



SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT REPORT

Hope for congregations and church leaders

Summary

Church leaders gathered to address this question – “When congregations find themselves facing issues of sustainability, what kind of help and leadership is helpful and beneficial? These leaders identified six directions for action.

This report describes the project and its outcomes.

Prepared by: Rev. Peter Soli, Facilitator
Dialog Works
September 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Prepared by Rev. Peter Soli, Project Coordinator and Facilitator – Dialog Works
September 2020*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

For nearly 50 years, mainline churches have experienced declines in the number of people attending and participating in congregational life. This decline, along with other contributing factors, is evidenced in the many small congregations struggling to sustain vital ministries. With the Covid 19 social distancing and gathering restrictions, these congregations are feeling additional stress. In the near future, it won't be surprising if many congregations reach a tipping point in the life of their ministry.

OBJECTIVES

- Discover new models and strategies for sustainable ministry with small congregations.
- Develop tools and resources for helping congregations and pastoral leaders who find themselves at a critical tipping point in their ministries.
- Find direction and discern the best and most helpful ways to strengthen the partnership between synods and small congregations struggling with sustainability issues.

PROCESS

This Project has an ELCA focus. It began with surveying Bishops, Assistants to the Bishop, and Directors of Evangelical Mission from 16 ELCA Synods representing North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and western Wisconsin. 35 surveys were completed and returned. Those responding represented seven synods. 53% were from pastors serving congregations, 34% were professional synod staff, and 11% were from Bishops

The survey results were compiled and shared with participants. Those who expressed interest were invited to become part of a planning team. The Planning Team meet online in three 90 - minute sessions. The Planning Team's work is represented by this report.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Survey

The survey results show the need for practical help for congregations facing sustainability issues to be both important and urgent. These congregations face financial challenges, declining participation, and conflict. While the survey indicated a variety of approaches and tools have been used with congregations, there didn't seem to be agreement that one was more helpful than another.

Project Team Results

The Project Team's objective was to answer the question "When congregations find themselves facing issues of sustainability, what kind of help and leadership is helpful and beneficial?" This was accomplished by exploring four specific questions:

1. What are the characteristics of a congregation facing sustainability issues? (Current reality)
2. For what do you pray when praying for these congregations? (Vision)
3. What might be blocking the vision or slowing down progress towards the vision? (Roadblocks)
4. What directions for action will deal with the roadblocks and move towards the vision? (Actions)

What are the characteristics of a congregation facing sustainability issues? (Current reality)

- Positive seeds of hope - *in many places there is an acceptance as well as a tenacious hopeful spirit, pushing creativity, and in some instances jump-starting other ministries*
- Unhelpful understandings and attitudes – *often an inward focus, a desire to find fault/blame, polarized thinking, and an attitude of scarcity*
- Solutions which seem unrealistic – *solutions are last-ditch efforts, too little too late, move towards being a club to keep the building open*
- Confusing and dangerous for leaders – *leaders are unprepared for the situation, get caught in the middle, become a lightning rod, deal with informal power structures*
- Stuck using old solutions to new challenges – *there is strong sense of nostalgia and loss, a desire to return to the old ways, stuck in the past*
- Unsettled, worried, anxious – *people are upset, worried, discouraged, anxious, and sometimes angry*
- Multiple generations tangible losses – *the membership and communities have suffered multiple losses – farms, schools, population, financial viability... exhibit the stages of grief*
- Aging membership death is on people's minds – *high average age of membership, missing youth, some want to die before the church closes*
- Challenged to acknowledge the situation and take action – *challenging for people to let go and to change, frozen*
- Loss of hope and confidence – *people are sad, fearful, tired, feeling alone, a sense of hopelessness*

For what do you pray when praying for these congregations? (Vision)

- The building issues are solved
- Overall confidence in the future based on God's promises
- The congregation's focus expands to include community
- An honest, realistic acknowledgement of the current situation
- Vital connections to the wider church
- Faithful, capable leadership
- Members are living out and practicing their faith

- Members working peacefully together

What might be blocking the vision or slowing down progress towards the vision? (Roadblocks)

- Strong feelings and disagreements
- Difficulty adapting and implementing new ways and change
- Fear which seems to be everywhere
- Leadership which is stressed when leadership is crucial
- Faith challenges – “Where is God?”
- Possibilities for the future are limited by inward thinking
- Financial and demographic realities

What directions for action will deal with the roadblocks and move towards the vision? (Actions)

- Cultivating new ministries with cooperation and a local mission focus
- Supporting, strengthening, and improving relationships within the congregation
- Taking advantage of professional resources outside of the congregation
- Developing specialized training, resources, and tools for leaders called to serve
- Building up hope, generosity, faith, and Christian identity
- Promoting patience and appreciation through careful listening

PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

This project was born out of a need for practical tools, training, and resources for pastors and leaders working with congregations facing sustainability issues. The survey results and the Project Team expanded the understanding of this need. The individuals who participated as part of the Project Team represented a broad geographical area, a wide range of experiences, and perspectives. They included congregation members, parish pastors, adjudicatory leaders, and outside consultants. These six directions for action suggest a way forward for the church to address this need.

Next steps might include the development of a specialized ministry training curriculum focused on

1. Increasing the leader’s understanding of the congregation facing sustainability issues
2. Accessing different cooperative ministry models and discerning who, when, where, how, and why a particular model might be helpful given the situation
3. Using tools for accessing sustainability and vitality issues
4. Improving and expanding skills for listening, conversation, and peacemaking
5. Preaching, teaching, and discovering new life in the congregation
6. Resources for ministry, including consultants, coaches, legal help, facilitation, grants, etc.

PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Rev. Peter Soli of Dialog Works has coordinated and facilitate this project. His leadership has been volunteered as an investment in the future of ministry in small congregations. For additional information visit www.dialogworks.org.

Sustainability Project Report

Hope for congregations and church leaders

Project Overview

For nearly 50 years, mainline churches have experienced declines in the number of people attending and participating in congregational life. This decline, along with other contributing factors, is evidenced in the many small congregations struggling to sustain vital ministries. With the Covid 19 social distancing and gathering restrictions, these congregations are feeling additional stress. In the near future, it won't be surprising if many congregations reach a tipping point in the life of their ministry.

Project Objectives

- Discover new models and strategies for sustainable ministry with small congregations.
- Develop tools and resources for helping congregations and pastoral leaders who find themselves at a critical tipping point in their ministries.
- Find direction and discern the best and most helpful ways to strengthen the partnership between synods and small congregations struggling with sustainability issues.

Process

This Project has an ELCA focus. It began with surveying Bishops, Assistants to the Bishop, and

Directors of Evangelical Mission from 16 ELCA Synods representing North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and western Wisconsin. Rostered leaders and other congregational leaders who are Facebook members were also invited to complete the survey.

The survey results were compiled into a report. It was shared with participants. Those contributors who expressed interest were invited to become part of the planning team and to meet together over three 90 - minute online sessions. It is the work of this team which represents the bulk of this report.

Leadership

Rev. Peter Soli of Dialog Works has coordinated and facilitated this project. His leadership has been volunteered as an investment in the future of ministry in small congregations.

The Survey

Survey overview

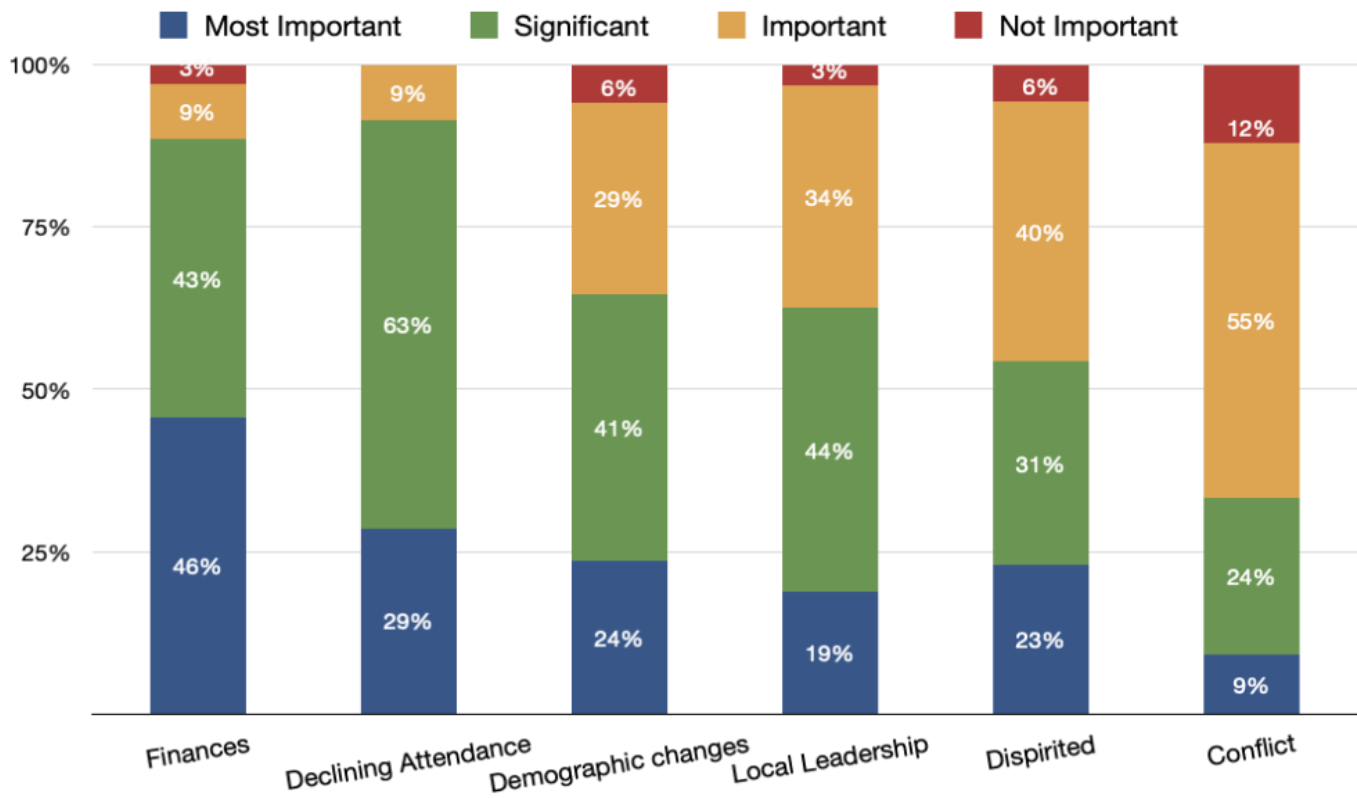
Peter Soli collaborated with Rev. Dr. Mark Yackel-Juleen and Bishop Regina Hassanally to develop a short survey. The survey was intended to assess and raise awareness of the importance and urgency of the current situation with many congregations nearing a tipping point in being able to sustain vital ministries. This was also an invitation to express an interest in being involved in conversations about the situation and in the development of ideas, actions, and tools for ministry with congregations.

A survey link was included in an email sent out to 204 leaders on May 14, 2020. Along with the Grassroots Ministry Sustainability Survey link was an invitation to participate in the survey and project. The email list included rostered leaders actively serving congregations in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA, professional synod staff (Bishops, Synod Ministers, Directors of Evangelical Mission, and Assistants to the Bishop) in five midwestern states (MN, WI, IA, ND, and SD), and Intentional Interim Ministers serving southern Minnesota. 35 surveys were completed and returned. Those responding represented seven synods. 53% were from pastors serving congregations, 34% were professional synod staff, and 11% were from Bishops.

Survey results

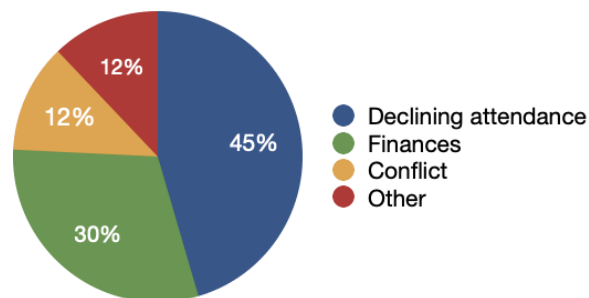
The results showed a strong agreement around the issue of ministry with congregations facing sustainability issues. When asked, *“In your setting and according to your perception, how IMPORTANT is the need to provide practical help for congregations facing sustainability issues?”*, 89% said the need was important. Then, when asked how urgent this need is, 81% said it was either urgent or very urgent.

The survey asked participants to rank in the order of importance, the factors contributing to the situations many congregations face. The results put finances and declining attendance as the most important and significant contributing factors.



When asked which of these evokes the most passion in congregations, declining attendance comes to the top. Congregational conflict gains importance as it arouses strong feelings in the membership.

The survey offered blank space for participants to make additional comments about what might be contributing to the stress in congregations. Responses can be summarized as follows.



- Local leadership
 - Denial of situation
 - Unwilling or unable to think or act creatively
- Stubborn and independent
- Clarity of purpose/mission
- What is role in community?
- What is the connection to the Gospel?

Several themes surfaced from the question: When it comes to addressing sustainability, where do congregations seem to get 'stuck' or 'spin their wheels'?

- Congregations get stuck in the past
 - Grief and nostalgia – looking back not to the future
 - Focus on lapsed members and judgement on other generations
- Must do things as they always have been done
- Focus on buildings and attendance rather than ministry and mission
- Tired – no energy for new ideas

Respondents were asked, “What programs, approaches, interventions, or tools have you found most helpful with congregations facing sustainability issues?” Several responded.

- Conversations (there was an implication these might be focused, guided, or facilitated)
 - Share stories – both personal (local) and Biblical
 - Listening – build trust and awareness
- Asset mapping and other ways to take stock of the current situation – both blessings and challenges
- Prayer, Bible study, and small group ministry
- Various programs: Ask, Thank, Tell; Healthy Congregations; Faith 5; Hope for the Heartland; Hope in Christ
- Patient, faithful, gospel-centered leadership

Survey follow-up

When asked 17 respondents expressed their interest in participating in continued conversation around this issue. These people along with a few others were invited to participate in three online meetings. The agenda and objective of these meetings was to move closer to understanding and possibly developing practical tools and ideas for ministry with congregations facing sustainability issues.

The work of the Project Team

The Grassroots Ministry Sustainability Project Team met three times: Thursday, July 30th, August 13th and 20th. Attendance at the meetings averaged sixteen. The three online meetings were facilitated by Rev. Peter Soli. Meeting #1 included team building and a look at the current situation. Meeting #2 began with a review of the current situation and moved to identifying a vision for ministry with congregations facing sustainability issues. Between meetings #2 and #3 the team was asked to brainstorm what might be blocking (anchoring) forward progress and also what might be helping progress (wind). At meeting #3 the conversation moved from ‘anchors’ and ‘wind’ to actions which would unblock and move towards the vision. These actions were summarized as “directions for action.”

The current situation – congregations dealing with sustainability issues

The group talked, brainstormed, and proposed descriptions of the situation in congregations facing sustainability issues. Ten general characteristics summarize the many ideas offered. (These are NOT listed in any particular order.)

1. **Positive seeds of hope** – *in many places there is an acceptance as well as a tenacious hopeful spirit, pushing creativity, and in some instances jump-starting other ministries*
2. **Unhelpful understandings and attitudes** – *often an inward focus, a desire to find fault/blame, polarized thinking, and an attitude of scarcity*
3. **Solutions which seem unrealistic** – *solutions are last-ditch efforts, too little too late, move towards being a club to keep the building open*
4. **Confusing and dangerous for leaders** – *leaders are unprepared for the situation, get caught in the middle, become a lightning rod, deal with informal power structures*
5. **Stuck using old solutions to new challenges** – *there is strong sense of nostalgia and loss, a desire to return to the old ways, stuck in the past*
6. **Unsettled, worried, anxious** – *people are upset, worried, discouraged, anxious, and sometimes angry*
7. **Multiple generations tangible losses** – *the membership and communities have suffered multiple losses – farms, schools, population, financial viability... exhibit the stages of grief*
8. **Aging membership – death is on people's minds** – *high average age of membership, missing youth, some want to die before the church closes*
9. **Members are challenged to acknowledge the situation and take action** – *challenging for people to let go and to change, frozen*
10. **Loss of hope and confidence** – *people are sad, fearful, tired, feeling alone, a sense of hopelessness*

At the team’s second meeting, the group was invited to reflect on these ten characteristics. They noticed that the negative far outweighs the positive and that it is a challenge for us to find the seeds of hope. At the same time, they noted that these churches are tenacious. Having been through other challenges, they are inclined to ‘hang in there.’ While this can be a strength, it can also contribute to being stuck and not able to let go.

These church leaders said that the situation reminded them of the people of Israel. It is a familiar story. There is hope for a miracle and for someone to parachute in and save them.

Leaders were then asked to share their reactions to the congregation’s current situation.

- It is easy to get drawn into the negative – all the more important to be grounded in faith practices.
- Requires curiosity – help the congregation try something new and if it doesn’t work, be okay with this. Remain steadfast in that Christ’s church is not dying.

- It is important to explore particulars, name the demons, be realistic, acknowledge the challenges but with optimism.
- Be ready to manage behaviors that come at you sideways.
- Discover how ritual might be used or fit with the situation – capture both the lament and possibility.
- See hope as a ray of light in the dark but be cautious about presenting hope – acknowledge both the dark and the light.

What is important? What is feasible? Where are our priorities?

While this would be best described as an ongoing conversation, leaders agreed that addressing the current situation could be thought of as moving from an inward focus to an outward focus. Financial challenges appear to be (at least in part) causing the crisis but it is unclear if this is where to focus in order to bring hope. Members would likely say money is most important, but it isn't clear if leadership should address this first.

Leaders acknowledged that there are things which tend to suck up time and are not helpful in addressing the situation. These include old solutions that don't work, a focus on death and the aging congregation, and unfounded hope that everything will return to 'normal.'

A vision for ministry with congregations

To lift up a vision for ministry with congregations, the Project Team was asked to think about how they would pray for these congregations. The question was, *"When we think about congregations facing sustainability issues, we ask for God to help us accomplish the following."*

Many different petitions were generated. As the petitions were shared with the group, team members were asked to prioritize each petition. Then the petitions were grouped and labeled. The table on the next page includes the grouped petitions along with each petition's priority (indicated by color).

The petitions printed in BOLD represent a summary of the individual petitions listed below each of the boxes

- The GREEN are individual petitions identified as having the highest priority.
- The LIGHT BLUE are individual petitions having a mid-range priority
- The SALMON are individual petitions having a lower priority

Building issues are solved

Know what to do with building
De-emphasize the building

Overall confidence in the future based in God's promises

See new fruits of the Spirit
Open to Possible Outcomes
Future Vision
Enthusiasm for Gospel
Be Bold to face the future
Have faith that God is with us and always doing a new thing
God's Got Our Back
Back to the Future

Congregation's focus expands to include the community

Growth in personal witness and practice
Engage Community beyond the Family
Involvement of the many
Community needs met
Increased congregational participation in missional outreach
Outward Focus
When we say ALL are welcome it means ALL are welcome.
Outreach to the community where needs are met
Service to the community

Honest, realistic, acknowledgement of the current situation

Not fearful of closure (ritual may be important here)
Be honest about the current situation
Realistic Understanding of Current Situation
Be open to acknowledge the situation and listen for God's urging

Connected to wider church ministries

Recognition of wider church
Intentional engagement with the ELCA ministries
LSS
LWR
Disaster Relief
Prioritize generosity
Overflowing generosity of time, talents, and money.
Dollars given towards others

Faithful, capable leadership

Leadership development
All leaders in worship and bible study
Leader development

Members are living out and practicing their faith

Patience with themselves
Genuine Self-Reflection
Faithfulness to God's call
People can see God's presence
Excellence in worship
Listen to him
Focus upon Jesus Love one another
Comfortable praying

Members peacefully working together

Considerate, Compassionate, Respectful Conversation
Cooperation fighting has ceased

Obstructing and assisting – anchors and wind

The Project Team identified factors, forces, or constraints to accomplishing the visions identified by the prayer petitions; and those factors or forces which might assist in bringing about the vision. This brainstorming was done using a sailing ship metaphor. The anchors are what impede efforts and the wind are what help propel us towards the vision. (These brainstormed lists are included in the appendix.)

The team divided into four work groups. Each group focused in parts of the vision. They reviewed what specifically acted as anchors to progress towards this part of the vision, considered what might work as wind, and brainstormed actions which would deal with what holds us back and moves us towards the vision. These results are represented in four tables. The vision is at the top, anchors are listed first, and action follows.

Building issues solved

Honest, realistic, acknowledgement of the current situation

ANCHORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership doesn't lead • Telling God what WE want, not what God wants • Memory of what once was blocks present view • Denial of present reality • Return to the way it was • Stuck in one path • Fear to admit situation • Leaders unwilling to let go of power
ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rooted in Bible Study and prayer • Diagnostic tools • Continually building relationships within congregation • Truly listening to other perspectives • Looking at local, Synod, nationwide trends • Leadership resources • Collaboration in greater community

Confidence in the future based on God's promises

Members are living out and practicing their faith

Members peacefully working together

ANCHORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trusting Traditions • Not Trusting God • Generational Difference • Close Mindedness • Discouragement • Not Working together
ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Generosity Cycles • Sharing Stories of Hope • What God is Doing right Now • Willingness to Listen • Intentional Pastoral Care • Looking at Multiple Models • Building Teams • Fusing Generations through Activities together • Faith Relationships Building • Build Faith Muscle • Baby Steps

Congregations' focus expands to include the community Connected to wider church ministries

A N C H O R S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking we are too small to matter • Real economic and demographic change • Inability to let go of a building • Seeking to survive rather than thrive • Apathy and lack of discernment
A C T I O N S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the idea of cooperatives • Focus on one or two needs in the community • Focus on the gifts of the congregation • Faith practices become core • Reinforce identity as faith community not a failed business

Faithful, capable leadership

A N C H O R S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People don't know how to lead • New fresh leadership is stifled/not allowed to emerge • Fear of making decisions/sticking their neck out • Fear of strong leaders • Systemic issues inhibit strong leadership • Gifts and skills don't match • Unwillingness to consider new people • Fear of destroying the legacy • Not on my watch!
A C T I O N S
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivate connections between congregational leaders • Seminary classes to address these questions • Training opportunities • Strong synodical leadership • Consultant or facilitator especially for presidents • For Rostered Leaders - Continuing Education in areas of Business Admin and Organizational leadership • Stronger Nominating Team • Work with HR recruitment specialists to help in identifying/recruiting/retaining leaderships (if available)

Directions for action

After the third Project Team meeting the brainstormed actions were gathered. Duplicate actions were eliminated and actions with a similar intent were clustered together. Six clusters were formed and labeled “Directions for Action.” These six provide intentional direction for those working with congregations facing sustainability issues.

Directions for Action

1. Cultivating new ministries with cooperation and a local mission focus
2. Supporting, strengthening, and improving relationships within the congregation
3. Taking advantage of professional resources outside of the congregation
4. Developing specialized training, resources, and tools for leaders called to serve
5. Building up hope, generosity, faith, and Christian identity
6. Promoting patience and appreciation through careful listening

Priorities for action

In an email following the Team’s online meetings, Project Team members were asked to prioritize the directions and indicate their importance. Of the six, two stood out. The first priority is building up hope, generosity, faith, and Christian identity.

The priority of hope and identity is a response to the stress imposed upon a congregation facing an uncertain future. The possibility of giving up independence or closure assaults a congregation’s sense of its personality, character, and selfhood. Accumulated losses and the weariness of struggling with maintaining vital ministry is a test of faith and chips away at hope. Renewing, rebuilding, and reinforcing the people’s identity as children of God and heirs to God’s bountiful promises is both the first order of business for leadership as well as the ongoing charge to leaders working with congregations.

The second priority to emerge is developing specialized training, resources, and tools for leaders called to serve congregations facing sustainability issues. In the many years leading up to our current situation, pastors and leaders did not need to think about these matters. There was an assumption that the congregation would continue on as it had for the last 100+ years. As a result, pastors and leaders have not been schooled or equipped to help deal with the situation many congregations find themselves in today.

A curriculum for this specialized training is suggested by the actions listed under this direction and by other priorities. One could imagine an outline for this specialized training.

- **Resources for leadership** – tools for building faith, dealing with change, and claiming Christian identity
- **Group decision making** – discovering and building consensus through dialogue – “Promoting patience and appreciation through careful listening”
- **Stronger together** – supporting, strengthening, and improving relationships within the congregation
- **Adapting to the new reality** – “Cultivating new ministries with cooperation and a local mission focus
- **Help is available** – “Taking advantage of professional resources outside of the congregation”

Closing Reflections by Rev. Peter Soli, Project Facilitator

The Grassroots Ministry Sustainability Project has come to an end but has planted seeds of hope for the future. One of the participants reflected on the value of project.

It was valuable to hear from a wide array of folks from different places all dealing with similar issues. These are issues that neither clergy nor congregations have been prepared to work with very well and I believe that it will only become more prevalent in the future. Trying to home in on some of the common denominators and underlying issues being faced will be helpful as we move into this new future.

My experience with this project has reminded me of the strength of Christ's church. This strength resides in the many who love and serve the church and the God given creative capacity of those serving to help reform and revitalize the body. This strength shows itself when people come together, speak and listen to each other, pray and imagine where God might be leading. However, when if, because of fear or uncertainty, we remain in our own world and do not engage this strength remains untapped and the way forward is more difficult.

The project affirmed what is the current situation for many small congregations. As church participation has declined, people's faith and identity as God's chosen is challenged. This fact needs the attention and care of leaders who are willing to acknowledge the reality, the doubt, and dis-spiriting nature of the many changes facing congregations; while being able to proclaim the hope of Easter and the power of a gracious God to change the world. This proclamation depends on the voices of many. Again, this is not a solitary call, our proclamation is done in consort. We lean on each other for support and courage. Coming together as a Project Team provided this opportunity to leaders and I see this as evidence that we work best in partnership.

This project was born out of a need for practical tools, training, and resources for pastors and leaders working with congregations facing sustainability issues. The survey results and the Project Team expanded the understanding of this need. The six directions for action suggest a way forward for the church to address this need.

Next steps might include the development of a specialized ministry training curriculum focused on

1. Increasing the leader's understanding of the congregation facing sustainability issues
2. Accessing different cooperative ministry models and discerning who, when, where, how, and why a particular model might be helpful given the situation
3. Using tools for accessing sustainability and vitality issues
4. Improving and expanding skills for listening, conversation, and peacemaking
5. Preaching, teaching, and discovering new life in the congregation
6. Resources for ministry, including consultants, coaches, legal help, facilitation, grants, etc.

Our hope for congregations and church leaders is grounded in the promise that Christ leads the way, going before us, traveling with us, and directing our ways.

Appendix

Sustainability Survey Results

A report on the survey was compiled and made into a slide deck. This has been posted on the slideshare.net website. The link to the slide deck is

<https://www.slideshare.net/PeterSoli/grassroots-ministry-sustainability-project-survey-results>

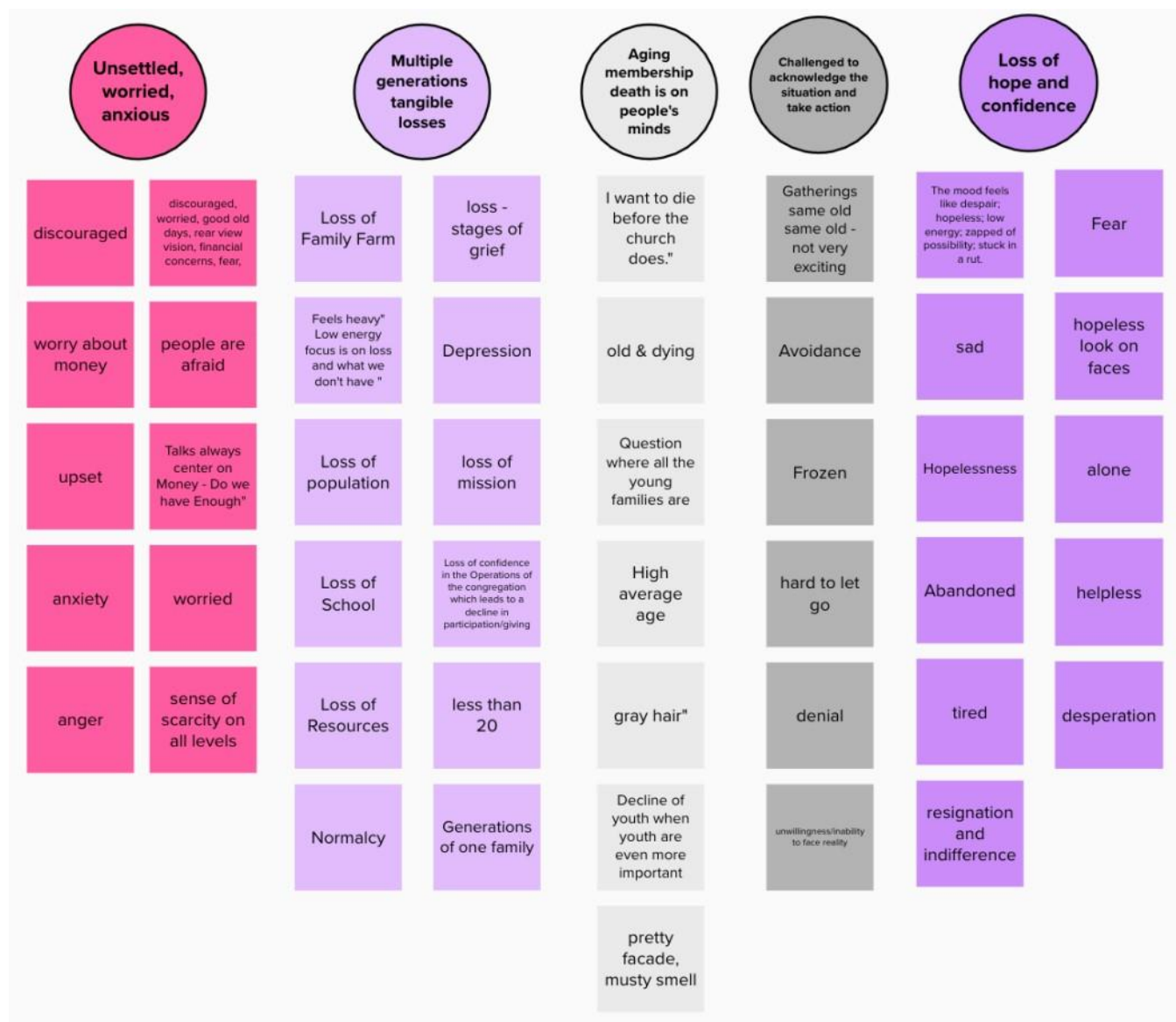
A video report was also created. Use this link to view the video:

<https://www.dialogworks.org/sustainability-member-page?wix-vod-videoId=d93cc9950b5f4b7e855ddaa0593c786d&wix-vod-comp-id=comp-kbb4fj4v>

Characteristics of congregations facing sustainability issues

The Project Team used an online tool to create sticky notes describing congregations facing sustainability issues. The following are screen shots of these notes.





Brainstorm data – “wind” and “anchors”

Wind

- Faithful relationships are built
- Active Engagement in the wider churchwide ministries.
- A defining event gets people unstuck
- Adopt and attitude of experimentation
- Congregational identity becomes clearer
- A sense of adventure with risk taking
- Willingness to risk failure
- The necessity of holding up clear future vision
- Willingness to truly listen
- Willingness to open their doors wide to include all people.
- Focus on the work of ministry, not the problems
- Impending storm (disaster)
- Deepening discipleship rooted in Bible study
- Strong, Experienced Leadership willing to make the tough calls and shut down infighting/distractions
- A willingness and desire to be flexible and adapt to the times.

Anchors

- C
- Carrying on the legacy of the elders which has and is no longer efficient in witnessing the gospel. Conviction trumps curiosity Striving displaces surrender Avoidance of conflict!
- Inability to let go of a building
- Decision-making preempts discernment
- Seeking to survive rather than thrive
- Feel like we are too small to make a difference Too focused on scarcity.
- Pastors who enable OR pastors who push too hard/fast
- Denominational parochialism ("we can't work with them - they're not our flavor")
- Conflict
- Apathy
- Getting past the idea that there is only one correct path forward So focused on the literal family that welcoming non-family is difficult.
- Fear of Change
- Fear of making mistakes
- Unwilling to be uncomfortable
- Real economic and demographic change
- Anger

Directions for action table

Cultivating new ministries with cooperation and a local mission focus	Supporting, strengthening, and improving relationships within the congregation	Taking advantage of professional resources outside of the congregation	Developing specialized training, resources, and tools for leaders called to serve	Building up hope, generosity, faith, and Christian identity	Promoting patience and appreciation through careful listening
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Looking at local, Synod, nationwide trends ▪ Looking at Multiple Models ▪ Introduce the idea of cooperatives ▪ Collaboration in greater community ▪ Focus on 1 or two needs in the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stronger Nominating Team ▪ Cultivate connections between congregational leaders ▪ Building Teams especially for presidents ▪ Focus on the gifts of the congregation ▪ Continually building relationships within congregation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong synodical leadership ▪ Consultant or facilitator ▪ Work with HR recruitment specialist to help identify, recruit, retrain leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership resources ▪ Seminary classes to address these questions ▪ Training opportunities ▪ Continuing Ed. - Business Admin. and Organizational leadership for Rostered Leaders ▪ Intentional Pastoral Care ▪ Diagnostic tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sharing Stories of Hope ▪ What God is Doing right Now ▪ Rooted in Bible Study and prayer ▪ Teaching Generosity Cycles ▪ Faith Relationships Building ▪ Build Faith Muscle ▪ Reinforce identity as faith community not a failed business ▪ Faith practices become core 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Willingness to Listen ▪ Fusing Generations through Activities together ▪ Truly listening to other perspectives ▪ Baby Steps

One-page Grassroots Sustainability Project Report (next page)

Directions for helping congregations and leaders facing sustainability issues.

DIRECTIONS FOR ACTION	ROADBLOCKS STOPPING PROGRESS	WHAT WE PRAY FOR - VISION
<p><i>What directions for action will deal with the roadblocks and move us toward our vision?</i></p> <div> <div>Cultivating new ministries with cooperation and a local mission focus</div> <div>Supporting, strengthening, and improving relationships within the congregation</div> <div>Taking advantage of professional resources outside the congregation</div> <div>Developing specialized training, resources, and tools for leaders called to serve</div> <div>Building up hope, generosity, faith, and Christian identity</div> <div>Promoting patience and appreciation through careful listening</div> </div>	<p><i>What might be blocking prayers from being answered and slowing down or anchoring progress?</i></p> <div> <div>Strong feelings and disagreements</div> <div>Difficulty adapting and implementing new ways and change</div> <div>Fear seems to be everywhere</div> <div>Leadership is stressed at a time when leadership is crucial</div> <div>Faith is challenged – Where is God?</div> <div>Possibilities of the future are limited by inward thinking</div> <div>Financial and demographic realities</div> </div>	<p><i>Given the current situation, what do we pray for? What do we envision for congregations?</i></p> <div> <div>BUILDING ISSUES ARE SOLVED</div> <div>OVERALL CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE BASED ON GOD'S PROMISES</div> <div>CONGREGATION'S FOCUS EXPANDS TO INCLUDE COMMUNITY</div> <div>HONEST, REALISTIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION</div> <div>CONNECTED TO THE WIDER CHURCH</div> <div>FAITHFUL, CAPABLE LEADERSHIP</div> <div>MEMBERS ARE LIVING OUT AND PRACTICING THEIR FAITH</div> <div>MEMBERS PEACEFULLY WORKING TOGETHER</div> </div>