

The following themes and short paragraphs come from condensing and compiling the notes taken by Kyle Means, Council President, Jennifer Puls, Council Vice-President, and Senior Pastor for the Transition, Sylvia Karlsson. We had five listening sessions with 87 different individuals in attendance, plus an exclusive youth group (high school) listening session with an additional 20 youth.

Other things were also mentioned in the sessions, but these main themes were brought up spontaneously by several people in every session. Thus, these themes have made it into this report. However, the themes are not in any priority order.

Church Community Feel, Spirituality and Perception:

In other words, "How we feel about the church"

Want to be fed spiritually and feel part of a community.

Want a leadership focus that gives us a direction. Not all from the new pastor, but from our council and others too. We are big, but we cannot do everything, nor should we think we could. Direction. Focus. Christ.

Desire inclusiveness, not a separation feeling. Feel like we are functioning too much as three congregations. Yet we know people support each other, and try to be welcoming.

Not doing a great job of being welcoming. What happens to the visitor cards or the attendance sheets? Don't see any outcome, at least its not visible. Too many stories of someone who came and no one said hello, even at coffee hour, let alone in worship.

Proud of our church's position in the community, but want us to be known as the church that helps others. A place of generosity.

How can more of us know what some of us are doing in the outreach programs? Is it just a communications problem?

We are thankful for the great ministry we have had through First Lutheran, but we need to seek something different for the future. Seeking something different means something that reaches a new generation to join in. This 'something' is

probably not just a style of worship, but a way for the whole family to be involved and grow in faith.

This is a “make or break” time for us to look to the future, even as we celebrate the past and build on what we have.

Financially we are in a strong position, and we are grateful for that. But we have to balance the human relationship side with the business side. And keep Christ at the center.

Church Administration, Structure and Process:

Our organization as pastors and staff should be looked at. The senior pastor should be the leader, with clear understanding and oversight of what others are doing.

Right now the pastors’ duties and how three pastors share the load or divide the load is not clear.

Communication, clarity, accountability, and compassion are all needed throughout the church, with staff, congregation, council, ministry teams, and all of us. Want Christ to always be at the center.

We should even look at the structure of our teams and committees. For things that don’t get done, it can’t all fall on the senior pastor or the staff, but we don’t know how it could work. At least we don’t know it now.

Want council meetings and decisions to be more out in the open, more transparent.

An example of an area that is not working, structurally, is visitation ministry.

Who helps the pastors get feedback or gives them the chance to state their frustrations? Perhaps that would be a help for pastors to improve and stay energetic.

Worship Style and Music:

Worship services have good music, yet we could develop more ‘spirit.’ Hard to define what that is, but it has to do with a friendlier and participative atmosphere.

Want services to be both contemporary and traditional, yet want both to have “liturgical” elements in them.

Perhaps there could be more explanation on what the elements of worship in the 'Lutheran' style mean, so everyone understands better. That means those who didn't grow up Lutheran as well as those who did. For example, both 'styles' of The Lord's Prayer, and what they mean, not in a superficial sense. There are other examples as well.

We have wonderful music and musicians; much appreciated. Want all people to feel included who want to take part in the music.

Could the services be more "hybrid?" Like a blended service to some extent, with still a clear sense of traditional or contemporary. Realize not everyone wants the same thing. It's an art.

We could have both services share time with children's choirs or adult choirs and so on. Seems like that could be done and wouldn't change the 'style.'

Don't like that we are "three" congregations; how can we find ways to be more united? Fellowship times help, yes, but perhaps we could find ways to unite worship too.

Want to be spiritually fed at worship with some depth. We don't come to be entertained, but it doesn't have to be dull or a 'dirge.' Don't want just to sing songs as the experience, but include the sermon, the prayers, sacraments and so on.

Youth and Education:

The programs here are unclear to many congregation members who want to "see" the outcome of what's going on in this ministry. In other words, we hear there are teenagers coming to the church, yet we don't see them in worship or even around the building.

Glad there is a finished area for youth so they have their sense of ownership in a place. Just want to see them some more with other generations.

Maybe we see young people a couple times a year when there is a special worship service or confirmation. But that's a long time in-between.

Probably we need more clarity for the various ages, such as Sunday School and FROG kids, because that's different from middle school and high school. Does that mean more paid staff, or define better what volunteers are doing.

So grateful for those who work in this area; know young people who have been touched and benefited from the effort. Know young people whose faith has grown.

Yet – know other young people who have left First and gone to other congregations, even if their parents are still attending at First. Leaves a question on what has happened.

Senior Pastor:

Desire a new called pastor to be a “people person.” Someone who knows my name, and remembers something about me. Realize we are a big church, yet want a renewed sense that every one of us is part of it.

Want a “good shepherd” with hands-on knowledge, even if he/she doesn’t do every thing. Realize one pastor cannot do it all nor should we want that scenario. The pastor is not coming to “save” us or solve our problems.

Build up the staff with support and encouragement. Clarity helps too.

Want someone who shows that Christ is central in his/her life. So that clarity of Christ being at the center is there when “business-like” decisions have to be made.

Know there is not a “perfect” pastor, but hope to find someone who is a good leader and is personable.

Visitations and Hospital Visits:

Feel like this ministry has not been covered very well. At least not ongoing.

We are a big church, yet individuals need to be called on. How can this get organized?

We can see that funerals and hospital visits are taken care of. But what happens in follow-up? Know of people who were not called again, or felt like no one remembered his/her loss.

Church Programs, Involvement and Adult Education:

Burned out on volunteering. Didn’t know what I was supposed to do, how much time it took, or what was to be the outcome.

It’s obvious only a few help out. Cannot expect many to sign up on a sheet; really need a personal call.

We are ripe for new people getting involved. New people just joining the church, yes, but also other people who have been on the periphery, but have a commitment to stay at First.

Loss of members causes grief. Wish we knew what happened or why, but realize for some its been quite awhile. Don't want to open this up so people are hurt, or maybe too much time has passed and it's not appropriate to ask now.

Small groups would make a big difference, because we would know each other in these groups and have friends at church. Could we be more intentional about doing this?

Want more adult education – what times will work? Who will come? When we have something interesting, we get a good turnout. Can this be shared between lay leaders and pastors?

We know there is a lot that happens out in the community with First Lutheran people involved. But we don't make a good connection and lift it up. Maybe we should do more 'advertising' or marketing to let others in the community know we are here and not going away.

Want to have even more ways to get all the membership to be aware of the many outreach areas we do. Communication is a two-way street, but we have to try in different media to get the word out. Still it seems nothing takes the place of a personal call when we need help.

High School Youth Listening Session Feedback:

Appreciate the opportunity to participate on the praise teams. Would be interested in an all-youth praise team.

Encourage more involvement opportunities for youth within the church. Perhaps a youth-led service, youth as ushers, etc. Also, have a youth liaison who can participate in some council meetings and the Call Process, in order to keep the other youth updated on happenings.

Want to have more activities outside of the church – both social activities and community service projects. They'd like to be seen as a more active youth group with more structured events. Then as a way to communicate and share more about what they're doing with the congregation, perhaps a youth group newsletter could help.

Having more biblical explanation is desired. Youth want to learn more about how certain messages can relate to their lives. Look at deeper meanings.

Youth enjoy relaxed atmosphere, open conversation and discussion on Wednesday nights, but at times would like more organization, focus and structure. Having a theme/topic to focus on and a clear message that they can relate to could be beneficial. Sometimes, they run short on time with youth leaders and feel rushed.

Maybe have guest speakers occasionally to share their own faith story, or small groups led by college students.

Make better use of the space down stairs. Finish the open area and make it more inviting. They'd like to get to a point when they can host coffee hour with the congregation, but want the space to feel more finished.

Youth would like to see a new Senior Pastor who is passionate, gives inspiring sermons that youth can relate to, more of a contemporary feel, utilize technology like pictures and video in sermons, up-beat, easy to talk to, approachable.