

The Dialogue Center
For Counseling and Consulting
Presbyterian Church on the Mall
Plymouth Meeting Mall
Plymouth Meeting, PA 19462
(610) 828-2270

February 10, 2004

Rev. Gary L. Meekins
Camphor Memorial United Methodist Church
5620 Wyalusing Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19131

Re: Listening Session Process

Dear Rev. Meekins:

It was a pleasure meeting with you and the members who attended the meeting with District Superintendent William Staton on December 9. As you recall, my colleague Dr. Wally Fletcher and I described a listening session process that we hope will be a part of God's plan in reconciling conflict and strengthening ministry at Camphor Memorial UMC. As we discussed, I am providing this letter for your review to document our listening session process and to offer a suggested timetable for its implementation.

The goals for this process would be:

1. to provide a forum for the broadest possible base of the congregation (including disaffected members who may not be attending currently) to voice its sense of the strengths and concerns/issues in the life of the church.
2. to form a steering committee (representative of the various points of view and/or sub-groups within the church) to develop together an action plan for addressing whatever issues are identified and implementing a positive vision.
3. to strengthen the congregation's sense of itself as a community of faithful leaders and servants.

Accomplishing these goals will require significant participation by the congregation. In order for the church to have confidence in any final recommendations and action plan, all points of view need to be heard. To this end we suggest the following process:

- We will moderate a series of 1½ hour-long listening sessions open to all members of the congregation. Members will sign up for one of these meetings in advance and should self-select in order to create an atmosphere where there can be honest and open sharing.

- Those attending listening sessions will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire at the beginning of the meeting to help focus the discussion and to help provide a written record of the issues identified.
- We will conduct one-on-one interviews with the staff.
- After this information is gathered, we will prepare a summary of the data in the form of a Preliminary Report.
- We will present this report to the congregation. We will then form a Steering Committee that represents all the points of view identified in the Preliminary Report.
- The Steering Committee will meet with us (preferably during 2 to 3 day-long work sessions or about 6 half-day-long sessions) to analyze the data and develop recommendations that address the concerns raised.
- We will write the Final Report of the Steering Committee's work and present it to the Administrative Council and the congregation.
- We will resource and support as needed the committee(s) charged with the implementation of the Report's recommendations.

I know that everyone involved expressed interest in entering into this process as quickly as possible. Since turnout in the listening sessions is crucial to the success of the process, we want to have enough lead time for the time of those sessions to be publicized. This may require a newsletter article and/or letter sent to the membership in addition to announcements during worship.

I have contacted my colleague, the Reverend Thomas Michael, and we can offer listening sessions at the following times:

- Thursday, March 4 at 11:00 am,
- Sunday March 7 at 1:00 pm (2 groups)
- Thursday, March 11 at 6:30 pm
- Sunday, March 14 at 1:00 pm (2 groups)

We hope this will provide a variety of times of day, both weekday and weekend to accommodate the various lifestyles of the members. Some planning and creativity may be required on the part of the congregation (e.g. offering childcare, a potluck, transportation for seniors, etc.) to maximize participation.

It traditionally takes about three weeks from the date of the last listening session to develop a Preliminary Report. A Steering Committee would then need to be formed whose task will be to interpret the data from the Preliminary Report and to develop action-recommendations for addressing key areas of concern. The primary criteria for Steering Committee selection are:

- a. Participation in the small group interviews and currently active participation in the life of the congregation.
- b. Ability to represent the various points of view in the congregation while respecting others' views and an ability to work for a higher purpose.
- c. Special gifts for understanding and addressing themes in the report.

- d. Ability to commit the time necessary for the Steering Committee work.
- e. Ability to support the process and the work of the group as a whole even when their own views or wishes do not prevail.
- f. Ability to give credibility to the process in the congregation as a whole.

The following steps provide an overview of how the steering committee will proceed:

- a. Grounding with prayer and devotions.
- b. Orientation and team building.
- c. Determination and analysis of the key themes in the preliminary findings
 - i. What do the findings reveal about:
 1. deep currents, trends and patterns in the life of the congregation that need attention?
 2. our most important opportunities and challenges?
 3. urgent problems or concerns that need addressing as soon as possible?
 4. what God is calling us to be and do next?
- d. Development of specific recommendations and action plans based on the analysis above.
- e. Preparation of a final report and presentation to the Admin Council and the congregation.
- f. Following approval of recommendations and action plans, the steering committee may meet with the consultants periodically to monitor progress of implementation.

Our fees are \$100/hr for one consultant and \$160 per hour when two consultants are present. There is a \$65/hr fee for the writing of reports. It is our expectation that the total costs for the entire process should be approximately \$6,000.

I hope this letter provides you with the information you would need to interpret this process to the congregation. In conclusion, we are grateful to the entire Camphor Memorial Church community for your trust and look forward to working with you toward the future God has in store for your ministries. Please contact me at (215)843-8811 or via e-mail at KvPrt@aol.com if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours in Christ,

Kevin L. Porter

Rev. Kevin L. Porter

Cc: District Superintendent William Staton