



# Summary of Congregational Gatherings

October 2011-May 2012

Marge Nicholson

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# October 2011

## Considering 3 questions:

- What is most important to me about MPC?
- What do I worry most about when I think of MPC?
- If I could change one thing about MPC, what would it be?

# November 2011

## History and Past Identity

- What are up to three highlights or experiences that resulted in your feeling closer to the MPC Community?
- What are up to three things that resulted in your experience of distress here at MPC?



# January 2012

## Identity: Who Are We?

- How would you describe MPC to someone who doesn't know us?
- What are the characteristics that are core to our identity?
- Who are today as a community of faith?

# February 2012

## What Is Our Purpose?

A summary



# March 2012

## Who Is Our Neighbor

A closer look at our immediate  
neighborhood of Montclair

# May 2012

## Discernment Exercise

- What is God calling us to do?
- Who is God calling us to be?

# Thank you

- We appreciate the journey you have taken with us.
- The Team will share some of the learnings and questions for further consideration culled from previous congregational gatherings, our survey, and research from our task subgroups.



**SUMMARY OF CONGREGATIONAL GATHERINGS**  
**Version.5/31/12**  
**For Presentation at the June 3, 2012 Gathering**

Our congregational gathering today is our seventh one in eight months. A few observations:

- No previous Mission Study process has included this much sustained congregational input
- We are not surprised – but ARE impressed by - your willingness to be honest with each other - and with us. To engage in a variety of new formats – to be game to “play,” risk, experiment. You were up for World Café - twice. Discernment with periods of silence. Structures that asked for levels of listening that we don’t often give each other.
- The gatherings have provided an opportunity to talk about things that matter with people we didn’t know – or didn’t know well. We have made connections and deepened relationships.

I’m going to give you a brief review of our past gatherings – and some key take-aways.

10/2/11 – CONGREGATIONAL GATHERING #1 - Consideration of three questions:

- What is most important to me about MPC?
  - Most frequent answers: the community itself, MPC values; the preaching, the music, the social justice programs. One person said, “MPC is a constant while the rest of life changes.” Which is in a sense true, of course, but is ironic because, MPC does not STAY the same.)
- What do I worry most about when I think about MPC?
  - Aging of the congregation, declining membership, sustainability.. We hear this concern, but will examine it for a reality check later in this program.
- If I could change one thing about MPC, what would it be?
  - More younger families, more members, more cross-generational activities, more focused social action. You will be hearing more about these subjects in this gathering today as well

11/13/11 – CONGREGATIONAL GATHERING #2 - History/Past Identity

- What are up to three highlights or experiences that resulted in your feeling closer to the MPC community?:
  - Adult Ed classes, celebration, sermons, children’s programs, music, friends, support, leadership opportunities, social justice activities. Interestingly, the capital campaign. We are generous people despite hard economic times. You will hear more about giving this morning

- What are up to three things that resulted in your experience of distress here at MPC?:
  - Conflict/controversy in 2006 over sanctuary earthquake retrofit & renovation. Sense of loss about staff changes, particularly the loss of Sally Juarez to the community. Some members of the community responded to these matters in unhelpful ways. It's worth looking at what we have learned from the experiences of 2006.
  - Also distressing: members we love leaving us, moving, dying. And some see elitism, cliques, and some difficulty plugging in and belonging.;

1/22/12 – CONGREGATIONAL GATHERING #3 - Introduction to World Café: Exploring questions of identity through the framework question “Who Are We?”

- How would you describe MPC to someone who doesn't know us?
  - We experience the holy through relationships. Maybe BECAUSE “we experience the holy through our relationships with one another,” that's why staff and membership changes are especially hard for us.
  - We value the here and now rather than the hereafter. We are intellectual, creative, progressive. We feed on challenging ideas. We are mostly Christian. . We feel that the essence of faith is doubt. We are a community of caring individuals. We are an aging congregation.
- What are the characteristics that are core to our identity?
  - Inclusive, though imperfectly. Loving relationships. Traditionally untraditional. Live the gospel through social action. Experience God through the arts – the spoken word, music, visual arts, movement. Seekers. Spiritual core. Intergenerational. Educating our youth.
- Who are we today as a community of faith?
  - Seekers. Always growing and learning. Willing to challenge church hierarchy. Strong calling to make things better. More attuned to the experience of the spiritual than 20 years ago.

2/26/12 – CONGREGATIONAL GATHERING #4 - World Café in more depth: Exploring the framework question of “What is our purpose?”

To explore and challenge what it means to be a Christian today. To spread the good word. To create a better world. To be a safe place to raise doubt and to grow spiritually. To celebrate and worship. To hold up compassion, hope, and openness.

3/17/12 – CONGREGATIONAL GATHERING #5 - Consideration of the framework question, “Who is our neighbor?” Looking at needs in our immediate community was new. The idea of partnering with the Montclair business community and schools is also new.

In looking at the needs of our Montclair neighbors, we learned from two local elementary principals about the needs of their schools. While these schools are doing very well in educating their students, many years of budget cuts and lack of funding in special needs areas have led to many areas where MPC may be of help – readers and tutors, help with underfunded breakfast programs, family food baskets, speech therapy, backpacks, coats, a washer and dryer, and on and on.. There was a palpable excitement at this meeting to move into action. This excitement should not be lost.

Additionally, we need to continue to find ways to support the young families within our church. Our local seniors may lack good public transportation and older adult services here in Montclair – and may have overlooked needs for assistance and pastoral care.

New ways of looking at “Who is our neighbor?”

5/6/12 - CONGREGATIONAL GATHERING # 6 - Discernment exercise on the framework questions, “What is God calling us to do? Who is God calling us to be?”

Our experience of community is the most valuable thing we have to offer and we need to go out into the world and offer it. Two themes emerged to the discernment exercise: (1) Importance of the experience of community for every person who attended. (2) We have yet to find ways to share our experience of community with all those who are not here yet. We expressed excitement. Some anxiety. We want to trust the process. God is calling us to be radically open to the future. To be a community of hope and compassion.