

WE ARE HERE NOW

Vision & Discernment Process Listening Themes Overview

The Vision & Discernment Team has been learning a great deal over the last several months:

- from the listening process completed this spring by members of our congregation,
- from our partners at Church Innovations,
- Through the Timeline Event shared with so many of you!
- and from listening to the Holy Spirit.

This process raises both challenges and joys. **The challenge is for us all to give this concern the priority it deserves—to think and pray and converse about it frequently and persistently.** *The joy was well expressed by our Listening Leaders who found it so encouraging to hear fellow members talk about the past and future of Eastern Avenue Church, whatever they said.*

Our Listening Leaders' conversations converged around the topics that we lay out below in 6 unique themes, *that were also shared individually through videos and graphics this summer and fall.* Please note that these topics raise questions that we need to discuss over the next few months, not “conclusions” that the Vision Team has come to! Our job as a Team is not to “decide” things but to become servants of the process of discussion and discernment. **The future that God promises for our church will become clear from the bottom up, in conversations that eventually lead to a consensus.**

Right now we continue in this process by:

- looking honestly at our present situation, including the sense of pain, loss, and lament that many of us have been feeling;
- remembering and celebrating the joys and strengths that God has given us;
- bringing those two together to ponder where God is leading us next.

So, as you go through the following material,

- Read each theme with openness and a sense of wondering.
- Consider the questions posed under each theme.
- Pray. Seek God's leadership and guidance.
- Get involved in the upcoming Vision & Discernment opportunities such as a small group discussion, or Cottage Meeting and the Discernment Event in mid-November.

Themes and questions from Listening Process

RELATIONSHIPS

From the Listening Leaders' sessions, one of the two most valued points among Eastern Avenue members is relationships. Many commented on the richness and blessing of these relationships, not least in the care that people show for each other in seasons of crisis and at moments of celebration. Others, however, felt that relationships were difficult to form or 'break into.'

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RELATIONSHIPS, cont'd.

- *What is God up to by giving us such abundant relationships within our church community?*
- *What is God teaching you about the church from the relationships you have with other Eastern Ave members, or that you see among other members?*
- *What is God teaching us about extending hospitality with newer or less-connected church members?*
- *What does it really mean to be an inclusive community, and how are we living that out in our relationships at church?*

WORSHIP

Worship is the other most highly valued quality at Eastern Avenue Church. Members who talked with the Listening Leaders said that their moving faith experiences happened more frequently in worship in music, preaching, communal prayer, and liturgical rhythms than anywhere else. And yet, there is an ongoing tension between head and heart, between intellectual and emotional emphases, in our values and experiences of worship. Some members' desire for change in worship is matched by others' anxiety about change.

- *In what ways is God working through our worship services to bring us into a better understanding of who God is and what God is calling us to do in the world?*
- *How is God calling Eastern Avenue to balance head (thinking), heart (feeling), and hands (doing) through worship? How might this help us engage more of God's children in worship?*
- *What do you find most meaningful in our worship together?*

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Within, but also well beyond the listening process, some real Pain Points emerged about our congregational life, including challenges in leadership, the departure of some members, issues involving transparency and conflict management, and concerns about program priorities (such as youth ministries, outreach ministries and pastoral care).

- *If these (or other) pain points have been real for you at EACRC, how have you sensed God's direction in addressing or managing these challenges?*
- *How has God led us as a congregation through these challenges so far?*
- *What changes might God be calling us to make in response to these challenges, and what values would God have us uphold and maintain going forward?*

BILINGUAL MINISTRY

Eastern's Bilingual Ministry has been a piece of our congregational fabric for close to a decade. As we look to the future, how do we as a whole community identify as a community of believers in worship, community and relationship? The listening process revealed a strong sense of

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loyalty, gratitude, and identity among Hispanic members over Eastern Avenue being “our” church!

- *What is your most vivid memory/experience with or in Eastern’s Hispanic community?*
- *What is God up to in this bil-lingual, multi-cultural ministry?*
- *How is the bilingual service a blessing for Eastern?*
- *In what ways does our community sense God’s call to this ministry?*
- *What is your prayer for this ministry?*

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Eastern Avenue Church has been blessed by God to minister on the corner of Eastern and Logan for more than 140 years. Over this time, the community has changed considerably – more than once! Today we live among some long standing neighbors, many generations deep, and have partnerships with firmly rooted community organizations and ministries. We also see new tides: gentrification and community revitalization in the neighboring business district on the one hand, and the affordable housing being erected along the Eastern corridor on the other. At the same time, Baxter continues to be a community with higher than average rates of crime and poverty.

- *In what ways has God called us to be a missional church in our neighborhood?*
- *In what ways is God calling us into the future as partners amid change?*
- *What is God up to, introducing all of these new neighbors across Eastern, along Wealthy, and throughout the Baxter neighborhood?*

LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

Many participants in the listening process highlighted Eastern becoming an affirming, inclusive body of believers toward our LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ as an important issue. The Vision Team is not being asked to help shape policy or program on this front, but affirms the parallel process that is now underway in the congregation on this significant issue and will align with it as we are able.

IN SUM

The process of sharing, listening and hearing was a challenging but most encouraging experience for those who participated in it. We are so very grateful to the 30+ members of our church community who committed to this work. We pray that their first steps provide hope and empower us all to continue along in this process, and that it prompts prayers of thanks to our

good God for sustaining and strengthening us as a community of believers.

- Those who were interviewed were glad to have the chance to talk about their hopes and anxieties about our church. *How might you ask God to give you the confidence to join in this*

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discernment process?

- In a time in the life of our church where expectations may carry more anxiety than hope, *what might God be teaching us about who we are and who God wants us to be?*

The Vision Team looks forward to having conversation with you and our whole body of believers on these and other topics in the coming weeks through our Cottage Meetings and beyond!