnout is one effect of board micromanagement. Even worse is that boards mired in micromanagement miss the chance to do really important work. Most people who join a congregation’s board hope to contribute to the spiritual lives of others,

to help discern God's will for the congregation, and to make a lasting difference in the congregation's life. In frustration at the triviality of their agendas, boards adjust budget items, second-guess staff decisions, and receive an endless stream of supplicants. But the sense of power this activity creates is mostly illusory.

Why do boards slip into micromanaging even when they know they shouldn't? One reason, of course, is that they can. A second is that the line between "micro" and "macro" is subjective. Too few boards have clear, shared criteria for choosing which issues to spend valuable board time on. Many simply deal with every issue anybody brings to them, but even those that try to discriminate have difficulty drawing a clear line.

A Bold Proposal

What is the best use of the board's time? All nonprofit boards struggle with this problem. The literature on nonprofit management abounds with good advice, but good advice and good intentions are not enough. To police themselves, boards need clear boundaries, definitions, and instructions.

Enter John Carver, governance guru of the nonprofit world and author of *Boards that Make a Difference*. Carver is not content to help boards improve; he challenges them to quit most of their current work and start "making a difference." The key difference boards can make is not to direct or help the staff but to represent and connect the institution to its "owners," articulate its basic rationale for being, and set limits for its staff and volunteers. A Carver board spends most of its time thinking not about what the organization is doing but about why it should exist at all.

Carver's "Policy Governance" model is widely read and debated, and sometimes even adopted by leaders in secular nonprofits, school boards, and city councils throughout the English-speaking world. Among leaders of most congregations, Carver's model is still little known. A dozen or so Unitarian Universalist congregations have adopted Policy Governance over the last decade, and this article is based in part on their experiences.

Means and Ends

At the heart of Carver's model is the distinction between means and ends. *Ends*, as Carver uses the word, are the basic purposes for which the congregation (or other organization) exists. In one congregation, an ends policy might be "that the hungry will be fed." Another congregation might embrace the end that the children of members will "understand and identify with Jewish tradition and pass it on to their own children."

Unlike many congregational mission statements, ends policies do not say what the congregation plans to do. They do not talk about Sunday school, buildings, or even worship. Ends say how lives will be changed as a result of congregational activity. If ends policies refer to members of the congregation, it is to discuss their roles as customers, clients, or beneficiaries—not as volunteers, decision-makers, or voters.

In Carver's words, ends policies specify "what benefit to which people at what cost."

Means include all organizational choices that are not ends. Hiring, supervising, and dismissing staff are means decisions. Budgeting, investing, raising and spending money

are means activities. Decisions about programs, building maintenance, baptisms, weddings, worship style, and how to vote on national church resolutions are all means issues—not because they are unimportant, but because they talk about what we are going to do, not about how people’s lives will change.

A means issue does not become an ends issue because it is expensive or important. (Choosing a minister, for example, is a means issue.) Means issues are still means issues even if they require a long sequence of steps to accomplish, such as the construction of a building. An ends issue is about those who benefit from the congregation’s work, not those who do it.

What Policy Boards Do and Don’t Do

At this point, many people expect to hear that the board deals with ends policies and the staff with means issues. The Carver model is not quite so simple. Defining and prescribing ends is the board’s main preoccupation (Carver calls it the board’s “obsession”). The staff—a term that includes volunteers who act as staff—spend most of their time selecting and applying means. But means and ends are not so neatly separable. Within the large ends set by the board, staff members make ends choices every day. Which hungry shall we feed? Which Jewish traditions shall we emphasize with nine-year-olds? The board, in turn, sets limits on the means that are permitted.

In every area, the board enacts the largest policies and leaves the smaller ones to others. Carver compares this to a set of nested mixing bowls. You can control the whole set if you grab hold of the outmost bowl; the others can still slosh back and forth, but only within fixed boundaries. If the board wants to control events more closely, it adopts policies at the next-smaller level, and so on. Using this discipline, boards often are surprised by how much latitude they are willing to leave to staff.

Several rules govern how a Carver board makes policy:

- Policies are always made from the outside in. The largest policies must be complete before moving in to the next level.
- Policies never are adopted to control specific events. A board would never vote to change the locks on the church’s doors; it would vote only to define the level of risk it forbids staff to accept. Events may, at most, raise the question, “Do we need a policy on this?” Until we do, the staff are free—and required—to deal with all events within existing policies.
- Policies are all addressed to the chief executive officer (CEO), not to individual staff members. It is not fair for a board to hold the CEO accountable for staff performance when it directs, rewards, or punishes staff members directly at all levels. Who plays the role of chief executive in a church setting is an interesting question. Most, but not all, of the Unitarian Universalist churches that have adopted Carver have assigned the CEO role to a team (e.g., the minister, the administrator, and one lay leader). A CEO team requires more complicated policies to deal with intra-team conflicts and succession planning, but reportedly has worked quite well in many cases.

- When defining ends policies, the board speaks *positively*, prescribing what good the congregation will do for what people at what cost: The city will become more just, the poor will live in better houses, and so on.
- The board also speaks positively when it writes *its own means policies*: We will meet monthly, keep minutes, and speak with one voice.
- Means policies for staff are worded *negatively*, prohibiting those means the board will not accept. “The staff may not steal money, engage in race discrimination, abuse church members, or buy real estate without a vote of the congregation” are examples of means policies for staff.
- The last rule is the oddest. Negatively worded staff means policies often resort to convoluted double negatives like “...shall not operate without a policy prohibiting discrimination...” Such words can be confusing, and the proscriptive “thou shalt not” form puts some people off.

Where the negative becomes a positive is in the lives of those who lead and manage programs. Having been told clearly what the boundaries are, leaders know that they are free to innovate and respond flexibly to changing opportunities.

The board, meanwhile, while it has relinquished its old habit of controlling every item that captures its attention, gains a more important power. Many boards try to feel powerful by adjusting a budget item or saying yes or no to a proposal, but such actions usually make little difference in the long run. A board that articulates in written policies the ends to be achieved and the means to be avoided controls many decisions at once. By articulating principles, a board guides many independent choices that together move the congregation closer to its ends.

Congregations are Different

By now it may be obvious that congregations find the Carver model (and perhaps good governance in general) harder to implement successfully than other nonprofits do. Clear role definitions are hard to achieve when everyone plays multiple roles. In a mental health clinic, staff and trustees are rarely also clients. But in churches and synagogues, role confusion is the rule, not the exception. Most board members who sing in the choir know better than to pull rank on the choir director, but not all remember to set aside personal preferences in board meetings. Most board members are active volunteers and program leaders. When confronted with a problem, they naturally offer ways to solve it rather than composing words to guide the people who will solve such problems over time.

Another difficulty congregations have in accepting Carver is that his Policy Governance model runs against so much tradition and, in some denominations, law. Carver assumes that all staff report to a CEO who is hired and fired by the board. Many larger synagogues have an executive director who functions this way—but who does not supervise the rabbi or cantor. In many congregations, the most obvious candidate for the Carver CEO role is the senior clergyperson, who may be selected by the congregation, bishop, presbytery, or some combination rather than the board alone.

Some congregations have a long list of committees that are in charge of program areas. The ambiguous relation between such committees and the staff members they relate to is a source of ineffectiveness and conflict. In place of a boss, staff members have a political constituency. The committees sometimes are there to help the staff person, but at other times must “represent the board.” Who is in charge? Such ambiguity discourages creativity and favors rigid adherence to familiar ways—as too many congregations demonstrate.

In Carver’s model the board appoints only a few committees to help it to do the board’s job. A “committee” whose job is to lead, design, or provide input to a program is part of the staff structure—and might better be called a team, ministry, or task force. The staff, and ultimately the CEO, are judged by how well programs fulfill the ends and adhere to the means set by the board. For this accountability to be both real and fair, the staff must be at liberty to accept or decline advice from committees.

Evaluation

The Carver model requires that the board evaluate the performance of the CEO only on the basis of how well the congregation achieves its ends and adheres to its means limitations. But in congregations, all leaders (and especially clergy) are evaluated based on a bewildering jumble of factors: personal attractiveness, performance skills, political finesse, theological compatibility, and on and on. It is one thing to say that evaluation will be based only on stated goals and institutional performance, but another to make it so.

Carver suggests boards considering his model first decide definitely that they will adopt it fully. This is a challenge because Policy Governance requires a great deal of study to understand. It conflicts with so much formal and informal teaching about how boards ought to operate that, in my experience, many months of reading and discussion are required to fully understand it. It is only after many repetitions of the basic concepts that the whole board begins to grasp them reliably. It is also helpful to review completed policies from similar organizations.

The board needs several copies of Carver’s book, *Reinventing Your Board*, which contains a basic set of policies. If possible, it is a good idea for the board to work with a consultant who is familiar with the model. Carver trains and certifies consultants, some of whom have church experience, and many other consultants work with boards using the model with varying levels of purity.

After learning the model, the first step toward adopting it is to craft means policies—the “thou shalt nots” that limit staff. Starting from the largest policies—the outer mixing bowls—the board moves inward until it is ready to say, “The CEO and staff can make all the smaller decisions that do not violate these limits.”

When the staff limitations policies are complete, the board moves on to create policies for itself, both for the conduct of its business and for its relationship to the CEO. The same mixing-bowl principle applies here, except that the smaller governance decisions are made by the board chair rather than the CEO. When the board is ready to leave all such decisions to the board chair, it is ready to start operating under the model.

What? We have no ends policies! Given the importance Carver gives to ends, it may seem odd to begin operating without them. But remember that creating and refining ends policies is the board's main work from this point on forever. Some boards adopt the existing mission or vision statement to stand in for ends policies until they can be adopted, perhaps in a year-long rotation that will bring the board's attention to each major ends area annually.

Board meetings now are quite different from the one we eavesdropped on at the beginning of this article. The CEO would be empowered to take action on the door lock issue on his or her own, without coming to the board at all. The building committee might well be involved, but as a work group rather than a board committee; it would work under the supervision of the CEO.

The board might, if it felt there was a need, consider adopting a new policy limiting the risks the staff may expose children to. Or it might note a concern about the staff's protection of church property—not for immediate action, but as a flag for the annual evaluation of the CEO. The custodian's evaluation would be handled by his or her immediate supervisor, with whatever participation the staff thinks will help it to measure the achievement of the ends and compliance with the means.

But the main part of the board's work would not be about doors at all. It might spend most of its meeting adjusting the statement of how the congregation hopes to transform lives. In the best case, this is not an academic exercise but an effort to discern what God is calling this congregation to do and to be today and in the years to come.

Six Core Principles of Good Governance

Not every board will want to adopt Carver's Policy Governance model. But under any system of governance, certain core principles should apply:

- Don't invite people to participate on a work crew and trap them into a deliberate body, or vice versa. Democracy is fine, but it defeats itself if every group that gathers reconsiders what has already been voted. Policy bodies should include a variety of members; task groups should include only those who are in favor of the task. Once the direction has been set through proper process, someone should be charged with getting the job done.
- When delegating responsibility, clearly state the goals to be achieved and the scope of the authority granted. This principle applies to staff and volunteers as well as boards. Too often, congregations plug people into generic positions or point them in vague directions, then expect them to come back repeatedly to let the board rehash every decision and vote every dollar. No wonder it is sometimes hard to find volunteers! It is not fair to hold someone accountable for results when the results have not been specified, or to blame someone for violating an unstated rule. Minutes spent clarifying
- Boards speak as a body, not as individuals. Carver rightly emphasizes that individual board members have no special authority outside board meetings. Board members often play program leadership roles as well, but need to always remember which hat they are wearing.

- Boards speak through written policies. Like any human gathering, a board meeting is a cauldron of informal, nonverbal, and emotional communication. People come away from meetings with a “sense of the board” on any number of topics. Good boards make it clear that staff and others will not be expected to read the board’s mind, but must read actions in the minutes as the final word.
- Staff and volunteers need clear direction, clear limits, and maximum flexibility in choosing means. Whether or not a board decides to adopt Carver’s precise system for board policy-making, his idea of the mixing bowls is useful. The concept is similar to Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers author William Easum’s “permission-giving” style of congregational life. If the board articulates a clear ministry vision and sets limits, it will feel safe allowing staff to make the smaller choices.
- The staff and volunteers should be responsible for managing their own work. The larger the congregation, the more important it is that the staff be unified and that boards and committees avoid triangulating themselves into staff work. This does not mean that the staff needs to be strongly hierarchical, or that others cannot be included in goal-setting, evaluation, conflict resolution, and decision-making, but these things should be done under the direction of the staff member who will be held responsible for the results.

Appendix K: Congregation Size: What the Research Tell Us

MARLIS MCCOLLUM

While considerable attention has been paid in recent years to small churches and megachurches, far less has been given to large churches—those with a minimum average attendance of 350 but not reaching the 2,000 mark often used as the cut-off point for defining a megachurch. However, studies and other research efforts have revealed some interesting and little-known findings about these churches—and church size in general.

“By any measure, most congregations are small” (p. 17), writes Mark Chaves in *Congregations in America*, in which he describes the findings of the 1998 National Congregations Study, a survey of 1,236 U.S. churches, the majority of them Christian and Jewish. “Fifty-nine percent of U.S. congregations have fewer than one hundred regular participants, counting both adults and children; 71 percent have fewer than one hundred regularly participating adults” (p. 17–18). These are stunning figures, but perhaps even more startling is another statistic Chaves cites: that 10 percent of U.S. congregations—the largest ones—contain half of the nation’s churchgoers¹. “Even though there are relatively few large congregations with many members, sizable budgets, and numerous staff, these large congregations contain most of the people involved in organized religion in the United States” (p. 18).

Similar results were obtained by later surveys. “Most congregations are small. But most worshipers are in large congregations” (p. 21), write Cynthia Woolever and Deborah Bruce in *A Field Guide to U.S. Congregations*, based on the U.S. Congregational Life Survey of more than 300,000 churchgoers from 434 congregations, conducted in 2001.² “Ten percent of U.S. congregations [the largest ones] draw 50 percent of all worshipers each week. Another 40 percent of congregations have 39 percent of worshipers attending services that week. The remaining 50 percent of all congregations [the smallest ones] have only 11 percent of the total number of worshipers in a given week” (p. 22).

Similarly, the Faith Communities Today (FACT) study, undertaken in 2000 by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary, found that only 10 percent of U.S. churches have more than 1,000 regularly participating adult members. Half have fewer than 100 participants, and one-fourth have fewer than 50³.

Church Growth: The Where and Why

Fifty-one percent of the congregations in the FACT study reported that they had grown in the previous five years, with 34 percent reporting a membership increase of 10 percent or more. Factors contributing to the greatest growth, the Hartford researchers found, included being located in the suburbs (particularly newer ones), offering a variety of social ministries, attention to social justice issues, denominational loyalty, a clear sense of mission, well-organized programs, uplifting worship, spiritual nurture, and

inclusion of contemporary worship styles and music—characteristics that describe many large churches.

New suburban communities, Hartford researchers Carl Dudley and David Roozen found, are particularly favorable to the growth of faith communities because they offer the family composition, higher educational and income levels, and the available teenage, male, and young adult populations that are conducive to such growth. According to these researchers, the larger the congregation, the more male participants it has⁴. In addition, “Newer and larger congregations in growing suburban communities report a higher percentage of active high school youth. The ability to attract teenagers and youth also contributes to membership growth,” they write (p. 21).

Additionally, many large churches tend to very socially conscious, develop strong ministries, are often located on arterial highways or other convenient access routes, offer plenty of parking, and are frequently highly denominational, the researchers found. “They do the tradition and they do it really well. They are not required to be so much innovative as excellent,” says Dudley, faculty emeritus for the Hartford Seminary and the Hartford Institute of Religion Research.

However, Dudley says, “Large churches do not necessarily grow at all. The growth of a large church is typically based on how good a job it has done at providing family-based programming.” Many growing large churches, he says, are located in “feeder suburbs”—suburban areas where there is a match between a church’s ministry and the surrounding population’s needs and desires, causing the community to “feed” members into the church. This heavy reliance on local support sets the large church apart from the megachurch. As Dudley points out, megachurches are often regional institutions, drawing their members from a wide geographical area. Consequently, their growth potential tends to be more independent of the reaction of the people living in the immediate area.

The Perception of Vitality

Dudley and Roozen also found that larger, newer, and growing congregations are more often described by their members as vital and healthy than are other congregations, and that the perception of vitality contributes to continued growth. Older, larger congregations—especially those in the suburbs—report better financial health than other congregations, as well. Directly related to a church’s growth and financial well-being, the FACT study suggests, are clarity of mission and purpose and the strictness of the church’s expectations of its members. Larger congregations, the researchers say, are more likely to be clear about their mission and purpose, and more likely to emphasize personal morality.

Larger congregations are also more likely than others to welcome change, the FACT study indicates, especially if they are Evangelical and located in growing suburban areas or Western states. More recently organized congregations appear to be more willing to change than older congregations, which tend to have more established patterns that appear to make them less able—or more resistant—to making changes.

When it comes to the breadth of program offerings, size makes the most significant difference, the Harvard researchers contend. “While Sunday school, Scripture study,

and prayer groups are the most universal programs, other programs for spiritual development seem to require a minimum critical mass of participants, funding, and building space to sustain the activity. Larger congregations, therefore, have the option of developing a much broader range of programs” (p. 44).

The ability to offer a wide array of programs, in turn, affects reports of the church’s vitality. “Congregations with the broadest offerings of programs report greater vitality among their members. For many participants, community outreach is as much an expression of faith as participation in prayer groups, liturgical practice, or doctrinal study. Congregations working for social justice and with a broad array of outreach ministries are more likely to express vitality. Congregational size has the predictable effect on social ministries, with larger congregations generating more programs and speaking to more issues” (p. 47).

Scores on Spiritual Growth and Nurturance

Size alone, however, should not be viewed as a reliable predictor of growth, cautions Deborah Bruce, associate research manager of the Research Services Office of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Like the FACT study, her research with Cynthia Woolever revealed that a church’s commitment to caring for its children and young people through adequate programming is a significant predictor of church growth. So is level of participation. In other words, says Bruce, “the degree to which people are involved in more than just worship”—whether that takes the form of singing in the choir, teaching a Sunday school class, participating in a small group, serving on a committee, or getting involved in the church’s outreach programs—is a strong indicator of how likely the church is to grow.

Size may actually be a drawback in some ways. As Woolever and Bruce note in *Beyond the Ordinary: 10 Strengths of U.S. Congregation*, although worshipers in mid-size and large congregations report being “more satisfied with the spiritual nurture they receive from their congregation” (p. 20) than those attending small congregations (those with average attendance under 100), small church members gave much higher ratings on factors relating to “growing spiritually” than did those attending larger churches.

Perhaps most significantly, small churches received the highest average scores from their members on the following six out of the ten strengths Woolever and Bruce believe are tied to church growth:⁵

- growing spiritually
- meaningful worship
- participating in the congregation
- having a sense of belonging
- sharing faith
- empowering leadership
- Mid-size congregations had the highest average scores on the following three strengths:

- caring for children and youth
- focusing on the community
- looking to the future

Large congregations received the highest average score on only one strength: welcoming new people. Contrary to what they expected, the authors say their research indicates that congregations with high scores on their Growing Spiritually Index are less likely to be growing numerically. “Unfortunately, congregations that are strong in the area of spiritual growth are rarely strong in welcoming new people, a congregational strength that powerfully predicts growing in numbers” (p. 23). Nevertheless, they caution against viewing growth as the key to determining a congregation’s health and vitality, and warn that “congregations whose members fail to spiritually change and grow” are likely to ultimately see membership declines—and possibly even their own demise.⁶

Contrast of Characteristics

Pastor-Centered Churches versus Large Congregations

Large congregations are vastly different from smaller congregations in a number of ways, as are the roles of their pastors. Alban Institute senior consultant Gil Rendle has drawn the following conclusions about these churches from his work with congregations of various sizes.

Pastor-Centered Churches (average attendance: 75-200)	Large Churches (average attendance: 350-2,000)
<i>Pastor-driven.</i> The pastor is often the primary or only provider of focus, program oversight, pastoral care, and leadership energy.	<i>Staff-driven.</i> Aspects of ministry typically handled by the pastor in smaller churches—such as pastoral care and program oversight—in the large church are typically handled by other staff members.
<i>Pastor-dependent.</i> The pastor’s personality and effectiveness are the primary determinants of the congregation’s growth and success.	<i>Staff-dependent.</i> The staff’s effectiveness and ability to work in harmony with each other and with lay leaders determine the success and growth of the congregation. Healthy communication and effective accountability systems are therefore a must.
<i>More relational than organizational.</i> The currency of leadership is in the forming, managing, and shaping of relationships.	<i>More organizational than relational.</i> The currency of leadership is organizational, through attention to vision, goals, staff supervision, and outcomes.
<i>Communal and relational advantages.</i> The size of the congregation supports a sense of community and creates a familial environment, in which members typically know and care about each other.	<i>Mission advantages.</i> Financial and human resources enable large churches to develop and sustain numerous and varied programs.
<i>Characterized by homogeneity and simplicity.</i> These churches tend to have homogeneous memberships and	<i>Characterized by complexity and diversity.</i> Large churches tend to offer a variety of worship styles, music,

limited options in regard to worship styles, music, and programs.	and program offerings, thus attracting people of diverse backgrounds, ages, and interests.
<i>Expect conformity.</i> Individuals tend to be expected to conform to the style and level of participation of other members. A willingness to work closely with others and establish close relationships with them is often expected.	<i>Expect individuality.</i> Individuals control their level of participation and commitment. Because of the variety of offerings available in large churches, individuals may choose to opt for small-group intimacy or full-group anonymity.
<i>Private communities.</i> Often have a singular purpose and tend to be self-contained communities.	<i>Public presence.</i> Large churches have a significant institutional presence in the community, and their leaders are able to speak to multiple issues and audiences in the community.
<i>Denominationally supported.</i> Pastor-centered churches tend to rely on denominational support for resources and training.	<i>Less denominationally supported.</i> Large churches tend to look outside their denominations for resources and training.
<i>Broad leadership role.</i> The pastor's role and responsibilities tend to be broad and encompassing, requiring a generalist approach.	<i>Narrow leadership role.</i> The senior pastor's role and responsibilities tend to be focused on preaching, visioning, staffing issues, development, and working with the governing board.
<i>Heavy reliance on volunteers.</i> The pastor is often the only paid staff member. In many other small churches, the pastor and one other person constitute the paid staff.	<i>Heavy reliance on staff.</i> Programs are of such a magnitude and complexity that trained staff are needed to fulfill the roles that volunteers are able to fill in smaller churches.
<i>Governing board meetings are brainstorming and decision-making sessions.</i>	<i>Governing board meetings are moments of discernment and visioning and—at best—events where direction and policy are set.</i>
<i>Vision alignment takes place within the governing board and in the work and focus of the pastor.</i>	<i>Vision alignment and organizational strategy take place in staff meetings.</i>
<i>Personalized expectations.</i> Members are often willing to accept whatever leaders and members offer—of whatever quality.	<i>High expectations.</i> Expectations of quality are high, so greater attention is given to detail and quality in the large church.
<i>Personalized discontent.</i> Discontent often has a very personal orientation around the practices or personality of the pastor.	<i>Organized discontent.</i> Large churches are more vulnerable to organized discontent because leaders are not as involved with members, and dissatisfaction can therefore go undetected for an extended period of time, leading to people to organize around their dissatisfaction.
<i>Multiple networking opportunities.</i> Pastors of smaller	<i>Limited networking opportunities.</i> Pastors of large

churches have many opportunities to network and form friendships with pastors of similar churches.

churches have few opportunities to network with pastors of similar churches.

Appendix L: Ordinary People, Strong Congregations

In the final moments of the film *Jurassic Park III* the scientist hero talks with the young boy who dreams of being a scientist. The scientist explains the difference between astronauts and astronomers. He says astronauts accomplish exceptional feats. By contrast, astronomers seldom become famous, but they make those exceptional feats possible. People of faith are like astronomers—essential partners in helping their congregations accomplish an extraordinary mission. Strong congregations are like astronauts—extraordinary heroes moving toward a realm that only God can bring.

Describing a strong congregation rests on our understanding of what a congregation is and what its purpose or mission is. Evaluating a congregation's strengths should reflect how well it is doing in "being" a congregation. Congregations are strong if they consistently, effectively, efficiently, and collectively achieve the goal of being a congregation. Are they gathering people for worship that is meaningful to those in their community? Are they replacing lost members and welcoming new people? Are they teaching others about the faith, especially the young? Do they provide places where people are emotionally and spiritually nurtured? Are they sharing their abundance with others? Are they conveying a message of hope and meaning?

What is at the heart of strong, vital congregations? A recent study of America's congregations—from Christian to Jewish to Buddhist—profiled their strengths in four areas:

Spiritual connections—the worship and faith dimensions of congregations.

Inside connections—worshippers' activities within the congregation.

Outside connections—how congregations and worshippers reach out to and serve those in the community.

Identity connections—who worshippers are and how they see their congregation's future.

More than 2,000 congregations participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, making it the largest study of worshippers ever conducted. Here is some of what we learned from surveying 300,000 worshippers.

Spiritual Connections

Where do worshippers find their spiritual growth? More than half of worshippers (54 percent) said they experienced *much growth* in their faith in the past year (39 percent reported some growth in faith). What fuels their growth in faith? Among those who experienced much growth, most said it came through taking part in the activities of their congregation. A second source of spiritual growth came through the practice of private devotions. The clear majority of worshippers (63 percent) reported that they pray, read the Bible or other sacred text, or meditate. Almost half (45 percent) said they devote time to this practice daily. Most worshippers (86 percent) said they find services and

congregational activities helpful and relevant to their everyday lives. Our findings indicate that many congregations, especially small ones (those with fewer than 100 attending worship services), show strength in nurturing worshipers and encouraging their spiritual growth.

Inside Connections

How are worshipers involved in their congregations? Attending worship services is the way most people participate in congregational life. Eighty-three percent of the people in the pews reported attending worship services regularly (every week or almost every week). This fact points to the centrality of worship in congregations of all denominations and faith groups and underscores the need to ensure that worship is meaningful. In what other ways do worshipers connect with their congregations? Fewer than half of all worshipers (44 percent) reported involvement in small-group activities associated with their congregation, such as church school, other religious education classes, prayer circles, groups studying the Bible or other sacred texts, or social groups. Small-group participation is more likely to be a strength in small or mid-size congregations, in the congregations of historically black denominations, and in conservative Protestant churches.

Many congregations provide ample opportunities for people in the pew to assume leadership roles. More than one-third of worshipers (38 percent) have one or more leadership positions in the congregation. Being a leader is strongly linked to levels of monetary giving. While only one in five overall reports giving 10 percent or more of income to the congregation, regular worshipers and those in leadership positions are more likely than others to give at this level. Small congregations excel in this area—a higher percentage of their worshipers invest in congregational life through leading and financial giving.

Outside Connections

How are worshipers involved in their communities? Worshipers are active citizens. Almost half of all worshipers (45 percent) said they are involved in community service, social service, or advocacy groups. Some take part in such activities through their congregations (19 percent), but a larger number (31 percent) are involved through other organizations. Involving people in community service is a strength of mid-size congregations or parishes—those with between 100 and 350 in worship. Also, churches in historically black and mainline Protestant denominations show above-average strength in these types of community interactions.

Worshipers are far more likely to vote than the average American. More than three-quarters (76 percent) of all worshipers (compared to one-half of the U.S. population) said they voted in the most recent presidential election. And worshipers are good neighbors. Almost three in four gave money to a charitable organization other than their congregation in the past year. In mid-size and large congregations, and in mainline Protestant churches, larger percentages of worshipers vote and give to charitable causes. Communities of faith are not always aware of the extent to which their worshipers are responding to the call to be messengers of hope and justice in the world.

Identity Connections

Who worships and where? Another strength of congregations lies in the characteristics of the average worshiper. Worshipers are better educated than the average American. Thirty-eight percent have college degrees (compared to 23 percent for the U.S. population). Along with their active community involvement, this strength attests to faith communities' potential for transforming their neighborhoods and cities. One-third of worshipers are "new people"—having started attending their current congregation or parish in the past five years. In fact, 20 percent have been in their congregation for two years or less. This high turnover indicates that congregations are not as stable or static as they are commonly portrayed. Welcoming new people and incorporating them into small groups and leadership roles requires explicit, ongoing efforts. Are there avenues to ensure that newcomers understand, feel part of, and support the mission of the congregation?

While most new people (57 percent) are transfers from other congregations of the same denomination or faith tradition, a healthy percentage (25 percent) are getting involved in a congregation or parish for the first time ever, or are coming back to a faith community after staying away for a while. The remaining new people (18 percent) are "switchers" who have moved from one denomination or faith tradition to another. The proportion of new people in the pews is not related to congregational size—a small church is just as likely to have newcomers as a large parish or congregation. However, churches in historically black denominations are likely to have the fewest new arrivals in the last five years, while conservative Protestant congregations are more likely than other faith groups to draw larger numbers of new people.

The Larger Galaxy: Some Challenges

Certainly the constellation of America's congregational life is not all positive. One problematic paradox lies in this fact: Most congregations are small, but most worshipers attend large congregations. Just 10 percent of U.S. congregations—the largest ones—draw 50 percent of all worshipers each week. The smallest 10 percent of congregations gather only around 11 percent of worshipers in a given week. This extreme unevenness in the average size of congregations and the experiences of worshipers has far-reaching consequences. Small congregations, those with fewer than 100 attending services, find it a strain to fund the salary and benefits of a full-time pastor or priest. As more people experience large churches, the small-church experience will be a foreign one to increasing numbers. As people move and look for new places of worship, this trend may begin to feed on itself. A third consequence stems from the experiences of clergy. Most people seeking to enter ministry as a profession come from a large-congregation experience. As they complete their seminary or other education, they often hope to serve in congregations like the ones they came from—most often large congregations, in urban or suburban locations. Few will know the unique challenges and culture of small congregations or rural settings or seek to work in those contexts. Another outcome surfaces at the national and regional levels of religious leadership. Most professional staff serving at these levels admit that they spend the majority of their time working with the half of congregations that represent only one in 10 worshipers.

Many congregations struggle with finances. Almost all congregations and parishes (99 percent) list individual contributions (in the form of offerings, pledges, donations, or dues) as the largest source of income. The median congregational income from all sources is about \$105,000 annually, and congregational expenses average just \$5,500 less than average income. Operating expenses alone average about \$84,000 annually. Thus, the typical congregation spends most of its income on day-to-day operating expenses and a much smaller portion on program and mission. Most congregations are extremely vulnerable to shifts in giving, worship attendance, and the local economy.

Beyond the Ordinary

Are congregations called to be strong in new ways? The ordinary congregation stops short, limits options, and gets stuck in old ways of doing things. Ordinary people are often afraid to venture into uncharted territory. Like astronauts, people in faith communities need to make leaps into the future and into the unknown. Although many congregations are already strong and getting stronger, there is no reason we cannot become even more heroic. In light of the stakes, we must.

Appendix M: Foundational Course Curriculum

Cross Creek Community Church ***Midweek Madness Information Sheet*** ***Fall 2006 – 8 weeks (Sep 20 – Nov 8)***

Every Wednesday 6:15-7:30pm at Cross Creek
Optional Brown Bag dinner/fellowship starting @ 5:30pm with short prayer at 6:05pm
Come join us for fellowship, learning, and personal growth!
This is a whole church, whole family time together.

'Midweek Madness' is a new opportunity for adults, children and youth to learn more deeply about "progressive" Christianity. It's a midweek retreat from the madness of the outside world; a place to come and feel a real sense of belonging; a place in God's world for you and a place for God in your world. These classes invite you to think and talk about how to integrate God, Jesus, and the Bible more fully into your life.

Classes will be each Wednesday from 6:15-7:30pm with an optional bring-your-own-brown-bag dinner at 5:30pm, where we will ALL eat together. There will be a prayer at 6:05, and then we split into our respective classes at 6:15.

Adults

There will be three (3) adult classes plus Mike's Discussion Group offered during the Fall for 8 weeks, and three different classes plus Mike's Discussion Group offered in the Winter/Spring for 12 weeks. A total of six (6) different foundational classes annually. It is designed so you can take all 6 classes over a 3 year period. (See schedule below). When you complete all six classes, you will earn a certificate of completion and we will plan to celebrate your success. To register for a class, please complete the attached registration form. Mike's Discussion Group is "drop in" so there is no need to register for it. The Discussion Group is intended for newer Cross Creek folks and for those whose schedules won't currently allow them to attend ongoing classes.

Year	Fall (Sept to Nov) (8 weeks)	Winter/Spring (Jan to April) (12 weeks) (Skip Ash Wednesday)
1 (2006-7)	Imagine Another World is Possible	Living The Questions (LTQ)
	Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time	What They Don't Tell You About the Bible
	The Spiritual Journey Toward a More Generous Life	Heart of Christianity

	Mike's Discussion Group	Mike's Discussion Group
2 (2007-8)	Imagine Another World is Possible	Living The Questions (LTQ)
	Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time	What They Don't Tell You About the Bible
	The Spiritual Journey Toward a More Generous Life	Heart of Christianity
	Mike's Discussion Group	Mike's Discussion Group
3 (2008-9)	Imagine Another World is Possible	Living The Questions (LTQ)
	Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time	What They Don't Tell You About the Bible
	The Spiritual Journey Toward a More Generous Life	Heart of Christianity
	Mike's Discussion Group	Mike's Discussion Group

Children/Youth

Programming such as Children's Choir, Our Whole Lives, Confirmation, other kid's programming and childcare will also occur each Wednesday – so plan to bring the family! Childcare has a shared nominal fee. Please register children on the attached registration form.

Year	Fall (Sept to Nov) (8 weeks)	Winter/Spring (Jan to April) (12 weeks) (Skip Ash Wednesday)
	1 (2006-7)	Children's Choir & Christmas Musical for ages 5 and up
Childcare for 4 and under		Confirmation
2 (2007-8)	Children's Choir & Christmas Musical for ages 5 and up	Our Whole Lives (OWL)
	Childcare for 4 and under	
3 (2008-9)	Children's Choir & Christmas Musical for ages 5 and up	<i>Special Kid's Programming</i>
	Childcare for 4 and under	Confirmation

While I/we am/are involved in the Adult class(es) listed above, I will need childcare for my child(ren) listed below. I understand that there will be a shared nominal cost for this service (part from me and part from the church):

Child # 1: _____
Child's name *Age*

Child # 2: _____
Child's name *Age*