

May 6, 2008

Dear Members and Friends of MPC,

As you may know, in March 2007 Session appointed a Reconciliation Committee to look for ways to address the unresolved feelings and issues that arose within our church family over the previous year as a result of staffing changes and the building renovation. We have enclosed for you a copy of our April report to Session that describes the team's work and summarizes recommendations from a consultant, Kristen Gardner, hired this year to help us move forward. A letter from Kristen to the church family is included. Making this information available to you is the first step in implementing her recommendations, which invite the participation of everyone concerned with the congregation's healing and moving forward in a healthy way. As indicated in the recommendations, one next step will be a poll of the congregation within a couple of months regarding what forum, if any, you might want to attend (large or small, individual, mediated, etc.), asking what you would hope to accomplish in such meetings.

We have also included the prayer "Streams of Voices...What was Heard," which captures what the committee heard last year from many people in the congregation. We sincerely thank all of you who have shared your distress, concerns, and suggestions with us. Without your help, we could not have moved ahead. Our team feels blessed to be a part of this caring and diverse church family. We see the turmoil we have experienced as an important phase in the process of evolving toward authentic community. We are confident that all of us in the church family working together can continue to move toward a stronger, more loving and creative community.

Feel free to contact any member of the committee with feedback or comments.

Your Reconciliation Committee,

Dot Cudaback
Eloise Gilland
Rebecca Herrero
Tamara Lett
David Longerbeam
Leonard Nielson
Linda Spencer
Karen Stokes

Reconciliation Committee Report

Montclair Presbyterian Church

April 19, 2008

Session Meeting

The intent of this report is to review what the Reconciliation Committee has done and to summarize the recommendations of the group process consultant, Kristen Gardner, hired by the committee (as authorized by Session at its January 2008 meeting). A letter from Kristen to the congregation is attached to this report.

Review

The Reconciliation Committee was created by Session at its annual kick-off meeting on March 6, 2007. Session recognized the importance of addressing the unresolved feelings and issues that arose over the previous year as a result of the staffing changes and the building renovation. The committee originally consisted of Dot Cudaback, Eloise Gilland, Tamara Lett, David Longerbeam, Leonard Nielson, Linda Spencer, and Karen Stokes. In December, Rebecca Herrero joined the group.

- The committee led a workshop at the April 21, 2007, Session retreat with committee chairs. The goals were (1) to have focused dialogues that would allow people to talk about their feelings and experiences, and (2) to solicit written and oral comments and suggestions from participants, including input on who else might want to be heard but may not have attended the retreat. Confidentiality was offered to those who spoke and honored by the committee.
- After the retreat, the committee reviewed the written comments and then drew up a list of every person who had been suggested as someone who might want to talk further as well as everyone whom the members of the committee itself could recommend. Responses to two contact announcements brought forward additional people.
- The committee set the goal of offering “active listening” to each person on this list. Mostly in pairs, the group met with every person who wanted to meet – more than 40 -- and tried to listen to and understand what each person was feeling.
- Several things became clearer. First, while there were some common themes and common understandings of what “went wrong” or “what had happened,” there was also a variety of interpretations of these issues, both in terms of how they may or may not have been better handled and how the ensuing conflicts may or may not have been avoided. There were also a variety of feelings within individuals that were still unresolved. There were also a variety of ideas about how to further resolve those feelings. For some people, the small group listening work done at the retreat was enough catharsis to allow them to move forward. Some people indicated that they were not interested in continuing to talk further about the issues raised because they had “begun to put it behind them.” Others indicated that they wanted more individual conversations, both generally and also

with particular individuals with whom they felt that they experienced particular misunderstanding or discord. Some people indicated that they would be interested in one or more larger group meetings to continue to talk through issues.

- After everyone who wanted to talk had been engaged, the committee then met over several more sessions to sort out themes and issues that were raised and to begin to consider ideas about how to proceed with the work of reconciliation.
- The committee captured what it had heard in the prayer “Streams of Voices... What Was Heard” (attached). At the September 2007 Session meeting, the committee reported that, given the many streams of voices, it seemed wise to offer different options for those seeking to reconcile, including encouraging sign-ups for the Engage classes on nonviolent communication, holding a special evening church service for reflection, prayer, and worship; providing trained facilitators for individuals that wish to reconcile with each other; offering facilitated groups; and holding a facilitated retreat or workshop.
- No single clear direction presented itself as the next best step that the committee could propose. Inspired by Scott Peck’s book *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, Eloise had brought in a summary of his ideas, and the group began to imagine that MPC may be dealing with both the present issues of disagreement but also the larger and perhaps less-examined issues of how communities share intimacy and decision-making and how those community dynamics can change over time.
- Eloise contacted Kristen Gardner, a professional facilitator and organizational consultant who has more than 15 years of experience working with participatory, consensus-based groups. After meeting with Kristen, the committee recommended to Session to hire her, to process the information already received, to pull it together into a form that would help us set priorities for possible paths forward, and to define an ending for the present committee’s work.
- Session approved the contract for the work, and Kristen Gardner was engaged with a contract not to exceed \$1500 (20 hours at \$75 per hour), on the assumption that Rebecca's group facilitation skills would help in implementing Kristen's recommendations. Kristen interviewed five committee members and received written comments from the other three. In announcements in one Bulletin and one Contact, members and friends of the congregation were also invited to submit thoughts in writing. About ten people took advantage of the opportunity.

Recommendations

Kristen’s recommendations fell into two main categories: reconciliation and structure. Under the structure category came subcategories of decision-making, personnel, committees, administration, and conflict management. The committee’s choice was to work on reconciliation first.

Suggestions regarding the “felt need” for closure of the reconciliation process:

- Poll the congregation regarding what forum, if any, they might want to attend (large or small, individual, mediated, etc), asking them what they would hope to accomplish in such meetings. They would require a facilitator/mediator with appropriate training.
- Have church leaders who are willing make specific offers to meet with individuals who have unresolved issues.
- Have leadership acknowledge in a public way that a) feelings have been stirred up, b) mistakes have been made, c) insights have been gained, d) new processes are being put into place to avoid those mistakes, e) recognize and appreciate those who have spoken up and the role that plays in improving us individually and as a congregation.
- Provide opportunities for positive group experiences in ongoing MPC endeavors such as an inclusive external giving campaign, improved committee processes, and small group ministry.
- Clarify availability of staff to congregation.

Regarding what can be done differently in the future:

- Develop a clear decision making philosophy and process, including the values the decision making is informed by and how decisions are made (by whom, in what manner, etc.) Revisit and revise as necessary the Session “How To” book.
- Clarify committee structures and roles. Much of this has already begun with the Mission Study implementation. At each committee, clarify the “how” of the decision making process.
- Standardize and improve personnel processes. Clarify what decisions are made by personnel on behalf of Session and what decisions are made by Session through the recommendation of Personnel.
- Session provide coaching of administrative staff and clergy for increased effectiveness; Session provide regular evaluations for addressing any concerns. Session and staff work together to make sure concerns that are arising within the congregation or the leadership are addressed.

Regarding conflict management:

- Consider the role of Engage in modeling positive interactional strategies.
- Develop through Session and through staff: leadership and conflict management skills trainings for individuals and within the community.
- Develop a conflict management protocol or update any that is in place.

Regarding the desire to complete the present work of the Reconciliation Committee:

- Recommending how to proceed may involve forming a new reconciliation group.
- Have closure for the present group.

Kristen Gardner
1112 Harrison Street
Berkeley, CA 94706

April 5, 2008

To: Montclair Presbyterian Church

Thank you to everyone who has provided their input, energy and caring into the reconciliation process and church community in general. It is clear that MPC has a wonderfully active and involved membership. A high level of care for the congregation and for the world at large permeates all of the input I have experienced.

I have been asked to gather some basic information and make recommendations for how your community can move toward reconciliation. I am sorry that I was not able to speak to everyone who would have liked to speak with me, but the scope of my contract only included time for 5 interviews. I tried to speak with people who had participated in many "listenings" and therefore could give me as broad of a picture as possible. Thank you to those who submitted their thoughts in writing. I have used the information you have provided to suggest ways for MPC to move forward in a transparent, honest manner that will build trust and respect.

Due to the nature of the organization and the conflict, it is not likely that a particular event (or even a few meetings) will resolve the conflict. Rather, I think, there are a few steps that can be taken soon to set the community on a path that will lead toward healing over time. A key issue here seems to be rebuilding trust, and that can only happen over time, through communication and experience.

There seem to be two main aspects to address:

- Painful feelings between people that have arisen during this difficult period. These can be addressed one-to-one or in groups, preferably with a skilled third party to help facilitate or mediate the conversation.
- Improving the skills and processes within MPC that can reduce the chances that such conflicts will arise again and increase the chances they will be handled more effectively if they do arise.

The Reconciliation Committee and Session will have to decide the best process for addressing these issues. I have discussed a variety of possibilities with them. I wish you all the best as you lovingly steward your community through its transformations.

Kristen Gardner
Organization Development Consultant

Streams of Voices.....What was Heard

I felt...

Grief over the loss of a ministry
Wounded by our leadership
Confused that I was not represented
Hurt that I was not heard

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Excited about the future
Impressed with the work of our leaders
Trusting of our leadership
Happy with the process

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Fearful of speaking out
Intimidated by the conflict
Shocked by the tenor of the debate
Angry that our leadership was not respected

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Misunderstood
Forsaken
Unloved and untended
Accused of lying

God hear my prayer

I was...

Unaware of what was going on
Avoiding the conflict
Looking to the leadership to work it out
Seeking to move on

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Excluded from decision making
Upset by big decisions made by a few
Troubled by lack of process
Certain that the truth was not being told

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Sad to lose a friendship
Wishing it would take different path
Uncertain how to reach out
Depressed about what was happening

God hear my prayer

I was...

Doing the best job possible
Not doing enough to support
Trying to be helpful
Representing others

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Afraid to come to church
Able to work through it
Impatient with others
Tired of hearing about it

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Discouraged by lack of openness
Dismayed by blaming and unloving attitudes
Disturbed by accusations and lack of trust
Worried about the church losing members

God hear my prayer

I felt...

Accepting that it was time for change
Confident about the strength of the community
Hopeful that healing and forgiveness will occur
Encouraged by signs of growth from the struggle

God hear my prayer

God hear our prayers in the midst of our feelings...

Grieving	Angry	Troubled	Seeking
Wounded	Misunderstood	Certain	Impatient
Confused	Forsaken	Sad	Tired
Hurt	Accused	Wishing	Discouraged
Excited	Unloved	Uncertain	Dismayed
Impressed	Unaware	Depressed	Disturbed
Trusting	Avoiding	Doing	Worried
Happy	Afraid	Not doing	Accepting
Fearful	Looking	Trying	Confident
Intimidated	Excluded	Representing	Hopeful
Shocked	Upset	Able	Encouraged

...for we need guidance for healing, wholeness, and reconciliation.