

2015 Congregational Survey Report



Metropolitan Community Church of Richmond

Conducted by the
Pastoral Search Committee

Introduction

On October 4, 2015, the Pastoral Search Committee, as part of the pastoral search process, invited members and friends of MCC Richmond to complete a congregational survey. The purpose of the survey was *to identify who we are as a congregation and what we are looking for in our next pastor.*

The Congregational Survey

The survey included items about their affiliation with MCC Richmond, personal information (sexual identity, age, occupation, culture/continental/racial identity, education, relationship/domestic status, household income, personal faith journey before attending MCC Richmond), beliefs/values, desired professional skills for our next pastor, expectations of our next pastor, the strengths/weakness of our congregation and a more general characterization of our congregation.

The beliefs and values items, desired professional skills of our next pastor items, strengths and weaknesses items, and more general characterization of our congregation items were ranked using a 3-point Likert scale. Items that addressed expectations for our next pastor were ranked using a 1-10 Likert scale—1 for most important and 10 for least important.

Response Rates

One hundred twenty-five individuals were invited to complete the survey either electronically or by providing written responses on a hard copy. Other individuals who frequent the website could also complete the survey electronically. Sixty individuals completed the survey—a 48% response rate. Usually response rates for surveys distributed internally by organizations are 30-40% or better.

Twenty-one individuals provided written comments about their beliefs and values. Thirty-four individuals provided written comments regarding concerns about the pastoral search.

In the following sections, we summarize the results from each section of the survey. After reporting these results, we provide some general comments and make recommendations to the congregation regarding the pastoral search process.

Survey Results

Information about our congregation and friends of MCC Richmond are based on a sample size of 60 survey responses. We assume that the responses are representative of the larger group of individuals who are members or friends of the church.

I. MCC Richmond Affiliation

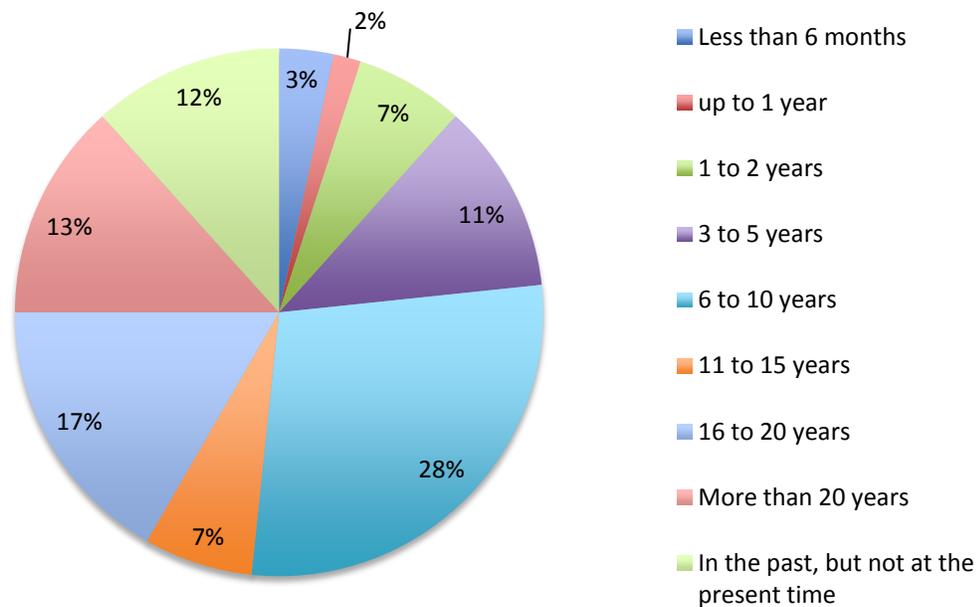
Membership

Ninety-two percent of survey takers are members of MCC Richmond.

Years of Attendance

As shown in the chart below, approximately 65% of the survey takers have attended MCC Richmond for at least 6 years. Most notable are the three largest groups who have attended the longest: 28% have attended 6 to 10 years, 17% have attended 16 to 20 years and 13% have attended more than 20 years. Another noticeable group are newcomers: 12% have attended up to 2 years. Additionally, 12% who took the survey are not attending MCC Richmond presently.

Years Attended MCC Richmond



Frequency of Attendance

Forty-two percent attend 4 or more services regularly each month. Another 23% attend 2 to 3 services each month, and 15% attend 1 service each month. Additionally, 7% attend less than one service each month and 13% do not currently attend.

Participation in Ministries, Programs or Activities

We estimate that 55% of church members who regularly attend services participate in ministries, programs or other activities. (73% of survey takers reported that they did.)

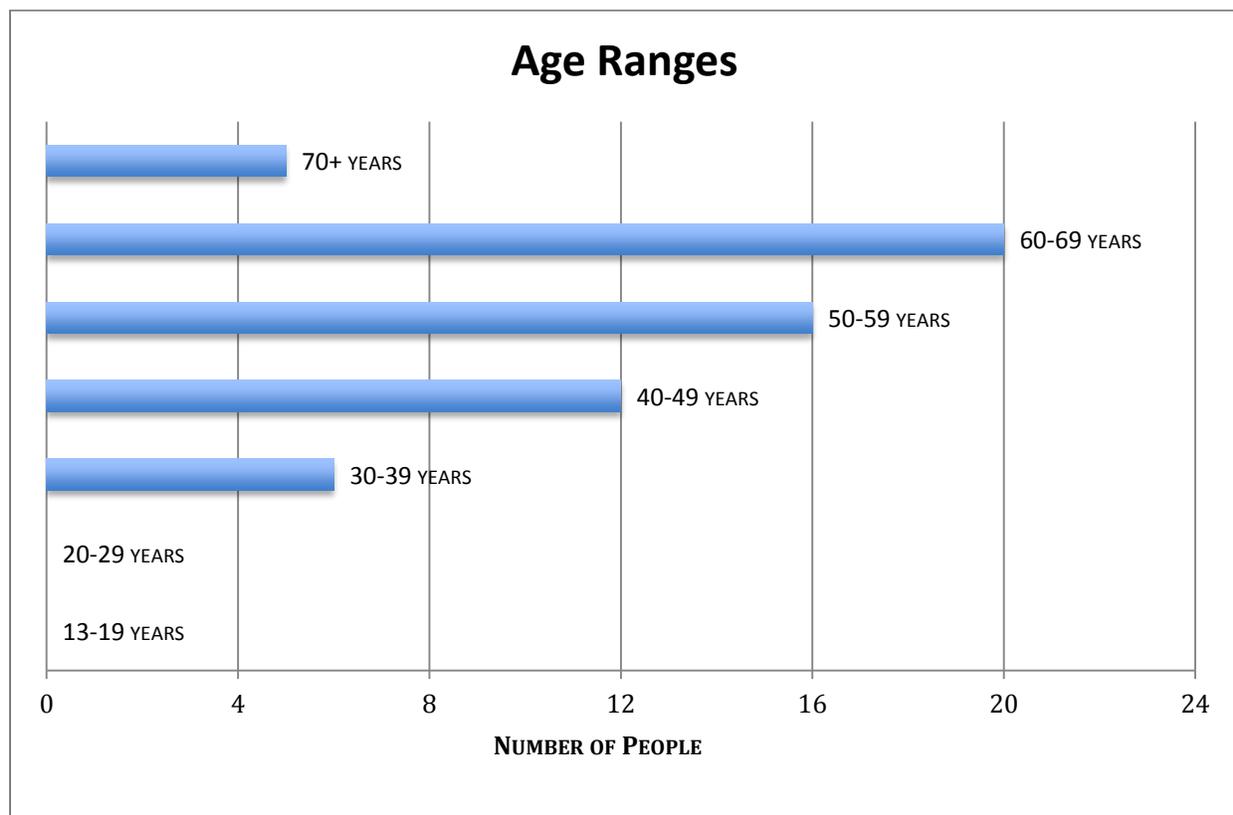
II. Personal Information

Gender Identity

Forty-three percent of our survey takers identify as male, 54% as female and 3% as transgender.

Sexual Identity

Eighty-nine percent of our survey takers are gay or lesbian, 3% are bisexual, 2% straight and 6% identify as other (both gay/lesbian and bisexual, nonconforming/questioning/queer, queer/demisexual).



Age Ranges

With regard to *age*, 10% of the survey takers are between 30-40 years of age, 20% are between 40-49 years of age, 27% are between 50-59 years of age, 34% are between 60-69 years of age, and 9% are 70 or more years of age (see bar chart above).

Occupation

About two-thirds of the survey takers are currently employed (68%). The largest group of employed individuals is comprised of professionals (42%). Another 7% reported that they had specific professional occupations. Others reported that they are employed as: minister/Chaplin, caregivers, sales representatives, students or homemakers (each area of work representing 2% or 3%). Additionally, about 19% of the survey takers reported that they are retired. And some retirees reported that they are engaged in other kinds of work (5%). Three percent are disabled and another 2% are presently unemployed.

Racial and Ethnic Identity

Individuals identify with one of three races: Caucasian (74%), African American (24%) and Native American (2%). With regard to *ethnic* identity, 2% identify as Pacific Islander and 4% as Hispanic.

Education

Seventy-one percent of the survey takers have undergraduate college degrees—31% of which also have at least one Master’s degree. Another 10% have completed trade/technical schools or other professional programs. And 19% have completed high school.

Relationship/Domestic Status

Fifty-eight percent of the survey takers are married or coupled/partnered (36% and 22% respectively), two percent of which also have children. Thirty-nine percent are single, and 2% are widowed.

Annual Household Income

Individuals’ incomes vary with about 60% earning an average income of at least \$40,000. Table 1 below shows the percentages for each income group.

Table 1: Annual Household Income

Annual Income	Percentage
< \$20,000	16%
\$20,000–\$40,000	24%
\$40,000–\$60,000	21%
\$60,000–\$80,000	14%
> \$80,000	25%

Spiritual/Religious Background

Many of the survey takers come from protestant backgrounds. Forty percent have previously been members of various Baptist denominations. Fifty-four percent have been members of one or more other protestant denominations (Presbyterian, Methodist, Friends/Quakers, etc.). Twenty-one percent reported that they have previously been members of the Catholic Church. Fourteen percent have engaged in New Age spiritual practices. Another 14 percent were affiliated with nontraditional religious practices. A few have affiliated with other spiritual groups (12-step Recovery, Mormon, Wicca).

III. The Beliefs and Values of our Congregation

This section of the survey had three parts: 1) Principles, 2) Beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Bible, and 3) An opportunity to write in comments.

1. Principles

The first part asked individuals to score a set of 12 principles according to how each principle influenced their beliefs and values, with 1 = No influence, 2 = Minor influence, 3 = Strong influence.

The two principles with the *strongest influence* (with a 2.9 average score) were the most general Judeo-Christian:

- The “Golden Rule” – Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Jesus’ summary of the greatest commandments: Love God with all your heart; Love your neighbor as yourself.

Less influential but still significant were more specific teachings from Jesus and Moses:

- The teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament. (2.5)
- The Ten Commandments – given to Israel through Moses. (2.4)

Principles that scored as *having a minor influence* (2.2 to 1.9 on average) ranged from New Testament and other Christian teachings on the high end to spiritual works apart from Christianity on the low end:

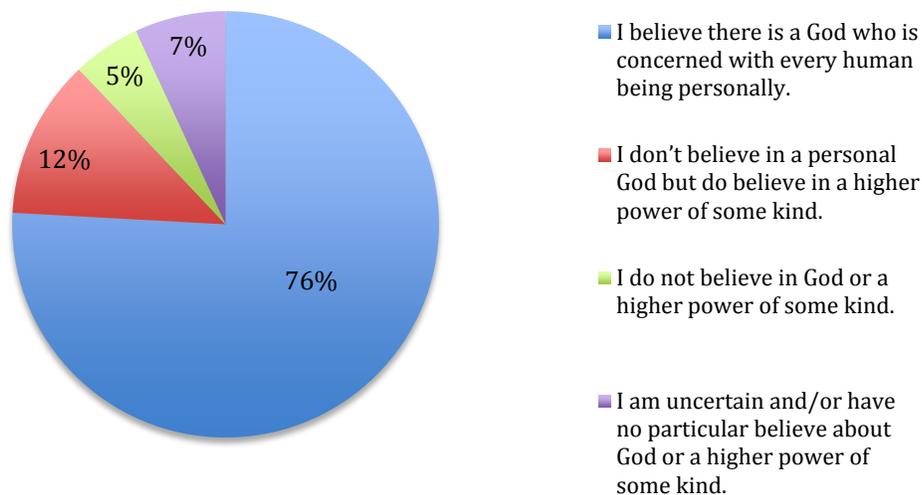
- The teachings of the early followers of Jesus as found throughout the New Testament (2.2)
- The teachings/writings of historic or contemporary writers/speakers associated with Christianity (2.2)
- The writings/teachings of liberation, feminist or queer theologians/authors (2.1)
- The teachings found in statements of Christian church traditions such as confessions, creeds, doctrines, and/or other writings (1.9)
- The teachings/writings of historic or contemporary writers/speakers associated with religions other than Christianity (1.9)
- The teachings of world religions such as Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or other (1.8)

2. Beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Bible

In the second part, four questions were asked about beliefs concerning God, beliefs concerning Jesus, the individual's connection to God, and beliefs concerning the Bible. Each question had a unique set of responses from which to choose.

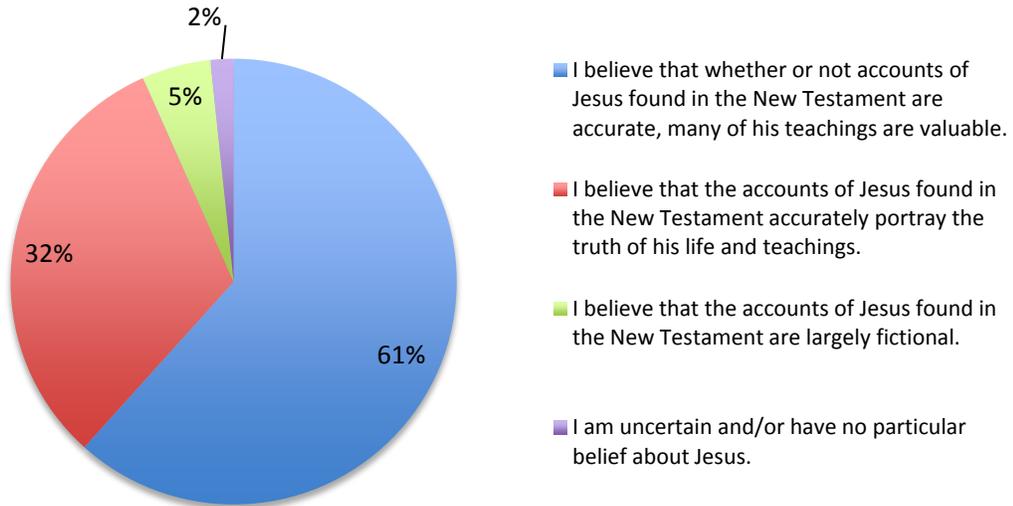
For the first question, *Which of following statements most closely represents your belief about God or a higher power?*, most surveyed (76%) believe in a God who is concerned about each of us on a personal level (see the chart below).

Beliefs about God



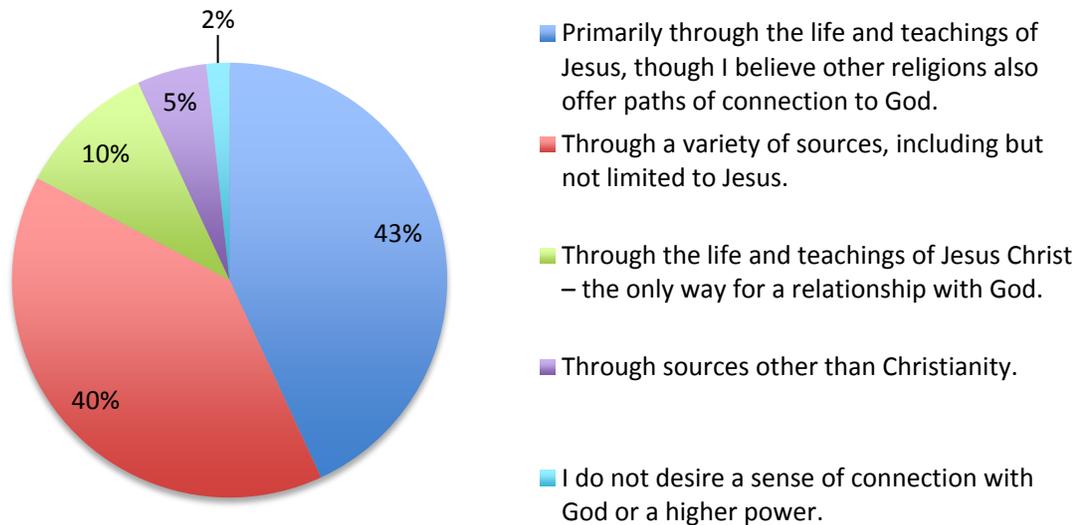
For the next question, *Which of the following statements most closely represents your belief about Jesus?*, almost everyone surveyed (93%) believes that the New Testament has valuable teachings (61%) or is an accurate portrait of the life and teachings of Jesus (35%). See the chart below.

Beliefs About Jesus



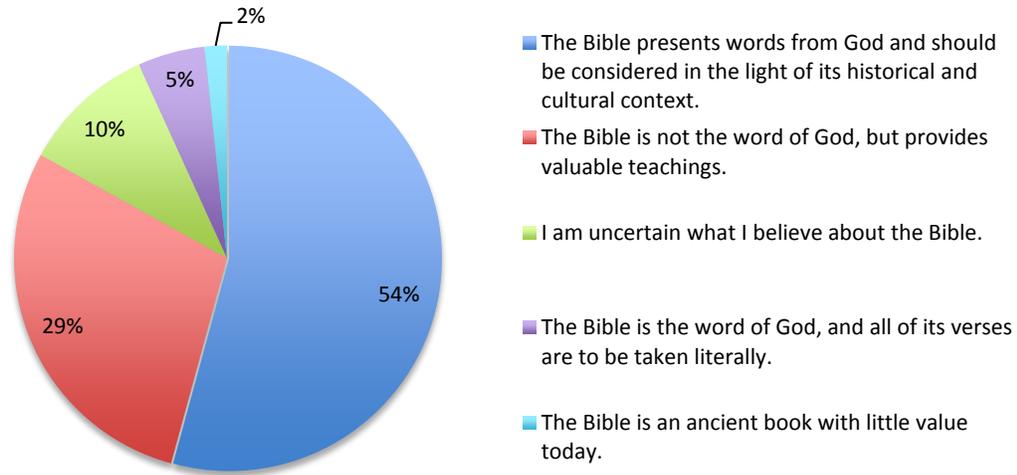
For the third question in this section, *Which of the following statements most closely represents your sense of connection to God or a higher power?*, a majority surveyed (83%) believe that Jesus plays some role in their connection to God, though that path is not be limited to Jesus alone (see the chart below).

Connection with God



For the next question, *Which of the following statements most closely represents your belief about the Bible?*, most survey takers (83%) look at the Bible in its historical and cultural context (54%) or believe that it provides valuable teachings even though it is not the word of God (29%). See the chart below.

Beliefs about the Bible



3. Write-In Comments

In the final part, survey takers could write in comments about their beliefs and values. Twenty-one individuals made comments to further clarify their beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible and MCC Richmond’s spiritual practices. A few made more general comments about their beliefs or values.

The largest number of comments, 14 total, were about God. Several individuals referred to God’s nature (love, forgiveness, humans as God’s creation). Some referred to God as Spirit or as High Power. Others suggested that God was a personal God that longed for a relationship with human beings whereas a few did not hold this belief. And a few reported that they had very broad views of God or High Power.

Here are some sample comments that represent individuals’ different points of views about God or some type of Higher Power:

- All of the Creation, and every human life is precious to God, and is therefore sacred.
- God is too big to be boxed in by humans ... God finds a ways to touch each of us where we are, how we are, who we are and whatever we are going through.
- I have a few traditional Christian beliefs but for the most part, have abandoned early teachings and look to a Universal Life Force.

Survey takers also made 5 comments about Jesus. Here are some sample comments:

- Jesus never told us to worship him but rather to follow him.
- My personal guide is through Jesus and how he lived, died and was resurrected through his connection and love God provides.
- While the teachings of Jesus continue to influence me, I struggle with talking about Him as though I know him. As a believer, I find that extreme.

Three individuals mentioned their beliefs about the Bible. Here are some of their comments:

- Interpretation of scripture is important. Literal regard for religious content is very dangerous.
- The Bible was written by man for a variety of reasons ... recording history, telling stories, recording songs, and probably the major reason ... to record what man thought about God.

Several other individuals referred to Bible verses to elaborate their beliefs.

Several individuals made general comments about their beliefs or values:

- [There are] many paths to the top of the mountain ...
- I am more concerned with spirituality for my life rather than any religious foundation for my life.
- Values: equality, harmony

And a few made comments about other spiritual leaders that have influenced them spiritually (Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Dr. Martin Luther King).

Three individuals made comments about MCC Richmond's spiritual health. Here are some of their comments:

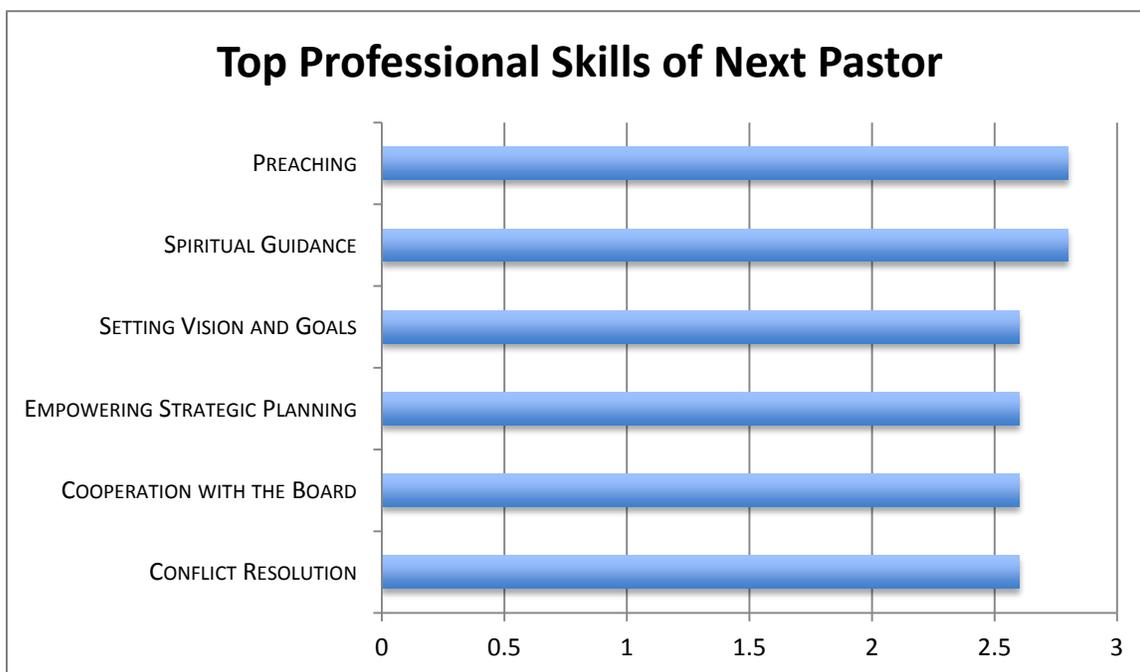
- Either we are a Christian church or we are not a Christian church. We lose our identity when we try to accommodate an "everything goes" mentality.
- I left MCC because I felt we were straying from our mission statement, lost in the petty problems. And now it continues to be the issue.

IV. Desired Professional Skills of Our Next Pastor

This section asked survey takers to score 21 professional skills that they would like the next pastor to possess, with 1 = Not important, 2 = Important, 3 = Very important.

On the whole, *every skill received an average score of 2 or higher*, meaning that our congregation desires a pastor who is skilled in most every area of ministry, leadership, management, and church development.

The top skills that received a 2.6 average or higher, were Preaching, Spiritual Guidance, Setting Vision and Goals, Empowering Strategic Planning, Cooperation with the Board and Conflict Resolution (see the chart below).



Second Tier Skills that scored a 2.5 average: Teaching, Problem Solving, Building Interfaith Relationships, Ministering to the Sick, Community Involvement, Building Ministries, and Empowering Stewardship.

Third Tier Skills that scored a 2.4 to 2.2 average: Planning/Overseeing Worship, Program Development, Church Administration, Personnel Supervision, Denominational Leadership, Training Leaders.

Evangelism Leadership scored a 2.0, which was the lowest.

Please note that Pastoral Care was a skill listed on the paper survey but not the online survey, which was an error. The average from the 6 paper surveys submitted was 2.7, which suggests that Pastoral Care is a significant skill needed by our next pastor.

V. Expectations of Our Next Pastor

This section asked the survey taker to rank a series of 10 action statements with *1 being the Most Important* and *10 being the Least Important* in regards to our next pastor.

In order to calculate the results, the team awarded points based on the number of 1s, 2s, and 3s each statement received. The statement with the most 1s, 2s, and 3s combined received the highest score, and so on. The percentage represents the number of survey takers who scored the item with a 1, 2, or 3, compared to all survey takers.

The statement with the *highest score* was “Is energetic and charismatic in worship” (59%). This expectation was a third higher than any other.

A *second tier* of expectations, still high on the wish list, had to do with growth and having the skills and leadership to achieve it:

- Works with the board in setting visionary leadership (49%)
- Will help us grow MCC Richmond (49%)
- Is gifted in time management and task achievement (47%)

A *third tier*, important but not as significant, dealt with roles that a pastor plays as a leader in worship, outreach, and board, ministry leader, and program development:

- Helps us develop strong board and ministry leaders (42%)
- Helps us develop a strong outreach into the community (41%)
- Focuses primarily on the worship service (39%)
- Helps us develop more programs for members and visitors (37%)

Finally, the two expectations that *scored lowest* in this ranking were:

- Makes it a priority to visit church members (31%)
- Helps us develop small groups (25%)

VI. Strengths and Weakness

This section contained 41 items that represented a range of statements about strengths and weaknesses of our congregation. Individuals were asked to rate each statement using one of three scores: 1 = weakness, 2 = average or 3 = strength.

To analyze this section, we collapsed items to form six categories (mission and core values; spiritual education; church management and operations; congregational health; ministering to people or groups; and ministry team work). For an overview of the categories and related items, see Table 2 below.

Strengths

MCC Richmond is a tight-knit community that cares deeply about its members and enthusiastically supports some key ministries. Survey takers also reported that our congregation cooperated well with our last permanent pastor and that our next pastor can count on our congregation to do the same. They also agreed that members and friends of MCC Richmond support our BOD and that the BOD sets worthy examples for members and encourages them to use their talents in worship services and ministry work.

In Table 2, the items that scored the highest each related to a longstanding ministry of the church, including Social Justice, Sunday School, Fellowship, HIV/AIDS, Transgender, Music and Greeters. Items in the average to above average range scored between 2.0–2.2 with the exception of Welcoming Visitors which received an average score of 2.4 (the highest).

Table 2. Strength and Weaknesses

Categories	Below Average	Average	Above Average
Mission & Core Values	Evangelism, Nurturing, Discipleship, Spiritual Growth, Shepherding, Community Outreach, Stewardship, Spiritual Guidance		Social Justice
Spiritual Education	Teaching	Adult Education	Bible Studies, Sunday School
Management & Operations	Administration, Meeting Goals, Cooperating with Other Churches, Global Missions, Denominational Participation		Defining our Mission & Core Values, Liturgy
Congregational Health	Managing Conflict, Unity, Faithfulness, Commitment, Openness to Change		Fellowship
Ministering to People & Groups	Children, Singles, Families, Women, Men, Seniors, Supporting Families, Youth*		HIV+, Transgender
Ministry Team Work		Caring for the Poor, Worship Service, Giving Care	Music, Welcoming Visitors**

*Lowest scores of 1.4 or 1.5

**Highest score of 2.4

Weaknesses

Survey takers rated many items in five of the six categories as below average. Most notable are the items related to Mission/Core Values and Ministering to People/Groups categories. Most of these items were rated between 1.6 and 1.9—slightly below average. Those marked in red text (Children, Singles, Youth, Seniors and Families) were rated the lowest (1.4 or 1.5).

These results suggest that church leadership needs to be more intentional with regard to ministering to different groups in our congregation. In particular, we need to develop ministries for children, youth, singles, seniors, men, women and families.

Although we scored average or better in some areas, we are not currently meeting the needs of many areas in our church.

VII. Our Congregation

This section contained 11 statements about the congregation that survey takers were asked to score as 1 = False, 2 = Somewhat True, or 3 = True. The number in parenthesis is the average score that each statement received with 2 being the median.

The statements that received the *highest scores* (and thus were considered the most true) were those that spoke about how we care for and encourage one other as well as those that asserted how we support and work with our board and pastor:

- Our members care about one another. (2.4)
- Our congregation cooperated well with Rev. Dr. Robin Gorsline when he was pastor. (2.4)
- Our next pastor can count on the wholehearted cooperation of the congregation. (2.4)

Four statements received *above-average to average* scores (in descending order):

- Members with broken lives find a safe haven in our church. (2.3)
- Our congregation supports the board. (2.2)
- The board sets worthy examples for the congregation. (2.2)
- The board encourages members to use their talents in worship services. (2.1)

Four statements scored *below average* and may represent areas for improvement (descending order):

- Our members volunteer readily for church activities. (1.9)
- Our members give generous financial support to the church. (1.9)
- Our congregation supports its ministries. (1.9)
- Our congregation cooperates well with Interim Pastor Rev. Carolyn J. Mobley. (1.8)

VIII. Your Special Concerns about the Pastoral Search

The survey takers were not required to give comments in this section. Thirty-four survey takers chose to do so. By in larger they expressed a range of issues around attributes, knowledge and skills they hope are exhibited by the new pastor. We organized their comments into ten categories around common or related themes (experienced, resolves conflicts, inspiring leader, spiritual, caring, helps us grow, embraces cultural and spiritual diversity, preacher/teacher, open-minded to others and change, and reaches out to the community)

The largest number of comments related to choosing an inspiring leader. Preaching and teaching was the second largest category with 9 comments followed by embraces cultural and spiritual diversity with 8 comments.

What We Are Looking for In A New Pastor

Experienced (2 comments)

- Some experience as a pastor
- Has served as an associate pastor
- Currently serving as a pastor in a church

Resolves Conflicts (3 comments)

- Needs positive skills
- Can help bridge conflict to resolve conflicts
- Keeps information about others (and how others behave) confidential

Inspiring Leader (14 comments)

- Inspires participation
- A gentle shepherd
- Has an infectious positive and inspiring outlook
- Works well with the ministry leaders
- Works well with, challenges and listens to Board members
- Supports, shares and delegates leadership as well as empowers leaders
- A strong spiritual leader

Spiritual (3 comments)

- Has strong inner peace
- Has a solid foundation of faith
- Is spiritually deep and sets an example ... concerned with spiritual growth

Caring (5 comments)

- Cares for and be committed to members (essential)
- Checks in on how people are doing, especially members that are going through difficulty times
- God-loving
- Is an example of peace, trusting and accepting others
- Family oriented
- Gives time to those sick and/or homebound
- Concerned with individual members

Helps us grow (4 comments)

- Is a church membership builder
- Has frank discussions about expanding ministries

Embraces Cultural and Spiritual Diversity (8 comments)

- Is bi-lingual or of Hispanic origin
- Culturally different pastor to help us live up to MCC's ideal of being a church for all people
- Ministers to everyone in our congregation

- Encourages discussions about sex and sexuality
- Acknowledges in sermons that we are people from many different walks of life
- Treats all equally
- Serves our diverse congregation to grow even more diverse so that we can be truly welcoming
- Bridges gaps, multi-generations, cultural and varying styles of worship (e.g., high church, gospel, contemporary, quiet, reflective, tender, etc.)
- Someone able to work in a more spiritually blended environment.

Preacher/Teacher (9 comments)

- Able to relate to us ... someone to translate readings to today's world ... a real connection
- Delivers an energetic, uplifting and thought-provoking sermon
- A preacher, not a teacher.
- Teach and preach about Jesus Christ
- I want a new pastor who will really preach to me ... a great storyteller ... a light in our community ... who will speak to young people ... pop culture savvy and in touch with social media.
- Dynamic with a strong, clear messages
- I want to be "spiritually fed"
- Spirituality and education ... to expand personal and collective learning

Open minded to Others' Ideas and Change (6 comments)

- Comes with an open mind to work with all groups of people and listens to all ideas and opinions and then judges fairly
- Listens to the congregation (invaluable)
- Does not divide people
- Not afraid to make changes
- Helps the church get out of its comfort zone

Reaches Out to the Community (5 comments)

- Strong presence in the larger community of Richmond
- Engages in service to our larger metropolitan community
- Contacts universities and colleges to bring in experts to talk about sexuality, racism, spirituality and religion ... encourages folks outside our community to participate.
- Someone who knows about HIV/AIDS outreach

Other Comments

Several survey takers made comments about the **process of choosing** a new pastor:

- Please do a thorough background check of our next pastor.
- Evaluate the performance of the pastor ... based on congregation's feedback through a survey.

- The new pastor should be under a three-month contract before it converts to a year contract.

Another concern expressed by a couple of survey takers related to the **focus of the pastor's work**:

- Our church and our people should be the next pastor's main concern, not his/her own agenda.

Some survey takers made **more general comments** related issues regarding the building, caring for others, the survey format, financially supporting a new pastor, greeting members, and becoming more progressive:

- Our building is a barrier, especially its cost (2 comments)
- Some of the questions were hard to answer ... A range of 1 to 5 might have provided better results (1 comment)
- I question our financial ability to attract and support a new pastor in our present state (1 comment)
- Almost every time I walk through the door, I am greeted as if it is my first time ... they just didn't seem to remember me! (1 comment)
- My low scores on welcoming is because you continue to refer to those from Fredericksburg as "our Fredericksburg group." (1 comment)
- It is alarming that we have members who have left due to illness or injury and have never been contacted, visited or called to sincerely check and see what happened. (2 comments)
- I would like the church to be more open minded, less traditional and more progressive (1 comment)

Summary

In this section we briefly summarize findings from the survey. First we address *who we are*. We then address *what we are looking for in a new pastor*.

Who We Are

Spiritual Beliefs and Values. Although many of the survey takers have a spiritual history of being members of protestant denominations, many have also been enriched by other spiritual experiences. In general, we have a blended past religious/spiritual background. Although we come from these different backgrounds, we share some common beliefs about God, Jesus, the role of the Bible and so on. Many of us believe that God is personal and loving. We also believe that individuals can find God through other paths. We believe that Jesus' teachings are words to live by but we also seek other sources to guide our spiritual growth and to find solace.

The majority of us also believe God is bigger than any religious institutions/traditions and that there are other paths to God. So we are on the cusp of possibly establishing and developing a new identity that richly aligns with and broadens the founding principles of our denomination.

Demographics. Although we continue to welcome newer members, we are an older, congregation that is committed to MCC Richmond.

We are mostly gay or lesbian and either married, partnered or single. We are also blended with regard to race. The most notable is the ratio of the number of Caucasians when compared with number of African Americans that attend (about 3:1); we are well above the national average.

We are well educated and/or professionally trained, and about 75% of us are presently employed. Another 19 percent are retired.

Our Commitment to MCC Richmond. We are also fairly active in our church; more than half who attend also participate in a range of ministries and activities hosted by the church.

Although we have concerns about our congregational health, those of us who attend regularly are very committed and, in fact, active and deeply loyal.

Strengths and Weaknesses. Presently we are struggling as a church. Most noticeable is the need for church leadership to be more intentional with regard to ministering to different groups that make up our congregation. In particular, we need to develop ministries for children, youth, singles, seniors, men, women and families. Although we scored average or better in many areas, in general, we are not adequately addressing many areas including meeting our mission and goals, ministering to our congregation, engaging in outreach, working with other churches, to name a few.

What Do We Desire in a New Pastor

We have high expectations for our new pastor. With the exception of two or three categories, we agree strongly that the new pastor should have many skills and abilities as a leader, caring for the needs of the congregation, preaching, teaching and so on.

Preaching and Teaching. By far, most believe that our new pastor should preach well—in fact, be a dynamic preacher that delivers messages that are savvy and pertinent to our lives and that encourage, comfort and challenge us spiritually.

Providing Guidance and Leadership. Providing guidance to ministry leaders, the Board of Directors, and others in order to fulfill their spiritual goals is some of the more important work that we desire of our new pastor. And leading includes listening and valuing others ideas, helping and supporting us as we move forward and when necessary embrace change. Importantly too is the need for our new pastor to be able to resolve conflicts and at the same time honor and support all those involved.

Not only does the new pastor need to provide guidance for individuals but also he or she will need to provide guidance for setting and implementing strategic goals for our congregation. As part of this process, the pastor will need to keep us be mindful of, and help us work toward, our vision, mission, and core values.

Outreach. The new pastor must desire to be a visible and active member of our community. We desire a pastor who will work with other faith churches and faith communities as well as organizations that support social justice issues, such as HIV AIDS, Transgender, youth and racial violence and inequity.

We also desire our new pastor to help us work more closely with UFMCC.

In sum, we have very high expectations for ourselves as a people of faith and for a new pastor. Given our commitment to MCC Richmond, though we are struggling to meet our mission and goals presently, there is every indication that we will continue to thrive with the help of a vibrant, keenly skilled new pastor, one who will help us move forward, expand ministries and help us grow individually and collectively.