

St. Margaret's United Church
Visioning Task Force
Compiled responses of Table Groups - Sunday May 25

On May 25, there were eight tables and most had eight participants, so in all about 64 people took part. The discussions were generally lively and most people stayed for about an hour following the business of the Annual Meeting. Task Force members met Sunday evening to share what they heard at their tables. Dan Norman compiled these responses, together with a written response from one table, a written response from one person, and the responses from some “test” groups which met on May 11. For each question, I tried to list first the most common responses but there is also some randomness in the ordering. On some questions, particularly the later ones, the answers include advice on how to do things as well as views on what we should be trying to do.

I apologize if I have missed some important response. I have not deliberately censored any responses, but I have probably emphasized things that seemed particularly important to me. Below are the questions (in bold type) distributed at the tables, followed by the responses. This information will be very helpful for the Visioning Task Force as we enter discussions with Queen St. United Church.

Dan Norman

Q1. How or why did you first come to St. Margaret's?

Welcoming. Close to where I lived. (Also some of the answers as in Q2.)

Q2. What do you value about St. Margaret's?

Feeling of family. Welcoming (“moreso than other congregations”). Friendly. Open. Easy to take part in any activity (craft group, shuffleboard, etc.). Caring church (caring both of each other and of wider community and world).

Outreach.

Music (expressed by both congregation and choir members). Worship. Some flexibility in worship, trying new things, relaxed about children wandering. Respect for tradition.

Preaching that relates Bible and current life. Liberal interpretation of scriptures.

Leadership – both ministerial and lay – variety of people in worship as well as in church life.

Commitment to youth, special programming such as Christmas Eve. Other special services on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Social activity such as Thursday afternoon program, various lunches and dinners. Even fundraisers provide important social opportunities. Men's Group.

Q3. What do you find missing at St. Margaret's?

Young people, children (Note: 0 weddings, 0 baptisms reported in Annual Report.).

Opportunities for group study, spiritual growth, such as Lenten Study or Advent Study in former years. Sharing the faith and living it. Focus groups on issues. Retreats.

Outreach – more opportunities for hands-on involvement (as in North Kingston at Christmas and at every month-end) and not just giving money. Hearing directly from groups to whom we give outreach and not just hearing that we gave money. An active Woman's Group (e.g. UCW). Using the front door. A steeple and bells.

Q4. How important is it to you that St. Margaret's be seen as a welcoming church? Who do you think might not feel welcomed at St. Margaret's as it is now?

It is pretty well universally felt that it is essential to be welcoming and that we are welcoming, at least in the sense of greeting and talking with people who come to our church, caring for each other, and making room for people who want to join our activities. The relative absence of children and young adults creates an atmosphere that is less welcoming to young people. There was some discussion in the committee whether our welcoming extends to being willing to adapt our worship and music and church life to really engage young people, or people with no church background. How do we truly welcome the community around us? Would gays and lesbians really feel comfortable among us? Do we put up barriers to some people by our unconscious assumptions about how to behave and how to worship? At one table, a person said "elitism kills a church". Still, while we recognized we can do better, the consensus remains that we are a welcoming community.

There was some discussion of whether we would welcome a woman minister. There are reports of a few people expressing negative feelings about this. However, at table groups where this was discussed openly, all present said they just wanted a really good minister and gender did not matter.

Q5. What do you feel St. Margaret's priorities are at the present? What do you feel St. Margaret's priorities should be (for example, spiritual growth, community outreach, music, youth, worship, fellowship, etc.)

At present:

Fundraising, survival. Youth (budget commitment). Outreach. Music. All of the examples listed in the question.

Should be:

Spiritual growth; helping individuals keep body and soul together.

Outreach.

Fellowship; maintaining community; welcoming.

Keeping relaxed feeling in worship. Music. Keep some traditional hymns.

Being a model of amalgamation so that others may join us.

Better communication (advertising) into the community around us – electronic sign?

Maintain participation of lay people in worship leadership, congregational decision-making.

Hiring a minister to lead St. Margaret's through this process.

Q6. What are your priorities in a possible merger with Queen St. United?

(People didn't seem to think it necessary to repeat all the things they had already said they valued and felt to be priorities at St. Margaret's, but I think we should recognize they are important for St. Margaret's people. Discussion tended towards advice on how to make the amalgamation work.)

Building one community, with sense of family. Can't be forced, must create situations which allow community to grow.

Recognize that we have message for and mission to wider community, not just to members of two churches. Welcome others.

Clear communication between members of the congregation and those involved in discussion and in planning means and occasions for the amalgamation.

Equal partnership, neither party dominates, share and compromise, be willing to change but be careful about losing essentials. “family” and “worship” are important but we must be open to change.

Maintain openness in worship.

A new project (e.g. welcoming a refugee family) could be a good way to create new community. One written submission expressed concern about a merger without immediate new ministerial leadership. It suggested specialized ministry – some downtown continuing Queen St.'s work, some at our present church.

Q7. What kind of church would you like to see us (as a new congregation) five years from now?

Still existing and thriving as a single welcoming, worshipping community.

More demographically diverse, and more financially stable so that we can commit more energy to doing more in the community, and have more people to spread the work of the church.

Willingness to use newness to try new things in worship and church life in general. (There may be an opportunity to get Presbytery permission for Queen St. to use some real estate proceeds from the sale of their property for new things such as a community nurse, or providing transportation to church, and other ideas. This is an issue for Queen St. to deal with.)

Maintain use of building by outside groups.

More hands-on outreach.