

Pastor Arthur Murray – Annual Meeting Remarks January, 2019

Survey Comments

I would like to offer some reflections on the Congregational Assessment Tool (the survey) results. First, thank you to the 229 TLC members who took the time to fill it out. Many thanks as well to the even greater number of folks who either tuned in online or came in person this past Monday night to hear the report from our consultants.

There was not a great deal of time for conversation last Monday night, so we do want to continue that conversation today and in the weeks and months to come. A detailed report was provided from the survey company to Council, Staff and the Strategic Planning Team and the results will inform the way all those in church leadership move forward.

I want to begin by recognizing some of the encouraging take-aways from the survey:

- We were identified as being adaptive and progressive (the other options being settled and conservative). This means we have a congregation that sees itself as flexible and forward looking. This positions us very well for creative ways of being church and changing with the times and culture. This is very good.
- We have great agreement amongst those who filled out the survey as to what the central identity, the first priority of this community is – and that is families. This was also very significant. It means that no matter whether you are generally satisfied or dissatisfied with where we are at as a church, or somewhere in the middle, no matter whether you are young or old, it means that there is a lot of shared agreement that this church is committed to families. This is really helpful insight to have. We will come back to this a little later.

Now for the potentially more disturbing report. We were reported as being a low energy and low satisfaction congregation when compared with others. Speaking personally, this was the hardest part for me to hear when we first heard the reports back in December. I went home pretty discouraged that night. But the more I have reflected on this, the more I see it as a potential positive. Here's why:

One of the biggest challenges we face at TLC, in my opinion, is genuinely inviting, encouraging, and enabling the next generation to take ownership of this place. For the most part, it is not newer members and newer families who fill out surveys and attend annual meetings. This is true in all churches, and this is true here. Those who come to meetings like this and fill out surveys are the folks who feel ownership of this church. Those who have been here for 20, 30, 40 years or more.

And what does the survey say? These folks are tired. They are low energy. They can't do it by themselves any more. They are longing for the next generation to step up. This is important. Because if the older generation is not ready for the next generation to step up, they won't. They will indirectly receive the message that they are not really needed. The survey says this is not true.

Younger generation: you are needed! You are valued! If you have energy, and enthusiasm, bring it! We need it! You are the TLC of the future.

Families, the Early Learning Center and our 2019 Budget

As was made clear by the survey, this congregation sees itself as being about families. For some this may be an obvious point, but for me this was enlightening. In my (almost) five years here at TLC, I have always described this as a church that does a WHOLE LOT of things. It has been hard to pinpoint with accuracy where our actual focus is. There was a lot of clarity in that survey regarding the priority of families.

I believe we are well positioned at this time for a solid recommitment to family ministry, and this is made possible by four things:

1. The restructuring of the pastoral roles to co-pastors
2. Financial constraints and a need to clarify our mission
3. Emerging lay leadership within our own congregation

The restructuring of the pastoral roles to co-pastors

Pastoral Leadership is important. The co-pastor proposal that John presented makes several things possible.

- a. It allows us to keep our current staff. Nothing loses new members and new families faster than a pastoral transition.
- b. Personally, it empowers me to invest deeply in family ministry precisely at a time in my life when I am deeply committed to building support for families.

Financial constraints

This seems counter-intuitive but let me explain. Financial constraints force us to pick and choose where we are going to focus our energy. We can't just continue to do everything with decreased staff and resources, burning everyone out in the process. The Mission and Outreach Team has taken the lead by recommending a benevolence budget that prioritizes the Early Learning Center. If budgets are mission statements (which they are) then we are stating in our 2019 budget that the TLC Early Learning Center is far and away the most important mission partner that we have. This changes things. This means we will be seeking more opportunities to strengthen this relationship. More on this in a moment.

Emerging lay leadership within our own congregation

I don't believe in trying to force something to grow where there is no evidence that it will take root. I don't want to try to force a family ministry where there is none to be had. But there is a lot of reason to be hopeful. Incredible new relationships are being formed and new leaders are stepping forward to build upon our long historical commitment to family ministry.

- a. Both of our newly Nominated Council members, Allison Lindman and Gretchen Schroeder, are mothers of school age children who are active in our congregation. This is good news and I have no doubt they will bring a great perspective to the council along with returning council parents, Patti Weichselbaum, Sandy Stooke and Zac Schnedler.
- b. Erin Pommeranz has emerged over the past year a dynamite leader as a result of the Small Group Re-Ignite effort of a year ago. She has taken lead with care ministry in starting the Stephen Ministry program along with Bob Riley and Becky Woll. She has also been instrumental in starting a support

group for mom's with young children which has become a life line for a dozen families with young children in our community. Erin's initiative also helped a second ministry start, an online parents support group which I help lead that meets weekly on Tuesdays at 6:15.

- c. Becky Grefthen is another mom in the church who has stepped forward to take leadership in our Family Mission Camp at Wilderness Canoe Base. We all had such a great time up there last year, volunteering and playing that every family signed up on the spot to come back for the following summer. Allison Sneller is leading on welcoming new families in our neighborhood. Carol Olson is providing consistent and energizing leadership for our Church PTA of confirmation parents.

TLC's Mission - How do all these things fit together?

We still have a lot of work to do together in figuring out where we are going. But I want to offer a few guesses of what God might be up to here at TLC.

If the survey is accurate, then we are a progressive family centered church. A place to grow, to raise children, to deepen relationships with one another and with God. A place for old and young to come together for the mutual purpose of supporting one another and celebrating our young people. A place where we all join together as a village of support, centered on Christ, committed to one another in all our diversity and especially to those who are on the front lines of parenting.

I can imagine us having three major focal points, three major partners in ministry – Center for Changing Lives, Liberia, the Early Learning Center, and Addiction and Faith. Not every TLC member will connect with all of them, but most of us will likely feel a connection with at least one of them. Every one of them directly relates to our commitment to being a family centered church.

The Early Learning Center is our most visible and immediate every day ministry partner. We support them and they support us. They connect us with new families in the neighborhood, we enable them to provide essential services through a devoted, loving presence in the lives of hundreds of families. I can

imagine a new team of ELC-TLC folks committed to imagining new ways to strengthen this relationship.

Center for Changing Lives – Liberia is a way for us to partner with, support and learn from families on the other side of the world. CCLL is committed to supporting families who have taken in orphans in the aftermath of Ebola and AIDS. Our TLC family is linked with our Liberia family through the presence of Stephen Nushann, one of our 8th grade confirmands, whose father, Philip, is running the program in Liberia. One year from now an intergenerational group of TLC folks will have just returned from Liberia – one more step in strengthening that relationship.

Finally, our newest potential ministry partner, Addiction and Faith is committed to helping faith communities just like ours around the country be supportive to families who are struggling with addictions of every kind. Addiction exists in every faith community and ours is no exception. We have the opportunity to share what we have learned with others and in the process we will be saving lives and restoring families.

Each of these ministries is different and each of the relationships is different. Financially speaking, Addiction and Faith provides a revenue stream to TLC. ELC provides families to TLC and the opportunity to serve the Bloomington community in a very meaningful way while we offer to them “in-kind” benefits. CCL-Liberia is a beneficiary of our Capital Campaign and many TLC members support CCLL through their own designated giving.