

Initial Retreat Observations with comments from January 28

Members and friends of Arlington Presbyterian gathered on January 28 to review and chew on the work done at the October 21 – 23 retreat. That retreat was a first step in redefining our mission as a faith community. Friday and Saturday were spent reflecting on the questions “Who is Jesus?”, “What is Church?”, “What is Evangelism?”, “What is Salvation?”, “What is Service?”. On Sunday we worshipped God by getting out on the Pike—what happens in this neighborhood on Sunday mornings?

There were 3 groups working on the questions and the amazing—or not so amazing thing—thanks to the movement and power of the Holy Spirit, was that there was not a lot of difference. Each group was voicing the same basic claims. Those are below along with the reflections (in red) from the January 28 dinner. These questions, answers and reflections will be used as theological groundings and guidelines for all future ministry at Arlington Presbyterian Church.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is the Son of God who embodies unconditional love, removes the obstacles between us and God and who through His death and His raising gives us new life. He is a radical teacher who shows us how to have a meaningful life with God—the impossible right way to live.

- We don't play it safe
- display Jesus' love in whatever we do
- Healing the hurt; who are the hurt? forgiveness
- Jesus is the Son of God
- therefore we need not fear
- purposeful bible study/discussion
- We help remove obstacles among people within the community

What is church?

Church is a community of ordinary people who follow Christ, who welcomes people to join them in the journey of faith and moves into the community carrying God's love and reconciliation.

- We move out; we invite in
- We can be church anywhere
- we make room for grace and forgiveness
- being a community of faith requires continuous nurturing
- church is as much a verb as it is a noun.

- What would “church” look like if we flipped it?
- nurturing children in turn nurtures the parents
- a group of pragmatic idealists
- It’s okay to not be extraordinary people—God’s got the extraordinary under control
- Why do people come to church?
- How can we change the perception of church?
- informality (in dress) may eliminate barriers
- there are different ways to be a part of a church community
- if one is welcoming is it not imposing for a pastor to wear a robe?
- Hands, feet of Christ—action has to clearly express the love of God; does it include prayer?; does it leave room for us to discern God’s will?; is it doing what Jesus told us to do?; does it help open a way for people to come to God?; does it reflect the world of Jesus?; will people see the person of Jesus in what we do?; will it make us stronger disciples?
- There is always room for more: understanding, forgiveness, removal of obstacles
- The asymmetric Attractional model—not your church, but Jesus’; members? what does this mean?; humility
- we open our doors for groups to meet; we could do things with these groups, do things with Funshine parents
- On a whole, the church is the “repairer of the breach”; we are here to serve people; to strengthen our fellow members; to support one another in whatever strata of life they may choose to serve; to support the needs of people in our community; to emphasize the love of God in words, thoughts, and deeds; the church should be the nucleus of its community

What is evangelism?

Evangelism is the way the church demonstrates to others the power and presence of God in communal and individual lives.

- demonstrate the power of God, not talk about it
- we become comfortable talking about our faith
- this definition is not limiting; we can go out in all ways, wherever we see a need. Welcoming
- How can we get people to get “skin in the game”?
- The expectation can’t be you have to join our church. It has to be “I see God in you and you in me.”

- “Power and presence in communal and individual lives” This quote applies to all five questions; welcome—religion, vulnerability, challenge; Service—why did they come?
- Graceful in a graceless world

What is salvation?

Salvation is true gift; unconditional love through Jesus Christ that frees us from sin.

- How do you forgive yourself?
- What need to be freed up in the community?
- What are people looking for? How does this fit into who we are? (what we do is informed by this)
- reunion, redemption, unearned grace, and wholeness and hope for all people

What is service?

Service is the way the church is the eyes, ears, hands, feet and heart of Jesus Christ in the world.

- Discipleship involves the whole of us
- To me, it seems like the Church and service items really will help us find a mission where we can share the Jesus, Evangelism, and Salvation portions with the community
- let people change us. Not all people want to follow “our” rules.
- How do you get to know people? --create opportunities; --need to challenge them or ask for some kind of commitment?
- participate with other community based service organizations
- service/evangelism is an outer expression of our faith and allows us to grow in the faith
- all service would display the love of God
- We represent Christ (!) in the world.
- we don’t just give our \$; we commit our time
- we should exhibit love for all as Christ did, unconditionally. We need to nurture each other in order to do Christ’s work in the world. We need to be courageous in our presentation of Jesus to our community.

Sunday Observations

People walk and drove up and down the Pike and the surrounding neighborhoods. Here are some of their comments:

- people were purposeful in the way they used their time on Sunday morning

- experienced different kinds of community—dog park, farmer’s market, park, bus stop
- The east end of Columbia pike “feels” more materially well off. The closer you get to the physical location of the church, the socio-economic demographic begins to change including the faces of the buildings
- people out, but by themselves
- the church sits geographically in the middle of all this; how does the church help create, nurture, and encourage community?
- one person, sitting at the bus stop at the end of the church’s parking lot, felt like the church was invisible
- we can’t be all things to all people
- after this time in the community, the walls of the building have gotten thinner
- a real passion was raised for participation in health ministry

Comments from Saturday Gathering, January 28

- People want to connect with other people. Look at all the “meet up” groups. Meet ups need to be based on who we are. How can the physical bldg. give back to the community? Affordable or Senior housing? coffee shop? other ways?
- who else do we need to talk to?
- we help create community along the Pike
- use of our property relative to location, need—could take a variety of forms
- what does worship look like? (if we’re opening up to everyone); sermon on-line before and then talk about it?
- How can we let everyone know they are equal in God’s eyes? Your sins are forgiven! The Good news of Jesus—eternal life
- We are at the crossroads between two different communities; how might this inspire our ministry?
- evening clothing bank hours that combines with a soup dinner or bible study
- we need to do things with other churches—not just Presbyterians
- adopt-a-family—AFAC, provide food for identified families or for kinds during holiday/weekends
- Basic question: given the diversity around us, are choosing where to turn our face or are we placing ourselves among the different cultures as a possible bridge or point of rest?
- where else do we need to go?
- be a coordinator for people who want to do volunteer things

- a central place—different—space, concept heart
- worship—purposeful; focused on different groups; create community through worship; re-imagine—as God doesn't care how/where but why and who; coffee hour most important—places to sit
- worship outside
- Sunday is not the only time to worship and/or serve
- the socio-economic reality of the Pike always needs to be in our face
- what is missing in people's lives? Do they think something is missing?
- the stone makes us invisible; how could the front be more inviting?
- What about the people we did not see?

Next Steps:

- what have we missed because time of day/week?
- what calls for more exploration?
- Are we the ones to do what we've identified?
- Are there others doing ministry that speaks to some of the needs we've identified? How can we partner with others in the community?