

Executive Summary

Definition of Terms

Vital and recurring terms in this report include:

Tenure Groups (how long people have attended CCC)

- New Attenders: those who have attended your church for 5 years or less.
- Intermediate Attenders: those who have attended your church for 6-19 years.
- Pioneers: those who have attended your church for 20 years or more.

Generation Groups:

- Gen Zers: people 18-26 years of age
- Millennials: people who are currently 27-43 years of age
- Gen Xers: people who are currently 44-58 years of age
- Boomers: people who are currently 59-77 years of age
- Silents: 78+ years of age

Scope of the Report

The criterion for a satisfactory survey sample is to have at least half of the year's average number of people in attendance take the survey. 451 people participated in taking your survey. Given a recent attendance figure of over 600 in both services and online, we have a response rate of almost 75%, which is very good.

Additionally, the VitalChurch Discernment Team was able to meet with 93 people through input sessions, including former Pastor Greg Alderman. The survey results, coupled with the input sessions, should accurately reflect the current reality at CCC (the *mirror*), with the primary objective being to develop a pathway forward for God's preferred future at CCC (the *map*).

Strengths to Build On

God has taken care of Christ Community Church over the past sixty and more years. So, the following section is intended to assist you in celebrating just a few of the many strengths that you have been blessed with, by God's grace. The data from your online survey reveals numerous areas and ministries where CCC is flourishing:

1. Your first great strength is **how you assessed** a large number of your ministries. Any ministry rated above 75% is considered strong and moving toward flourishing. Here are your top-rated ministries:

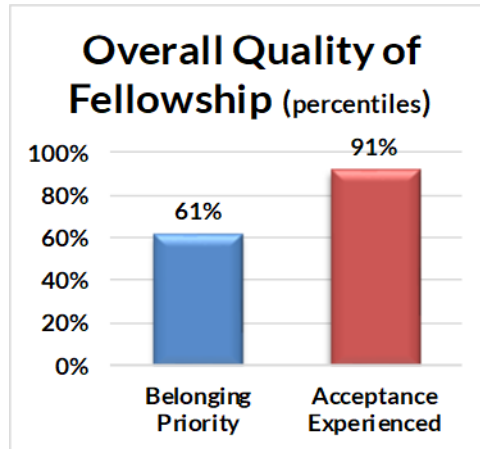
Ministry	Rating
Sermons/Preaching	85%
Celebrate Recovery	84%
Children's Ministry (Birth - 5th Grade)	82%
Church Facilities	82%
Hospitality Ministry - Campus Hosts/Ushers/Welcome Center/Cafe	81%
Middle School Ministry	78%
Care & Prayer Ministries	77%
Traditional Worship Music (Worship Services)	77%
Church Communications (Website, Church Wide Email, Bulletin, Ministry Handouts, Social Media, Podcast, etc.)	77%
Worship Audio/Visual (Worship Services)	76%
In-Person Traditional Sunday Worship Services (overall experience)	76%
Missions	76%
LAF Track Courses	75%
Women's Ministry	75%
High School Ministry	75%
In-Person Contemporary Sunday Worship Services (overall experience)	75%

2. Now we can see **what keeps people coming** to CCC:

- 45% Bible Study/Sermons
- 28% Relationships

While we can see that CCC is strong in its sermons, something that is interesting is that the church also showed an exceptionally high rate of *experienced quality of fellowship*. As we will see below, CCC has not been good at attracting and sponsoring people into the church, yet once they're in, the potential for fellowship is strong.

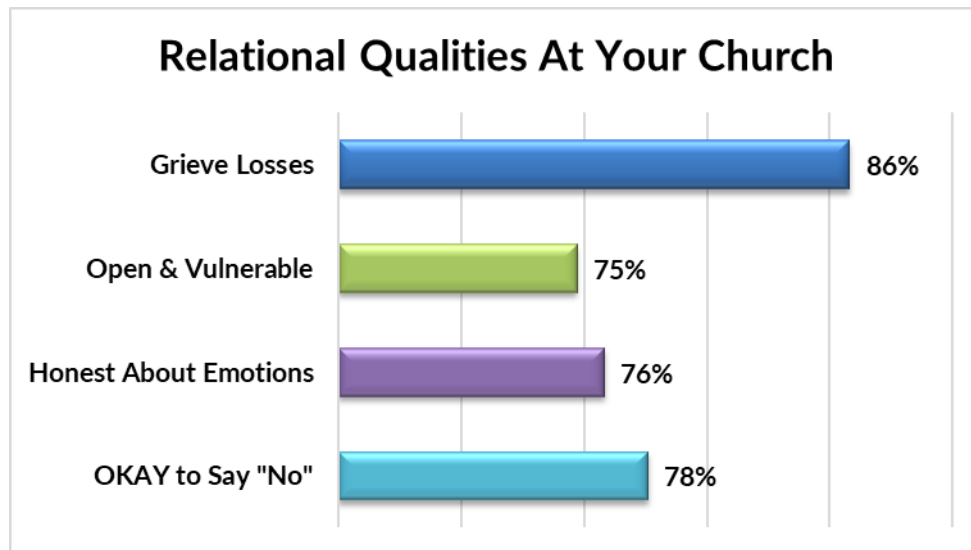
3. **Quality of Fellowship—Koinonia** (See [Section 4: Quality of Fellowship](#) in the Appendices for full discussion).



Priority is in the "High Normal" range.
 Experienced is in the "High" range.

- CCC is in the 91%ile of people feel like they are experiencing acceptance. That is amazing!

Christ Community is exceptional in that you have managed to maintain a high focus in both sermons and fellowship (once people are in). That also shows in the relational qualities at your church:



The minimum ideal score on these characteristics is 70%.

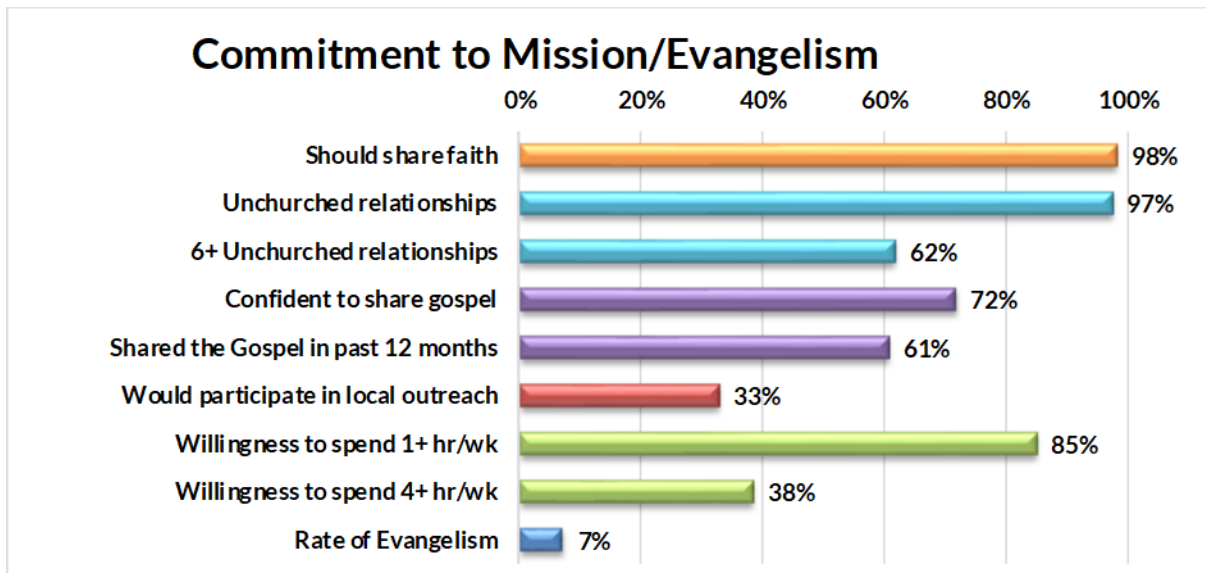
These emotional health questions help measure the degree to which CCC’s attenders become involved in each other’s lives. And CCC is doing a great job in this category.

4. And once you're here, and you feel accepted, another strength is that **you feel your needs are being met.**

Needs Met	Overall	New	Inter	Pi's	Zer	Mill	Xer	Bmer	Silent
Definitely	48%	54%	49%	43%	40%	54%	47%	46%	51%
Satisfactorily	32%	30%	34%	31%	20%	37%	29%	33%	30%
Somewhat	14%	14%	13%	15%	30%	8%	17%	13%	16%
Not really	6%	2%	4%	11%	10%	1%	7%	8%	4%

- 80% of you said your needs are being met at a satisfactory or more level.

5. With a people who are satisfied, it also means they are committed to living on **mission, doing evangelism, and serving** at Christ Community.



- 97% have non-Christian friends, 62% have 6 or more.
- 98% Say Christians should find ways to share their faith.
- So, you are in your community and willing to share your faith with the people you interact with.
- 85% are willing to volunteer an hour or more per week supporting the mission of the church.
- 38% Willing to spend 4 or more volunteer hours (Excellent)
- CCC has a mass of volunteers who are ready and willing to help this church succeed.

6. Now that we have a group of volunteers who are ready, a huge benefit is that **your staff members are good at mentoring and training people to participate in their area of ministry.**

Staff Mentoring

	Congregation	Leaders	Staff
Excellent	24%	0%	31%
Good	46%	75%	56%
Hit and Miss	22%	25%	6%
Tendency to do their area of ministry on their own	8%	0%	6%
Red Total	30%	25%	13%
Don't know	35%	27%	0%

- 70% of the congregation feels the staff does a great job, and the staff also seem to enjoy doing it at 87%.

All in all, God has certainly blessed Christ Community Church! Those are just a few of the many things to build on as you enter the next season of fruitful ministry.

Introduction

In Deuteronomy 1:2-3 Moses addressed the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land, and he clearly stated that what would normally take about eleven days has taken them forty years.

Sinful attitudes like grumbling, murmuring, disputing, and complaining don't reflect God's heart and purposes, and they lead us down a long and winding road that can prolong our anxiety and our longing for stability and control. And, as most of us know, a whole generation of people died during the forty-year-long journey through the wilderness. I [Gregg] became a Jesus follower in the early '70's in the SoCal Jesus Movement (e.g., the *Jesus Revolution* movie), and I still remember a particular song from those days. It was titled, "Walkin' Sinai" and the chorus went like this:

*Go on and take another lap around Mount Sinai,
'Til you've learned your lesson,
'Til you stop your whining and you quit your rebellin',
'Til you learn to stand in your day of testing, by trustin' and obeyin' the Lord.*

God wants to teach us deep and fruitful lessons in a season of transition but, like Jonah, Jacob, David, Peter, and countless other biblical characters, we are prone to run from what God wants to teach us in the moment. In the end we find that God is patiently providing us with the opportunity to learn as we grow closer to him and to one another.

Here are some important questions for you, CCC: What is God trying to teach you in this transition season? Are you humble? Are you listening? Have you surrendered your personal preferences?

Considering the Israelites and the Exodus as a helpful metaphor for the spiritual journey of a church in transition, here are six basic stages:¹

1. **Pre-Awareness** begins with a general sense of dis-ease—yet we are not fully aware of God is up to and we often try to find ways to maintain the status quo.
2. **Awareness** comes when an event, or an accumulation of events, happens and we can no longer dismiss or ignore that God is wanting our attention.
3. **A Turning (or Tipping) Point** occurs when we finally “wake up” and face the pain of our need to surrender afresh and change.
4. **A Time of Testing**, like when the ancient Israelites found themselves standing at the Red Sea with the Egyptian army bearing down on them. They were initially convinced that God had abandoned them, and they wanted to surrender and go back to Egypt.
5. **Learning to Trust**, like in Exodus 14:13-14, *Moses said to the people, “Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which he will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. ¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.”*
6. **Training in Our Waiting** can be compared to a dark season of the soul when we realize that without God’s intervention there is very little hope. As we surrender afresh our lives and our church to God and prayerfully seek his guidance, wisdom, and direction. This means placing all of our personal preferences up on the table.

Most of us have not had much training in waiting—and there is no grad-school or seminary course that teaches us how to wait well. However, here’s something that many people miss in the Exodus narrative: Moses had already been through 40 years of wilderness testing and training and he was well prepared to lead the Israelites on their prolonged journey.

We will be referring to these stages as we move through the rest of this report.

¹ Adapted from *Strengthening the Soul of Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* by Ruth Haley Barton, IVP Books 2008/2018:87-100 (Chap 6).

Addressing the Issues



We will now move on to what has been hindering your vitality. While CCC has a plethora of strengths to build on, this report will show there are some very real and current threats that should not be ignored. CCC is at a distinct crossroads, and we would encourage you to relinquish your *status quo*. In our reports we often use the language of Taproot and Branch Root Issues to identify the current threats to your church's vitality.

The *VitalChurch* Discernment Team, through analyzing the data, conducting input sessions, prayer, and with decades of experience sees **one taproot issue** and **three branch root issues** as the *primary hindering factors* at this time. These will need to be addressed with humility, confession, repentance, prayer, planning, and waiting—even as you take the time to celebrate and build on to your strengths.

Taproot Issue: You have allowed conflict to engulf significant portions of the church during this transition season, which has shifted your focus away from trusting Jesus to care, lead, and provide for your church during this time. Our encouragement is to surrender this church afresh and return to the feet of Jesus.

"Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to his word." –Luke 10:39b

There is little doubt that we are living in a time of heightened levels of unresolved conflict and contentiousness. With that being said, it is not the conflict itself that is the problem but how inevitable conflict is attended to. Conflict will always present us with the opportunity to grow—and in a church context, we have the opportunity to deepen our relationships with one another as well as with God when we commit to handling conflict biblically.

What does the New Testament say about our conflicts? It's almost too blunt:

"Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that war within you." (James 4:1)

Your Verbatim Responses indicate that many of you have been in a **Pre-Awareness (Disease) Stage**. It is our hope that by reading this report and dialoguing with others, that CCC will move into a church-wide **Awareness Stage** that will usher you into the **Turning Point Stage**. (Then there are the trials of **Testing, Trusting, and Training**.)

Here are two Verbatim Responses that indicate **Pre-Awareness**:

- “I feel like if I’m honest...our church hasn't sought out the Holy Spirit in this whole process. We’ve been trying to do it in our own strength. It’s not working.”
- “We need to let Christ be head of the church, be humble, and let Christ lead.”

In the six transition stages we mentioned above, significant conflicts clearly send the message that there is a need to move from **Pre-Awareness** to **Awareness**—and that God wants your full attention. Think of it like the oil light on the dashboard of a car: if it starts flashing, we had better pay attention.

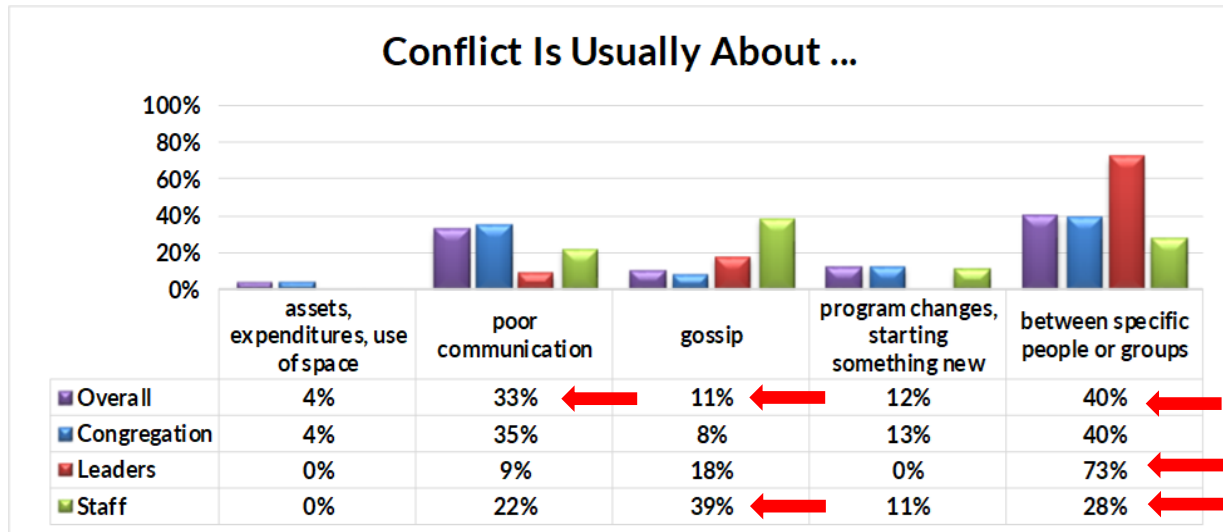
In addition to the stated verbatim responses the data clearly reveals that significant conflict has worked its way into the system.

Taproot Rationale (Mirror)

Only 32% of survey respondents said that CCC and your leaders are good at conflict resolution. Any score under 70% is cause for concern.



And you even told us what much of the conflict is about, which we will examine on the following pages.



- a. Overall, 40% of survey respondents said that conflict is between specific people or groups of people.
 - 1) 40% of the congregation as a whole sees conflict between groups as THE most significant issue.
 - 2) 73% of the Session see conflict.
 - 3) 28% Staff's second highest rating (behind gossip 39%).
- b. 33% of the survey respondents said conflict is about Poor Communication.
- c. About a tenth of the survey respondents (11%) said Gossip is an issue, with almost 40% of the Staff (39%) saying that Gossip is causing conflict.

You also told us about the Degree of Conflict:

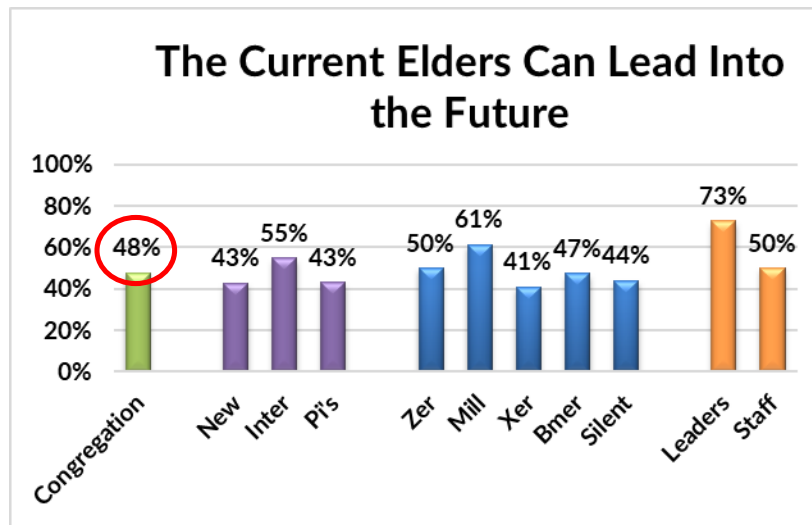
Describe the current atmosphere of your church.	All	New	Inter	Pi's	Zers	Mills	Xers	Boomers	Silents	Board	Staff	Traditional	Contemporary
Everyone is getting along	22%	39%	22%	11%	30%	35%	23%	21%	12%	0%	13%	19%	27%
Mostly everyone is getting along	35%	39%	38%	28%	50%	34%	37%	36%	30%	27%	44%	32%	38%
Some distinct undercurrents/ conflicts/disagreements	37%	21%	36%	50%	10%	27%	37%	37%	49%	64%	38%	43%	31%
Situation is highly conflicted	6%	1%	4%	12%	10%	3%	4%	6%	9%	9%	6%	6%	4%
Green total	57%	78%	61%	38%	80%	69%	59%	57%	43%	27%	56%	51%	64%
Red total	43%	22%	39%	62%	20%	31%	41%	43%	57%	73%	44%	49%	36%

In this graph, the Board and Staff are considered separately and are not included in tenure, generation, or service data but are included in the "All" entries.

We are primarily concerned with the bottom *Green total* and *Red total* rows...

- a. At 73%, the Session is most aware of conflict.
- b. Among all survey participants, 43% report there are some undercurrents, conflicts, and disagreements in your church.
- c. Among tenure groups, Pioneers reported the highest level of conflict (62%).
- d. Among generational groups, Silents (78+) reported the highest level of conflict (57%).
- e. Those attending the In-Person Traditional Service (49%) are more aware of conflict than those attending the In-Person Contemporary Service (36%).
- f. Gen Zers are giving you the benefit of the doubt at 80%!

Conflict that is not managed well will erode trust.



- Notice that almost half (48%) of your survey respondents think the Session can lead into the future.
- How teams (or committees or sessions or leadership) handle conflict can make or break trust within an organization.
- If conflicts are ignored or poorly managed, trust will be eroded. Trust is vital for high-functioning teams so when trust is strained, taking steps to restore it is critical.
- Trust is restored through care.

Three Branch Issues

1. CCC has been a pastor-focused church—sometimes to the detriment of being a Jesus-focused church.
2. You are aging out as a congregation and have become institutionalized.
3. There is a need for CCC to re/focus and re/clarify your values, mission, and vision before you call a permanent Lead Pastor.

The Rationale (Mirror)

1. **CCC has been a pastor-focused church—sometimes to the detriment of being a Jesus-focused church.**
 - a. While there is not an all-encompassing definition or description of a “Pastor-Focused Church,” nor is there a research-based method to verify it, one author has compared it to “the sun [and] the solar system, he is the person (or should I say *persona*) around whom much of the church revolves...this is the pastor-[focused] church.”²
 - b. CCC has been privileged to be served by several long-tenured pastors. You had Dave Schutt for 13 years (11/93-5/06) and then Greg Alderman for 15 years (11/06-6/22). Long-tenured pastorates are not necessarily wrong or bad (in fact more of them are needed), and yet when that long-tenured pastor is a strong leader there can be an overdependence on him as the keeper of the vision and the maker of decisions.
 - c. And when there is a leadership vacuum, things can go sideways pretty quickly. Just as water fills a vacuum, someone or something will seek to fill in where there is a void.
 - d. The writer of Judges summarizes the leadership vacuum which existed in Israel after the death of two long tenured leaders (Joshua and Caleb) by declaring, *“In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* (Judges 21:25; see also 17:6, 18:1, and 19:1.)
 - e. A strong and competent leader can hold groups of people together that have different views regarding theology, liturgy, ministry, or internal governance structures. And when the leader leaves, people tend to see that as an opportunity promote their particular views (or “pet doctrines”).

² Yancey Arrington, “The Pastor-Centered Church” (YanceyArrington.com, 9/29/09. Arrington employs the term “Pastor-Centered,” which VitalChurch Ministry views as an equivalent.

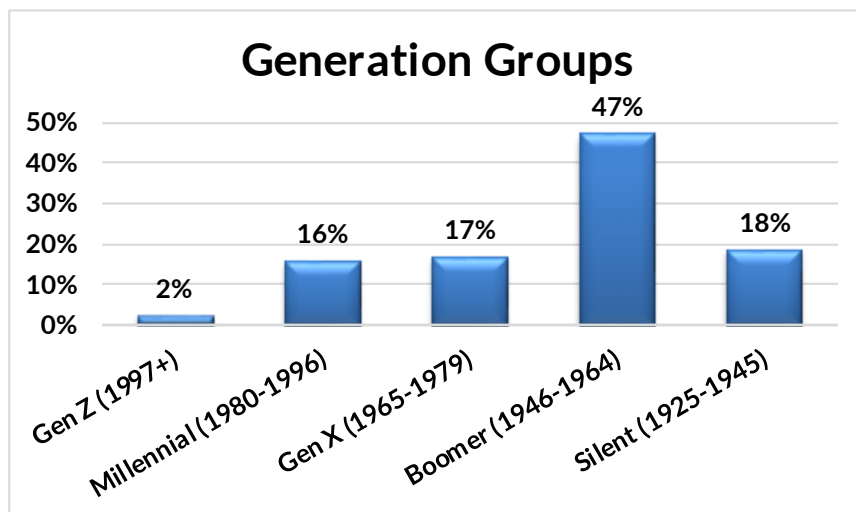
- f. Also, a long-tenured, strong leader can spend more time making decisions for a church rather than developing decision-makers in the church, and consequently the elders/session have not been sufficiently trained to step into the leadership vacuum.
- g. Here are some Verbatim Responses that indicate a pastor-focus and possible leadership vacuum:
 - “Jesus Christ must be the main focus of any church. CCC has lost this because it has become a body of [people] who are [seeking to build] their own kingdom.”
 - “Let’s stop wasting time, recenter the mission of the church...We can’t be ‘Christ Community Church’ if we lose sight of Christ and the community.”
- h. A Jesus-focused church is characterized by fruitfulness, prayer, humility, joy, sacrifice, generosity, mission, and evangelistic effectiveness as well as doctrinal depth. A congregation can tell if they have been pastor-focused by what happens when s/he leaves. What fills the vacuum? At CCC there has been infighting, division, gossip, and other conflicts. Now is the time to humble yourselves and return to feet of Jesus.

2. CCC is *aging out* as a congregation and you have become institutionalized.³

- a. There is a very serious pattern at CCC that VitalChurch Ministry calls “Aging Out.”
 - 1) The average age of your survey respondents is 62 years.
 - 2) The average age of New Attenders is 56.
 - 3) The average age of Session members is 67.
- b. The initial warning sign of aging out is when the adults in a congregation pass an average age of 55. The point of no return (without very serious effort to address the issue) is 60 years of age. An average of 4,000 churches in America close their doors each year, most of which are aging out.

³ Tim Keller addresses this well in his book *Center Church*. An overview can be found here: <https://timothykeller.com/blog/2010/7/27/ministry-movements>.

c. Here is the distribution of generations at your church:



- CCC is attracting mostly Boomers (46%) and Silents (18%).
- 53% of your New Attenders are Boomers (44%) and Silents (9%).
- CCC is not attracting, let alone keeping, younger generations.

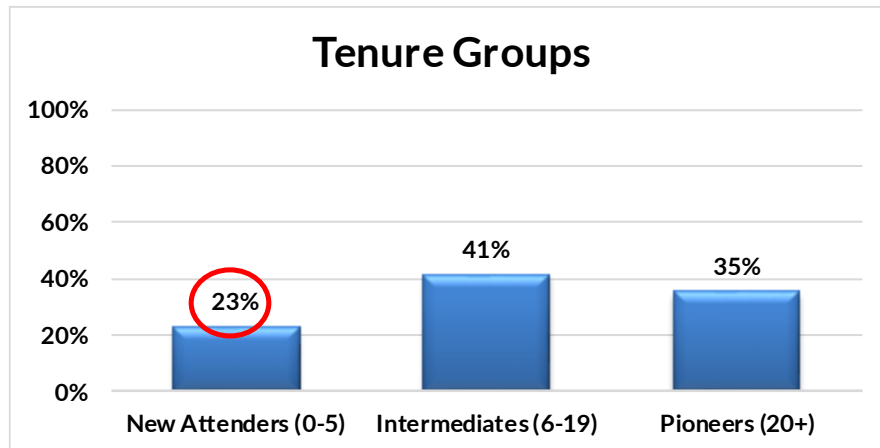
d. CCC has taken on some of the traits of an Institutionalized Church, which occurs when a church moves away from an outward focus (of enthusiastic mission and evangelism) and circles the wagons creating an inward focus (taking care of itself). When a church becomes institutionalized, maintaining the status quo becomes a priority and resistance to change can become normal. If this issue is not addressed, it can become a terminal disease.

e. This institutionalization can be seen in your lack of evangelism (among adults).

	All	New	Inter	Pi's	Zer	Mill	Xer	Bmer	Silent
Number who were not Christians when they came	41	4	10	27	4	15	6	13	3
Still Seeking	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Number currently attending who came with their parents and have since become Christians	9	1	3	5	3	4	2	0	0
Net conversions from the world	31	2	7	22	1	10	4	13	3
Rate of Evangelism	7%	2%	4%	14%					

- 1) While you have a high level of agreement on mission/evangelism, there has been very little evangelism in the last five years.
- 2) The overall rate of evangelism among your survey respondents is 7%. A vital church would have a rate of evangelism of between 15-20%.
- 3) Most evangelism took place more than 20 years ago. In the past 5 years, your rate of evangelism is 2%.

- 4) There is some good news: 38% of your survey respondents are willing to spend 4 or more volunteer hours a week in evangelistic efforts.
- f. Institutionalization can also be seen in the low rate of New Attenders (23%). A vital and growing church would have 40% or more of New Attenders. At 23% CCC has been in a pattern of decline:



- You may be a friendly church, but you have ceased to be a welcoming church.
- People are not being welcomed and sponsored into the church as they once were.
- g. And finally, we can see institutionalization in that it will be difficult for you to navigate change. [The survey question was: **At our church the following is most true.**]

		Congregation	Leaders	Staff
Progressive Total		61%	27%	73%
Radicals	We anticipate and value change	17%	9%	18%
Progressives	We are open to change	44%	18%	55%
Conservatives	We do not navigate change well	28%	64%	18%
Traditionalists	We tend to resist change	10%	9%	9%
Conservative Total		39%	73%	27%

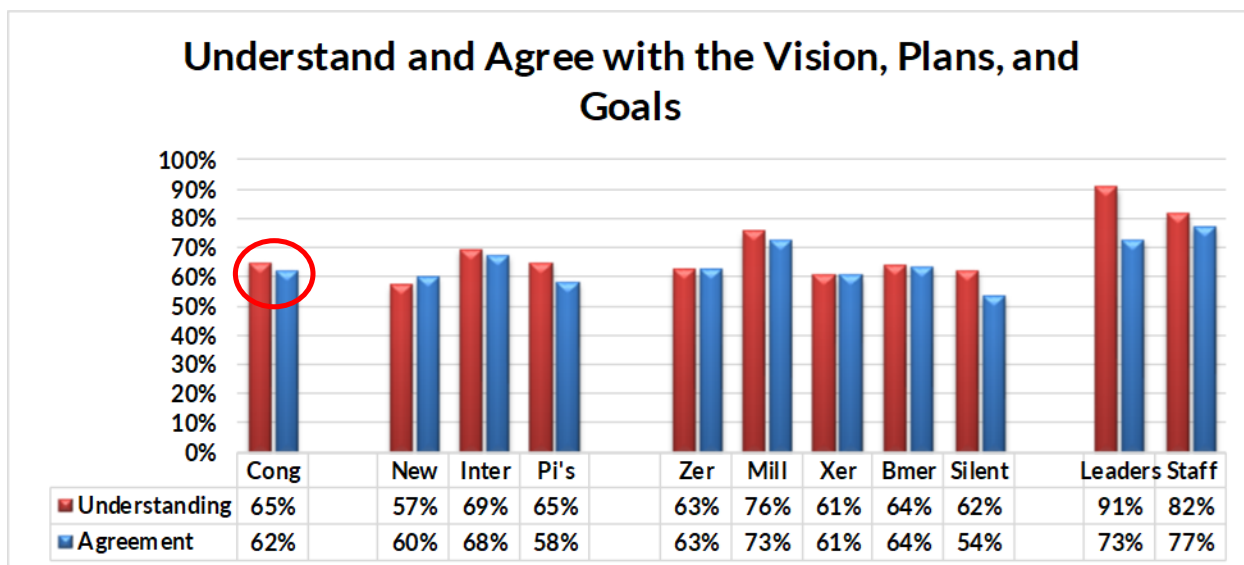
- h. Interrelatedness
 - 1) A factor that often affects how people experience fellowship in the church is interrelatedness. The question used to measure interrelatedness is “Do you have relatives living outside your home who attend this church?”

Relatedness	Zer	Mill	Xer	Bmer	Silent	Total
New Attenders	67%	38%	23%	15%	0%	22%
Intermediates	50%	42%	37%	20%	24%	29%
Pioneers	0%	91%	56%	30%	27%	36%
Totals	50%	48%	37%	23%	23%	30%
						Overall

- 2) Research shows that when interrelatedness in a church (or group within the church) surpasses 20%, the ability to effectively include new people is usually compromised because families (grandparents, adult children, grandkids, etc.) “bunch-up” after a service.
- 3) CCC has an overall rate of interrelatedness of **30%**. Among the 451 people who took the survey, 134 individuals reported having relatives in the church who live outside their homes.

3. There is a need for CCC to re/focus and re/clarify your values, mission, and vision before you call a permanent Lead Pastor.

- a. CCC is weak in Vision, Plans, and Goals. Proverbs 29:18 (NASB) says, *“Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained.”* During this transition season CCC has not been retrained to a vision, which is reminiscent of the verses from Judges cited above regarding each person doing what is right in their own eyes.
- b. The chart below tells us that 65% of your survey respondents understand the vision of CCC, and 63% are in agreement with the vision.



- c. Any score below 70% is cause for concern, although these scores are only somewhat low. Having said that, a vital church is unified around a clear and compelling vision of what the church is trying to accomplish.
- d. Some of the previous data related to institutionalization is also an indication that CCC has been coasting along on the path of least resistance:
 - 1) The lack of evangelism. Most evangelism took place more than 20 years ago. In the past 5 years, the rate of evangelism is only 2%.
 - 2) The low number of New Attenders (23%)
 - 3) The Leaders/Session acknowledging that they either don't navigate change well (68%) or that they even tend to resist change (9%)—and with the average age of the Leadership/Session being 67, it seems that change is difficult and the status quo is preferred.
- e. While the phrase “love, acceptance, and forgiveness”⁴ was heard with regularity, it is time to revisit and refresh CCC's core values, mission, and vision as you prepare for your next season of fruitful ministry.

⁴ Likely from the book *Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness: Being a Christian in a Non-Christian World* by Jerry Cook and Stanley Baldwin, Bethany House 1979.

Recommendations: The MAP

To be refreshed and revitalized will require serious commitment and sacrifice. Stated simply, at CCC you desperately need to take the time to integrate your head knowledge with what every heart longs for—a growing intimacy with God and one another through an increased understanding of the deep implications of the gospel to redeem and shape all parts of your lives. Another way to say this is, when Doctrine (knowledge) and Doxology (worship) are united, we experience God.⁵ It is with this conviction in mind that we make the following eight recommendations to address the issues that are currently preventing CCC from flourishing:

1. Seek to Restore Peace and Repair Relationships

A church-wide refresher course in biblical conflict resolution will be critically important for CCC to get back on track during the remainder of this transition season. Truth and love are meant to work together—truth sanctifies and love sacrifices. Church conflict is ultimately a leadership issue. So, church expectations in the area of conflict resolution are set by church leaders. If church leaders do not model good biblical conflict resolution skills, creating an expectation that issues will be addressed in reasonable time frames and with fairness, then the rest of the congregation is unlikely to rise above the level of resolution set by your church leaders.

Conflict is inevitable and is an instrument God uses to develop qualities in our lives that aren't developed any other way. When faced with conflicts we must ask, "What is God trying to teach me?" In Acts 6:1-7 church conflict was used by God to release a greater number of leaders into the fledgling church and bring to light a grievous sin (in their case, it was racism). Conflict becomes redemptive when it highlights areas of needed growth and brings clarity to God's sanctifying plan for our personal lives and for our church.

- Begin to practice straightforward biblical conflict resolution steps like:
 - Focus your efforts on identifying and owning the log/s in your own eye before you attempt to remove the speck in another's (Matt 7:5).
 - Commit to making things right when you've been offended by someone or offended someone—proactively seek to be reconciled (Matt 5:23-24).
 - Learn how to speak the truth in love to one another (Eph 4:15).
 - Restore your brother or sister with graceful gentleness (Gal 6:2).

⁵ This is what's happening in the doxologies of Paul, Peter, and John in Eph 1:3-14, 1 Pet 1:3-9, and 1 Jn 3. We experience each one of them experiencing God.

- Take personal responsibility for your own growth and development as a follower of Jesus. Church-wide renewal begins with personal renewal, and personal renewal begins with the humble acknowledgement of our need for God’s grace and mercy to do IN us and THROUGH us what we cannot do on our own.
- Cultivate a lifestyle of repentance. Martin Luther said, “The whole life of believers should be repentance.”⁶ While this lifestyle may appear to be paradoxical, it becomes the unlikely route to a deep and lasting joy.
- Read, reflect on, and put into practice:
 - James 4:6-12. Gospel-driven humility will be manifest in us as we acknowledge and turn from our sins.
 - The Beatitudes (Mat 5:3-10). There is an emptying and then a filling. The journey begins with humbly owning our own poverty of spirit, mourning over brokenness and sin, becoming humble learners. As we are emptied, a hunger and thirst for righteous begins to fill our hungry souls—and then mercy, purity, peace, and persecution are added to our lives.
- Seek to understand the deeper issues at work beneath the conflicts you are experiencing at CCC. Family of origin issues⁷ can deeply affect our ability to relate to others in healthy ways, which underscores our need for grace-empowered transformation. When a system (either familial or organizational) is confused, deceptive, or unable to deal with situations in a straightforward manner, every problem is allowed to continue to the point of crisis.”⁸ The conflicts at CCC need to be viewed and addressed with this in mind.

Therefore:

- Invite the whole congregation to read *Making Peace: Growing Redemptive Community* by Jim Van Yperen. This very practical and straightforward book will provide CCC with common language, definitions, and context for understanding and applying healthy and biblical conflict resolution skills from a systemic viewpoint.

⁶ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/repentance-first-last/>

⁷ Family of origin issues may include having grown up in an alcoholic or chemically dependent family system; witnessing domestic violence; having lost a parent through death; having an absent parent; being adopted; being a child of divorced parents; or having had step-family issues; being a survivor of childhood neglect or emotional/physical/sexual abuse; having a parent who was a ragger or a workaholic; growing up in a family system plagued with eating disorders; having had a mentally ill parent or a sex-addicted parent; or having been brought up with a “Christian” legalistic or moralistic orientation that somehow causes spiritual and emotional conflicts in adulthood. Yes, you are a new creature (2 Cor 5:17), yet these are experiences we bring into our new Christian life that need to be embraced and processed biblically (see Mal 3:2-3).

⁸ *The Addictive Organization*, Anne Wilson Schaeff, HarperOne: 1990.

- Additional helpful books include:
 - *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature* by Peter Scazzero.
 - *Crucial Conversations* by Patterson, Grenny, McMilland and Switzler.
 - *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande.
 - *Relationships—A Mess Worth Making* by Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp.
 - **Church leaders should read** *Family Systems and Congregational Life: A Map for Ministry* by R. Robert Creech.

2. Reclaim Spiritual Discernment by Pursuing Emotionally Healthy Discipleship

It is good to be reminded that wisdom is ours for the asking and that discernment is not only a grace-gift but can be finetuned through practice.

- *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” (James 1:5, NIV)*
- *“But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” (Heb 5:14, NASB)*

How does this discernment come? It comes from building holy habits and by regularly practicing, nourishing, and shaping our spiritual senses with the Word of God.

Discernment is what happens naturally when the milk of God's promises is so savored and so satisfying that it gives us the mind of Christ.⁹ Discerning Christians have had their spiritual, intellectual, and emotional faculties trained by experience and practice to discern good from evil. With input from the Presbytery, develop resources to reclaim spiritual discernment and emotionally healthy spirituality by engaging in books, training materials of Emotionally Healthy Discipleship, etc.

3. Engage in a Church-Wide *Focusing the Church Process*¹⁰

Appoint and train a “Re/Focusing Team” made up of some (8-10) godly men and women (preferably under 50 years old) who possess a heart and desire for CCC to be “re/focused” on your missionary calling to Sacramento and beyond. The goal is to begin by creating a “Journey Wall” that looks back at the successes as well as the difficult times of CCC; celebrate your successes, learn from your mistakes, identify and embrace your current reality; and begin seeking the Lord for his intended future, which will include reaffirming or readjusting CCC's core values, mission, and vision. The more you

⁹ Adapted from John Piper's sermon, “By This Time You Ought to Be Teachers.”

¹⁰ VitalChurch Ministry has significant resources and trainers to either coach or lead the *Focusing the Church* process.

accomplish in this transition season the higher caliber of pastor you will attract when it's time to conduct a search for a permanent pastor.

Take the next few months with as many people from CCC who are willing and work through the following three focusing questions:

- Where have we been?
- Where are we going?
- How will we get there?

This will help you to prepare a job profile for a permanent Lead Pastor and you will know exactly what giftings, experience, and skill sets you are looking for.

4. Strengthen the Confidence in Leadership.

Currently only 48% of your survey respondents believe the current Session/Leaders have the ability to lead the church into the future. (Any score under 70% is cause for concern.)

- Work closely with Mark Eshoff and The Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest to train Session members, Staff, and Congregants using EPC's "Leadership Training Guide: A Resource for Pastors, Elders and Church Leaders of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church" which covers history, theology, church governance, and what it means to be emotionally and spiritually healthy.
- Strong and effective servant leadership starts with clearly discerning God's will for this congregation and learning how to recruit and train biblical leaders. Plan a process that includes leadership training for potential Session members. Good hearts and intentions alone are not adequate criteria for serving in these roles. Become the *"sons of Issachar...who understood the times, with knowledge of what [CCC] should do"* (1 Chr. 12:32). To restore this confidence, the minimum your leaders need to do is:
 - Listen well to the heart cries of members and attenders, and take seriously their biblical concerns.
 - Continue to clearly, regularly, and creatively communicate with members both the *what*, and more importantly the *why*, of ministry decisions.
 - The congregation at CCC is asking the leaders to deal with the conflict "between specific people or groups" (40%), "poor communication" (33%), and "gossip" (11%).
 - One of the most important things members need in order to maintain leader confidence is an explanation and accounting of how the monies are be spent.

When trust is strained it can be difficult to regain. The opposite of mistrust is not trust, but care. Continuing to grow the credibility and trust of the Session in their roles of casting a godly vision, teaching sound doctrine, shepherding the flock, administering church discipline, and oversight of budget assumptions are vital.

5. Consider How You Will Re-Join the Mission of God.

Christian community is ultimately about God's glory being displayed IN and THROUGH the church. Community, however, is not the final destination: it is the means by which the church joins Jesus to live on mission (see Jn 13:35 and Matt 28:19). The data and input sessions strongly suggest that CCC is currently (and has been for a while) an inward-focused church and is institutionalized. During this transition season, intensify church-wide efforts to connect with unchurched family, friends, and acquaintances in the marketplace, in clubs, etc. as well as in neighborhoods. Unchurched and de-churched people are longing to connect with authentic and transparent people. Be honest about your faults and failures as a church. Seek to become genuine and vulnerable. Invite people on this journey with you.

A missionary learns about the people and lifestyle preferences of those s/he is trying to reach with the gospel. Moreover, a missionary incarnates the gospel within that culture or lifestyle group. This requires humility and the sacrifice of personal preferences to serve this group in receiving the gospel. In a similar way, new structures and forms are sorely needed at CCC.

Read *Center Church* by Tim Keller and prayerfully implement the following five features of a missional church:

- Contextualize the gospel by showing that the secular culture's deepest desires are met only in Christ.
- Share the gospel in the vernacular of the culture. That is, avoiding we/them language, or tribal terminology, and when meeting in public, assumes that unchurched people are present.
- Train and send people out into public life so that on their jobs and in neighborhoods they live out distinctly kingdom values with convictional civility.
- Live out your faith in a counter-cultural Christian context that shows the culture how radically different society is with regards to money, sex, power, law, justice, etc.
- Seek the peace and prosperity of the city, "*for in its welfare you will have welfare*" (Jer 29:7).

6. Enter a Season of Repentance as a Congregation

The VitalChurch Discernment Team invites you, as a congregation, to take a deep look inside yourselves through entering a season of repentance, prayer, and fasting—seeking God’s face for a fresh infusion of God’s grace. Where there is great humility, there is great grace (James 4:10).

In Nehemiah 1, when he heard about the broken-down walls and the people were in distress and reproach, Nehemiah “*sat down and wept and mourned for days*” (Neh 1:4). And then for the rest of the chapter he repents on behalf of the whole Hebrew people. He even takes responsibility for the nation’s sin, declaring, “*I and my father’s house have sinned*” (Neh 1:6c). Nehemiah then spent the next four months repenting, fasting, praying—and planning—before he approached the king to put his plan into action.

Now is the time to seek God’s vision and purpose for the next season of fruitful ministry at CCC. We even encourage that this time culminate with a time of *Sacred Assembly*¹¹ where you formally repent of and confess the failures and missteps of your church and return afresh to God’s purposes.

- This should go well beyond regularly scheduled prayer meetings and involve prayer in people’s homes, individual and corporate fasting, repentance, and concerts of prayer with extended worship.
- Humble yourselves before Christ. Surrender completely to Christ and receive his grace.
- Change business as usual. Avoiding inevitable conflict, fighting over personal preferences and traditions, and being resistant to change are not what it means to worship Jesus.
- During this season of repentance, prayer, and worship each attendee must willingly own his, or her, part of the current dysfunctions and make things right with brothers and sisters—both inside and outside the church. Start today by committing to biblical reconciliation.

¹¹ Plan a time of *Sacred Assembly* where you confess the failures of the church and return anew to God and his purposes. VitalChurch Ministry has resources to help plan and carry out a Sacred Assembly. (Some Bible translations render it *Solemn Assembly*.) In times of severe struggle and pain a church may have no recourse but to cry out to God in humility and repentance. Those times of corporate repentance and confession are known as a Sacred Assembly. The term and concept of Sacred Assembly is used several times in Scripture. In Leviticus 23, each feast of Israel was to be a Sacred Assembly (23:2); each Sabbath was to be a Sacred Assembly (23:3). (Note also 23:7, 8, 21, 24, and 35.) The concept is further developed by the Old Testament prophet Joel and from the book of Nehemiah. Joel describes a situation where the nation finds itself at odds with God because of their sin. Nehemiah 9:3-38 is an example of a Sacred Assembly. Though the term is not used, the concepts are clearly articulated. Revelation 2-3 could be described as a New Testament call for a Sacred Assembly.

VitalChurch adamantly asserts that every church (and every person) has a collection of sins and sinful patterns that require active and ongoing repentance. We do not believe that you should find a call to repent demoralizing; we would like you to find it to be liberating and transforming—as did Paul as he leads us from the end of Romans 7 into Romans 8 (see Rom. 7:14-8:1).

7. Staff a Transitional Pastor

Remember, Moses had forty years of wilderness training before the Lord sent him back to lead Israel through another forty years in the wilderness.

8. Address the Needs and Listen to the Pioneer Boomers and Silents Who Are Feeling Disenfranchised.

The data strongly suggests that the Session made staff-cutting decisions and have done a number of things without addressing issues with those who were once the backbone of CCC. While the moves may have been necessary, there is the need to clearly and honestly communicate with those who have been affected. The reasons for the low approval rating of the Session are addressed above.

As noted above, poor communication is an ongoing issue at CCC. Again, 35% of your survey respondents identified poor communication as a leading source of conflict. Vital churches have built communication systems that regularly communicate the “what’s?” and the “why’s?” of ministry decisions, usually in regularly scheduled “town hall gatherings.”

Conclusion

As you navigate the remainder of this transition season, it will be important to remember that the primary objective is NOT to secure a permanent Lead Pastor, but to view this as a spiritual journey. While this journey has, and may again, felt like a wilderness experience, view it as an opportunity to listen to God and one another as you move through the various stages. Hopefully this diagnostic assessment can provide you with a turning point, but know that testing, trusting, and training in waiting are still to come:

1. Pre-Awareness
2. Awareness
3. A Turning Point
4. A Time of Testing
5. Learning to Trust
6. Training in the Waiting

The most direct pathway to renewal is a wholehearted reconnection and recommitment to the GOSPEL.

The word *gospel* means *good news* and is not simply the entry point into the Christian life, but it is also the foundation and power that shapes all we do as followers of Jesus Christ—both in our daily lives and in our experience as a community of Christ-followers. The Good News of Jesus Christ is not only the *fire* that ignites the Christian life, but also the *fuel* that keeps Christians going and growing each day.

The gospel is the gloriously great announcement of what God has done through the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ to satisfy (or settle) the opposition against sin which God's holy nature requires, and to secure unrestricted access to God that includes the free gift of eternal life, a free and perfect righteousness for all who trust in Christ alone for salvation, the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit, and a coming new creation free from decay, disasters, disease, evil, sin, and death.

Therefore, the gospel is central because it is not what God *requires*—it is what God *provides*. The gospel is not an *imperative*, demanding things we must *do*. The gospel is an *indicative*, declaring what God has *done*. The gospel is not about *human activity*—it is about *divine achievement*.

As a congregation, in the days ahead, focus on making the gospel beautiful. All church-wide renewal begins with individual renewal; and all individual renewal begins with each of us owning our own issues. We will close this Executive Summary with the following verse and then briefly provide you with some practical next steps.

“Therefore, repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19)

Next Steps:

1. Acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Senior Pastor and Chief Shepherd of CCC and ask him to lead, guide, protect, and unleash his presence afresh on you, on Carmichael, Sacramento, and the surrounding region.
2. Continue to learn how to disagree agreeably. Humble, prayerful, civil, and convictional dialogue is the way forward.
3. Celebrate the strengths that need to be reinforced and built upon.
4. Repent of your lack of welcoming and enfolding new people into the life of the church, and your lack of evangelism.
5. Be openhanded with your personal preferences as you consider what God has for the future of CCC.
6. Dialogue with one another regarding this report.
7. Choose to accept the recommendations and begin to prioritize and implement the recommendations.
8. Pray, pray, pray, and pray some more.
9. The wisest decisions concerning your future will include respect for and preservation of the strength that is rooted in the authority of the Scriptures as well as your newfound faith family, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church.