

## **We Are an Open, Inclusive, and Accepting Congregation**

Let me first thank all seventy-six of you who participated in the Congregational Survey on Core Values and the thirty-one of you who attended the first Chapel Cafe'. This is nothing less than an enthusiastic beginning to our church-wide discussions on the Board proposed 2023 church growth program. As your pastor I am so excited about all the work that members of our Board are already putting into this effort, but mostly I am so proud of the eagerness I sense from all of you to be a part of the planning process. The Board of Directors are presently having monthly workshops dedicated to this one vital program and I can assure all of you that your ideas, comments, and suggestions are all valued by the members of our Board and will be a critical element of their planning as it continues throughout 2022.

Determining the Core Values of our Chapel is an essential first step in our proposed church growth program. Before we invite others to join us on our particular faith journey it is important to know who we are as a church, what we value most about our experiences here at the Chapel, and what we have to offer anyone who would choose to follow in our footsteps as we strive to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

In the last issue of the Chapel Chimes I spoke to you about one of the core values that appeared in our survey.

*We are a loving and caring congregation.*

I wrote, "How we love and care for one another in our Chapel family is both a reflection of our close relationship with God and an example of God's love to those outside our church...If our Chapel is a place that is indeed loving and caring...then those outside our church will be open to experiencing God by joining our faith community. In fact, the way we love each other may very well be our most effective means of spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and an essential part of any church growth program..."

Now, in the Core Values Survey there were two other choices that sound similar and some of you perceived them as redundant. Here they are and I want you to think about the words used in each of them and I believe you will see that each of the three are quite different.

*We are a friendly, gracious, and welcoming congregation*

*We are an open, inclusive, and accepting congregation*

*We are a loving and caring congregation* is a revelation that comes to us as we look inward. It speaks to our core value of treating all our Chapel Family and Friends with kindness, forgiveness, and love. We are a community that loves one another as Christ first loved us.

However, *We are a friendly, gracious, and welcoming congregation* is more of a statement about the feeling one might have if they visited our

Chapel for worship, joined us in a service project, or just sat with us around a table for a covered-dish meal. This is more of a core value revealed to us as we look outward to how others perceive our community of faith. How we welcome and receive our visitors with Christian hospitality...gracious and welcoming...is an essential beginning to any church growth program.

Yet, the one that I think we should all be most proud of is...

*We are an open, inclusive, and accepting congregation*

All of you deemed this core value as the second most important to our church community...and only second by nine votes. This is an affirmation of the twenty-eight founding fathers and mothers of our church. Our church doors are open to everyone. This was the basis of our Chapel being established as an "interdenominational" church, where all are welcome regardless of their previous religious affiliations...welcome even if they had no previous religious affiliations. All are welcome to be a member of our family and worship and serve God in this place.

We are accepting of everyone, no matter who they are...no matter where they are on their spiritual journey. In a time when some churches are restricting who can be a part of their communities by insisting on rigid acceptance of church doctrines...even restricting who can partake in the sacraments of the church...our church is a shining light of the inclusiveness that Jesus taught and the openness of a community based on the love and acceptance of everyone.

It is the knowledge that all of you identify with these three important core values that makes me so proud to be your pastor. We are all so lucky to worship and serve God together.

Peace,  
Pastor Paul