

**A WAY FORWARD FOR ST. PAUL'S:
THE COLLECTIVE WISDOM OF SEVENTY-FIVE
Attachment 1: Detailed items from breakout groups
and general session
Saturday, May 19, 2018**

Note: Several of the exercises produced measures of strength of agreement among participants and their breakout groups. The higher the number in parentheses beside an entry, the stronger the sense of agreement. Entries with no associated number stand on their own.

Question 1: What do we believe?

- 1. What do we believe about God's relationship with us?

- God is Love (6) Also...
 - God loves us all/everyone/all people (5)
 - God loves us (2)
 - God is loving (2)
 - God loves us unconditionally and expects us to do the same with all people (2)
 - God loves us unconditionally
 - God wants us each to love each other and ourselves
 - All people are equal in God's love
 - God loves us, and we are here on Earth to have a choice to love God
 - God loves everyone as they are
 - God is love. Christ died for our sins. He is God's son
- Creator
 - Heavenly Father and Creator (2)
 - All people are children of God
 - God is still creating and at work in our world
- Protector/refuge
 - God is always there

- God is all powerful, all knowing, ever present, and all we have
- We are all equal in His eyes
- God is creator and protector
- God looks out for us
- Forgiving
 - God is forgiving (3)
 - God forgives people
- Desiring intimate connection
 - God loves us each as His children and desires to be in relationship with us
 - God is intimately involved in our lives
 - God desires intimacy with all people
- Savior
 - There is one God in three persons. Jesus is our savior.
 - Jesus was sent to prioritize love of all people over judgement and condemnation (e.g. eating with tax collectors, etc.)
 - God saves us
 - God loves us and sent His son to prove that love
- Individual comments on this topic:
 - God is trinity
 - Jesus is the only son of God
 - St. Paul's people worship God regularly
 - Some people believe God is male. Some people believe God has no gender.
 - God is a male figure
 - The Bible and scripture defines God's relationship with us
 - God is the ultimate authority

- 2. What do we believe about the Bible?

- Inspired by God

- Word of God (3)
- The Bible is inspired by God
- The Bible is the inspired word of God
- The Bible inspired by God, written by people
- The Bible is the living word of God, with lessons applicable in our lives today
- The Bible is an inspired human document
- The Bible is the Word- God's Word we live by
- The Bible is the word of God...tells God's story for us, for our instruction
- The Bible should not be taken literally
- God still speaks through the Bible
- Bible defines basic tenets of Christian faith
- The Bible is a guideline for our lives. We must understand the context in which it was written as we apply it to ourselves today.
- Parts are not literal and influenced by the time it was written
- It can be interpreted differently
- The way we understand it does change
- The Bible is a collection written by man
- The Bible should be recognized in the context of the time it was written and some of its context is not very Christian in its tenor
- Definitive word of God
- Basis for living- requires interpretation and translation to current world
- The Bible guides us and helps us know God's will for us and helps us know our savior
- The Bible should not be interpreted literally. Its truths evolve over time.
- Some people believe the Bible was written by human beings and inspired by God, but also reflecting the society of the time

- Tool of faith
 - The Bible is our guide (2)
 - Bible is the foundation our faith
 - The Bible is truth
 - We should study the Bible
 - Jesus' life represents our ideal (example) way of relating to others
 - Scripture is important
 - The Bible has important messages about God
 - Study Bible
 - The NRSV is easier to read
 - People at St. Paul's limit their knowledge and study of the Bible
 - It teaches not to judge
 - The Bible provides lessons about how to live as Christians
 - Abide by Bible
 - It's a guiding book - may be interpreted in many different ways
 - Bible as a general guide for how to live our lives
 - There are different interpretations of what the Bible tells us to do-how to live our lives
 - The New Testament has many messages of love, acceptance, compassion, and the importance of this over all else
 - The Bible is the word of God and helps us learn more about Him and the things He has done.
- Literal
 - The Bible should be interpreted literally
 - The Bible is literally correct
 - The Bible should be interpreted literally and followed without question
 - The meaning never changes
 - Belief in inerrancy of the Bible

- The belief that everything in the Bible should be taken in word for word and nothing should be changed, even with time
- Some people believe the Bible is God's word and infallible
- 3. What do we believe about the Wesleyan tradition of faith?
 - Wesleyan quadrilateral: scripture, reason, tradition, experience
 - Methodology
 - Service
 - Prayer
 - Small groups
 - Outreach
 - Discipline
 - Music
 - Witness
 - Personal relationship with God
 - Grace
- 4. What do we believe about worship?
 - Worship is needed to reaffirm our faith (modern or traditional??)
 - Worship should have joy (music), the word (Bible), and prayer
 - Love the ritual of worship
 - Important to some, necessary to some
 - Worship needs a liturgy to be meaningful
 - Music is very important/worship with hymnal
 - St. Paul's people like the order and content of worship
 - Worship service should be inspiring and uplifting
 - The sermon should be thought-provoking
 - Attend worship

- Worship builds community
 - St. Paul's are comfortable with Methodist tradition, not overly comfortable with big changes in worship style (3)
 - Some people like worship to be familiar and unchanging; some people like changes in the style and structure of worship (2)
 - A time to be with our friends and community (2)
 - Corporate worship is as important as individual worship
 - worship is an important way to be in fellowship with people
 - Fellowship of prayer
 - All are welcome at the communion table
 - Worship should provide opportunity for all interested to feel welcomed and closer to God
 - Worship is not a club experience
 - An opportunity to be together to praise and to petition God
- Worship informs our understanding/educates
 - Worship guides our expression of faith and provides a time to learn about God
 - Be open to new types of worship
 - Worship is led by trained ministers
- Worship brings us into a loving relationship with God and each other
 - We were made to worship God. Worship is an encounter with God
 - God delights in our worship
 - Relating to God
 - worship is the way we connect to God
 - Worship is a way of showing love
 - Worship should glorify God and build our relationship with God
 - God is present in worship
 - Respect
 - In worship we are welcome as we essentially are

- 5. What do we believe about how St. Paul's people aspire to relate to each other?
 - Welcoming
 - Welcoming to all (3)
 - We should welcome all (2)
 - Accept everyone cordially as a child of God. Welcome all races and economic levels. speak against overt hate, cruelty, and rejection
 - Most of us are open and friendly to members. Family feeling.
 - Open hearts, open minds, open doors
 - St. Paul's is a community
 - Love and compassion
 - With love and acceptance/love and compassion (2)
 - Caring (2)
 - Treat others with kindness
 - People should not say mean things to other people
 - Kind
 - Generous
 - Supportive / support each other as family / support all / love and support one another
 - We should be patient and understanding of each other
 - Members of St. Paul's should love each other as brothers and sisters
 - Relate to each other with love
 - We love and relate to one another without expecting perfection
 - With an open mind and willing to share burdens
 - With compassion and kindness, with equality
 - Care about each other - some affection
 - Respect and no judgement
 - Treat one another with respect (2)

- Treat others with respect, even if “different” (2)
- We should think of everyone as a child of God (2)
- No judgement
- St. Paul’s members should respect each other but be comfortable holding each other accountable in love, per the scriptures
- People at St. Paul’s all believe we all have good thoughts about others in the congregation
- God calls us to treat others with grace
- Other notes
 - St. Paul’s people do not reach out to others. They know who they know.
 - Concerned that former Oakdale members have not been fully integrated
 - Sometimes you really can’t believe the attitude others display
 - We relate to each other through faith.
 - We like stability and getting along
- 6. What do we believe about how St. Paul’s people should relate to people different from us?
 - Welcome, love, and accept all people
 - We should love all people no matter the differences from us (3)
 - As Christians, we should welcome those who are different (3)
 - We are all different (2)
 - Welcome everyone (2)
 - All are children of God (2)
 - St. Paul’s members are welcoming to outsiders
 - St. Paul’s should be welcoming to people different than us
 - We should respect, be civil to, and be kind to others
 - We care about each other
 - Warm and caring
 - We should treat them as equals irrespective of their faith, country of origin, color

- Respect for all others, even if difference in opinion
- Everyone should feel safe and welcome
- St. Paul's should welcome anybody who wants to worship here
- St. Paul's members love all people regardless of their faith, race, creed, belief
- Open to differences
- Accept people where they are and provide guidance that meets them where they are.
- With an open mind, along with compassion and mercy
- Open-hearted welcome to all people is best
- Love each other, care about the well-being of all people
- God wants us to love one another - no exceptions to His wanting us to do this
- People believe in God and know He loves us. People desire to learn about Jesus and His teaching, especially teachings about relationships with others
- Accept them
- Golden rule
 - Who is my neighbor?
 - We should treat people who are different to us the same way that we would want them to treat us
 - Embrace fully - love thy neighbor
- Outreach - outside the church
 - Different people should be included
 - Members are always ready to accept "different people"
 - St. Paul's is a living church that places action- good compassionate work to extend outside its walls
 - Largely addressed via the food sharing programs
 - St. Paul's people should love and serve everyone in our community
- Don't insist others are different in the same way

- We should use our differences to strengthen our humanity and examine our own values (2)
- All are welcome at the table. Come as you are.
- The purpose of St. Paul's is to invite and welcome all to worship God, etc. (our mission statement)
- See more acceptance of all people in services, groups, activities in church
- Someone "different" is welcome as long as they don't insist others agree to be different in the same way
- We should not judge others by our beliefs
- We should be tolerant
- People may feel that different people should be excluded
 - People may feel that they should be excluded from the church
- Some people are more inviting than others
 - We want to give all people a welcome place. We don't always do this well.
 - Polite. Some more inviting than others.

Question 2: What might be our areas of disagreement?

1. Is everyone created in God's image?
2. Is homosexuality prohibited by the Bible? (2)
3. How does our Christian education teach this (adults and kids)? (2)
4. Ordaining clergy (2)
5. How the church should communicate our beliefs and practice to the community (2)
6. Kick the can down the road to youth (2)
7. Is homosexuality a choice?
8. Whether LGBTQ youth can be confirmed?
9. Should gay marriages be performed in the church?

10. How to separate political activism from faith
11. Will people be upset by having an LGBTQ leader?
12. Whether to be a reconciling congregation
13. Is LGBTQ consistent with Christian teaching?
14. Are some sexualities harder to accept?
15. Can same-sex couples (or LGBTQ people) join the church?
16. Will some people decide to leave the church?
17. Can the child of a same-sex couple be baptized?
18. Should sexual orientation be asked about in hiring?

Question 3: How should we at St. Paul's make decisions about this?

1. Congregational vote/charge conference (11) - including youth, and using appropriate procedures/forum
2. Church council (5)
3. BWCUMC (Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church) (3)
4. General (denomination-wide) conference (3)
5. Conduct a survey (to get input, not make a decision) (3)
6. Prayer/prayerful experience (to get input, not make a decision) (3)
 1. Address from the pulpit (to get input, not make a decision) (2)
 2. Hear voices from the LGBT community (to get input, not make a decision) (2)
 3. SPRC (Staff-Parish Relations Committee)
 4. Kick the can down the road
 5. Task force
 6. Trustees
 7. Pastors
 8. Squeaky wheel
 9. Inertia
10. Attendance and giving

11. Church staff
12. Community terms
13. Views of affiliated organizations
14. Education programs
15. Hear from other faith groups