

Sustainability is a growing movement. After many decades of uncritical promotion of progress, a few are realizing that much of it is not sustainable, and some progress is not even desirable. Strategic efforts are underway (e.g. in energy, food production, economics, environment) to find sustainable solutions.

Is it helpful to ask the sustainability question with Christian community? What factors enabled Shalom to accomplish so much in 24 years? Are they all sustainable? Were some factors specific to that era or individuals?

The pioneers yet among us are now retired, or nearing retirement. While still very committed, they are doing what is normal for that stage in life: traveling to volunteer or visit family, and a few, unfortunately, are dealing with illness and declining mobility. As younger/newer to Shalom folk step up, are they expected to fit into the well-worn grooves, or given freedom to discover sustainable solutions for the future? Many assume the latter, but asking new folk directly is helpful.

Sustainability at first may not sound like a good image to use with God's Reign. But I think it is because sustainability usually calls for transformation in thinking and behavior!

Babette's Feast (1988 Oscar, Best Foreign Language Film), is about a Danish faith community struggling to survive into the second generation. A foreigner's radical and selfless gift, transforms the entire community to see new purpose beyond survival. (The movie is stylistic/slow paced; Christian symbolism abounds.)

Assumptions are being tested in our Congregational Dialogues. In July, Martha Yoder Maust observed that Shalom's original purpose was "to start another congregation." In August, there were 13 comments expressing excitement about the transitional period: all focused on it being an opportunity to discern new possibilities.

Last Sunday's Dialogue was a positive experience as we shared differing perspectives on mission statement related topics. The results (attached to this message), indicate strong openness to change, and high value placed on the work of the Holy Spirit among us. As we

reflected together on the entire experience, many helpful observations were shared. Two related specifically to testing assumptions.

Solomon Abebe called for discerning intangible dynamics which might be impacting why some folk come, but don't stay long term. Brian Bither observed that we tended to be more together on conceptualizing priority for both evangelism and peace/justice, but more separated on how we understand the church's purpose. He suggested this division could be a factor in past struggles to find unity on outreach strategy.

While division is not desirable, naming it clearly is the best place to start. Last Sunday was a helpful first step in discerning a common mission statement during the next several Dialogues.

To prepare for Oct. 9, please write a concise sentence answer to each of the following questions: Who are we? Why do we exist? It's helpful to think in terms of being, rather than doing. Specific programs should not be mentioned in a mission statement. It's also helpful to think of Shalom as *Jesus'* church, not *our* church.

I am encouraged. A priority for foundational matters is emerging. Yes, because they are foundational, they will be more challenging. But effort invested here, will be recouped down the road. Clarity of mission, makes discernment of specific vision less difficult.

As we continue to work as a congregation on clarity of mission, we will work in small groups on clarifying our individual passion, spiritual gift, personal style and calling. Some, perhaps many, have this clarity. As those who do, share their understandings, those with less clarity can find greater clarity. I am attempting to meet with each small group in the next five weeks, and will offer several opportunities for anyone not in a small group, to work on the same topic.

- Gary Martin

Looking Ahead:

Sept. 18 9:30 a.m. *The Power of Peace* Psalm 20: 1-9 Brian Bither

Sept. 25 9:30 a.m. *Disciples under the Influence of the Holy Spirit*

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21 Gary Martin

Oct. 2 9:30 a.m. Acts 2:37-47; 4:32-37 *Community* Frank Kandel

Gary's projected in town schedule: Sept. 18-20; 25-28; Oct. 9-10