



## THE NOAH TEAM

# INITIAL REPORT TO SESSION OCTOBER, 2011

The report that follows is a compilation and summary of findings from interviews and discussions with almost 200 members of the congregation during the summer and fall of 2011.

PLEASE NOTE: This is intended simply as an initial report based on compiled data. It was received by the Session on October 18, 2011.

The NOAH Team will continue its work over the next few months, formulating specific proposals to be considered and acted upon by the Session.

# **REPORT OF THE NOAH TEAM TO THE SESSION OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTHVILLE, MICHIGAN OCTOBER 2011**

## **THE NOAH PROCESS**

Early in 2011 Elders and Deacons, and then the entire congregation, were invited to submit names of individuals they trusted as leaders. Eight persons whose names appeared most often were assembled and designated the “NOAH” team. Their charge was to discover the core identity of this congregation and to discern the direction in which God is calling us. From that discernment process was to emerge a vision of our mission as God’s people in this community as we prepare to call our next senior pastor.

The team prepared by discussing concepts of leadership and a process of questioning called “Appreciative Inquiry”. Three questions were developed as the ones by which we would learn about the memories, values and dreams of members of this church community. Those questions were:

- 1. What is the most meaningful or exciting experience you can remember at First Presbyterian Church?**
- 2. What do you value most about our church?**
- 3. What is your vision for the future of our church?**

All in our church community were invited and encouraged via mail, website, and weekly bulletins and announcements to participate in any of nine gatherings scheduled in July, August and September 2011. Attendees at the sessions were divided into pairs for the initial inquiry. Each one interviewed a partner, using the three questions, and recorded responses on designated forms. Following the interview portion of the gathering participants reassembled for lively discussions about what they had learned from one another and to brainstorm about commonly occurring themes. These last brainstorming sessions were termed “Passion Groups” and they offered an opportunity for free-flowing, out-loud dreaming about where these passions may take our church.

Written inquiry forms and additional notes captured by NOAH team members during discussions were reviewed thoroughly and used to compile the graphs and summaries that follow.

## **THE PROPOSED VALUE OF THIS DATA IS:**

- 1. That the report will provide a foundation for a soon-to-be-identified Pastor Nominating Committee to begin the search process for a new Senior Pastor under the guidance of the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry.**
- 2. That the NOAH team will use the gathered information to generate specific recommendations for immediate consideration by Session.**

## **INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHICS**

Total number of participants in NOAH interviews: 194

Age Group	Number Interviewed	Average # Years in this Church
12-17	2	12.5
18-24	2	8
25-34	5	11
35-44	12	10
45-54	30	16
55-64	44	18
65-74	53	23
75+	43	20
Unknown	3	

Seven additional high school and/or college students were interviewed as a group in the APEX gathering noted under the section “Children and Youth”.

NOTE: The NOAH team is aware that the above demographics do not reflect the overall demographics of our congregation. Members aged 44 and under were underrepresented in the interview process and those aged 45 and above were overrepresented. While participation was, of course, voluntary, this discrepancy in participation may bear further exploration by the NOAH team as we prepare specific recommendations for Session to consider.

## **MAJOR THEMES THAT EMERGED DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

### **WORSHIP**

When asked what they remember and value about our church, participants mentioned the elements of worship more often than any other topic. The strength of this response shows that gathering as a body to worship God in word and song, to celebrate the sacraments and to hear the Word proclaimed holds deep meaning for our people.

Specific comments expressed how valuable dynamic, Biblically based preaching has been to us historically. We fully expect that to continue. From our future pastors we want to hear sermons that help us to understand scripture better, that inspire us, that comfort us, and that impact our daily lives.

Likewise, comments demonstrated how deeply we are touched by the music in worship. The quality and variety of our music was cited by many as the reason they joined this church. One stated, “the music draws me in and stays with me when I leave”. Many cited that their own participation in worship leadership through the chancel, bell or youth choirs, or in the praise band has been valuable to them both spiritually and socially.

In addition to our Sunday worship, respondents cited special services celebrating events in the Christian year - Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Easter - and patriotic services as meaningful. Baptisms of family members were mentioned often as cherished experiences.

Overall our participants strongly supported our traditional, liturgical approach to corporate worship. They appreciate creative and diverse elements within that traditional structure and would welcome more exploration and expansion in that arena.

Seeing children and youth in worship and having them participate in meaningful ways was a recurring theme in interviews. That reinforces our overall desire for a strong, multi-generational church family. Many expressed enthusiasm for the energy that resulted this past summer as we joined in a single Sunday worship service.

### **CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The particular segment of our church population that generated the most comment (based on responses to question #3) is Children and Youth. Many of our respondents have invested personally in children and youth as Sunday school teachers, Vacation Bible school volunteers, or chaperones on youth mission trips. Respondents remembered their joy and satisfaction in seeing our children and youth participate actively in leading worship through their choirs, plays and musicals.

Participants believe our children and youth programs have been historically strong and have enjoyed watching children mature through the system. We want to support our children but are concerned that many of the families we serve in our preschool and VBS are uninvolved with us otherwise. Those closest to the situation are concerned by dwindling youth and parent involvement in planned activities and wonder if restructuring the schedule would help or hinder the spiritual development of our youth.

Since very few of our youth participated in the general NOAH gatherings three NOAH team members opted to visit a Wednesday evening APEX (high school) session to listen to the dreams of those in attendance. In response to our question about why they come they cited “relationships” as the primary reason. They like the relaxed space to escape the pressures of school and to get to know one another better. They talked about how they might “mentor” the middle-schoolers and confirmation class in order to form a more cohesive group. They would like to see sustainable growth within their group, but not at the cost of close relationships and they stated emphatically that they do not feel the need to be “like the mega church youth groups”.

In response to the “future vision” question participants in the NOAH process cited their overwhelming commitment to a revitalized children and youth program. While what that might actually look like demands further exploration, it appears that this church is ready to invest time, energy and resources to attract and support the “under 30” crowd.

## **COMPASSION**

Significant numbers of participants in the NOAH process indicated that their own personal engagement in ministries of outreach and compassion was the most memorable and valuable of their church experiences. Whether the efforts were internal (Stephen ministry, Prayers & Squares, Card Ministry, visiting shut-ins), local in nature (Foster Child Care, Angel Tree, Northville Civic Concern, Garden Gatherers, Gleaners, Everybody Eats, Habitat for Humanity blitz build) or farther afield (New Orleans, Appalachia, Mexico, Romania) the sense was deep and real: that we grow spiritually when we engage in caring in very concrete ways for our neighbors.

Internally we want to be more creative and consistent in remembering and engaging our own members who are no longer able to participate actively with us but who remain faithful followers of Christ and valuable members of our community. We want to become better listeners and more trusting as we share our struggles with others in our church family.

Through feeding the hungry, building affordable housing, providing disaster relief and comforting those who are suffering we are carrying out our Lord's command that we love our neighbors as ourselves. And while many of us support these efforts financially, those who had participated first hand in these ministries of compassion cited added benefits: deeper relationships with fellow workers and renewed passion for serving those in need.

Responses indicate that this church is committed to expanding its efforts to serve "the least of these". We want to see not only increased financial resources directed to these missions, but we want to engage people of all ages within our church as well as any in our surrounding community who have hearts for serving those who are hurting and in need.

## **SPIRITUALITY**

On a personal level, participants commented on the many ways they connect and are nurtured spiritually in this church. These connections echo and support our other themes. Weekly worship invites them to pursue their lives with more Christ-like attitudes. They are spiritually moved by the music, the prayers, communion, baptisms, and by the beautiful setting of our sanctuary. They are uplifted through special services - Christmas, the Messiah, the Seder meal. Some even mentioned having grown spiritually as the result of serving with others on a committee.

As a group we are committed to building a strong spiritual foundation for our children and youth and to continuing to nurture one another through education, fellowship and prayer. Prayer, in particular, was highlighted as a spiritual cornerstone and also as an area in which we could grow. We want our prayers to be "better" and "more dynamic". This is surely an opportunity for intentional study and training in prayer and other classic spiritual disciplines as we seek to practice the presence of God in our lives.

## **COMMUNITY**

The folks who convene here have come for a variety of personal reasons. Responses to the NOAH query revealed that, regardless of why they came initially, they choose to stay because they value the friendliness of our church community. They also appreciate the warm, welcoming environment, the traditional style, the extensive history at this site and the central location of the campus. However, it is the relationships that have been built that keep us together as the body of Christ.

The growth of fellowship here is multifaceted. Many respondents mentioned the affection and respect that grow out of serving together in support of our children, youth, adult education, music programs, compassion ministries, and outreach programs. And beyond serving together, we simply enjoy one another's company socially. Informal opportunities to be together such as Dinner for Eight, the Men's and Women's golf leagues, Single Place and Progressive Dinner were cited.

Many commented during the NOAH gatherings how much they enjoyed the interview process as an opportunity to get to know someone new or to become better acquainted with a familiar face. We enjoy the civility of social pleasantries but would like to discover additional ways of knowing one another more deeply. Respondents indicated that knowing one another better would make it easier to support and connect with one another. One frequently mentioned and simple starting point would be the consistent use of name tags by people in the congregation.

For many this church is far more than just a group of friends; it is truly home and family. We are concerned about supporting one another and staying connected to those who cannot attend regularly due to illness or infirmity. We believe this is a good place for people to form an extended family and grow in the faith. We would like to bring more people into this fold but are not confident that we always express that effectively.

Many participants noted their joy in being able to comfortably invite neighbors to events such as the Patriotic Concert/Ice Cream Social. Others indicated a desire that we make ourselves and our facilities more available as a resource to the neighboring community. In both cases, the sense was that our building and location could be utilized more effectively than at present.

Our respondents clearly signaled a desire to be a community of all ages and of increasing diversity. We must become more intentionally welcoming and nurturing to the visitors and strangers God sends our way.

## **ADULT EDUCATION**

NOAH participants value the opportunities they have had in both small and large group settings to study God's word, be challenged intellectually and to grow spiritually as a result. Many mentioned particularly small group Bible studies, men's and women's retreats, Disciple classes and special events such as the multi-sensory Seder meal. They see a future in which this church offers multiple options each week, daytime, evening and Sunday mornings, so that each of our members has access to classes

and discussions that will stretch and strengthen them for service in God's kingdom. They would like to see whole family units engaged in Christian education.

They want to know the history of our denomination and how it fits into the larger sphere of Christendom. They want to study and discuss the big issues facing our denomination and Christianity. They want to know more about other world religions, to understand other faith systems and to have opportunities to know people who practice those faiths. They would like to engage these and other topics in varied venues - small groups, guest lectures, group discussions, and book clubs.

They want to feel safe in settings, large and small, where they can share ideas, engage in lively discussion and ask questions. More importantly, they want to reflect on what they learn in these settings and how it can transform their lives. Well designed and promoted educational offerings have the potential to strengthen our members personally, to equip them to serve in Christ's ministry and mission, and may act as a point of contact between the church and the surrounding community.

## **OPERATIONS**

It is clear, based on interview responses, that our members take great pride in our building and grounds. Several expressed their personal satisfaction in caring for, repairing, and beautifying the property. They find the beauty of the sanctuary comforting, the sounds of the organ inspiring, Boll fellowship hall inviting, and our location in downtown Northville very convenient.

Many respondents thought our current size is "just right", but many others recognized that sharing the gospel implies also sharing our resources and our space with new folks who may come our way and want to join with us in Christ's ministry. In particular, several suggested that we might use the CLC more often and more effectively.

Need was expressed for much improved communication overall internally, with our members and with the surrounding community. Expanded use of technology was favored as long as it was in good taste and in support of our stated mission.

NOAH participants communicated emphatically the expectation that our leaders and staff be fiscally responsible in order to sustain our ministry - committed to accurate record keeping and reporting and to transparency in communicating the operational needs of the church.

Finally, we need to recognize the need for more effective stewardship of our resources in order to maintain this church property as a home-base for worship, education, nurture and outreach. Church members will need to see the connection between their financial commitment to this church and the realization of the dreams expressed by those who shared their memories and vision through the NOAH process.

**OUR PRAYER IS THAT GOD WILL BLESS THE FURTHER USE OF THIS DATA AS WE,  
THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTHVILLE,  
SEEK TO DO HIS WILL.**

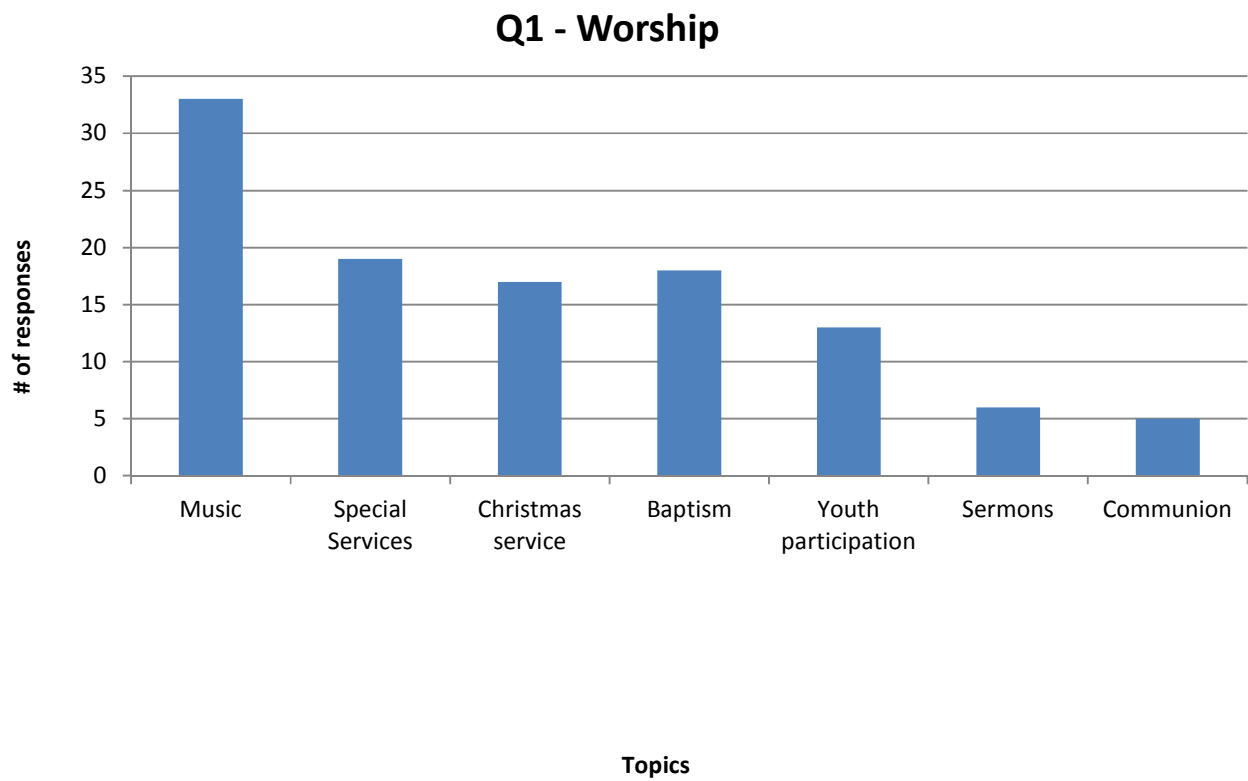
Respectfully Submitted by your NOAH team, October, 2011:

Dave Bader	Lori Danes	John Emmert	Sean Hollister
Wanda Moon	Barbara Ross	Dave Spindler	Owen Weir

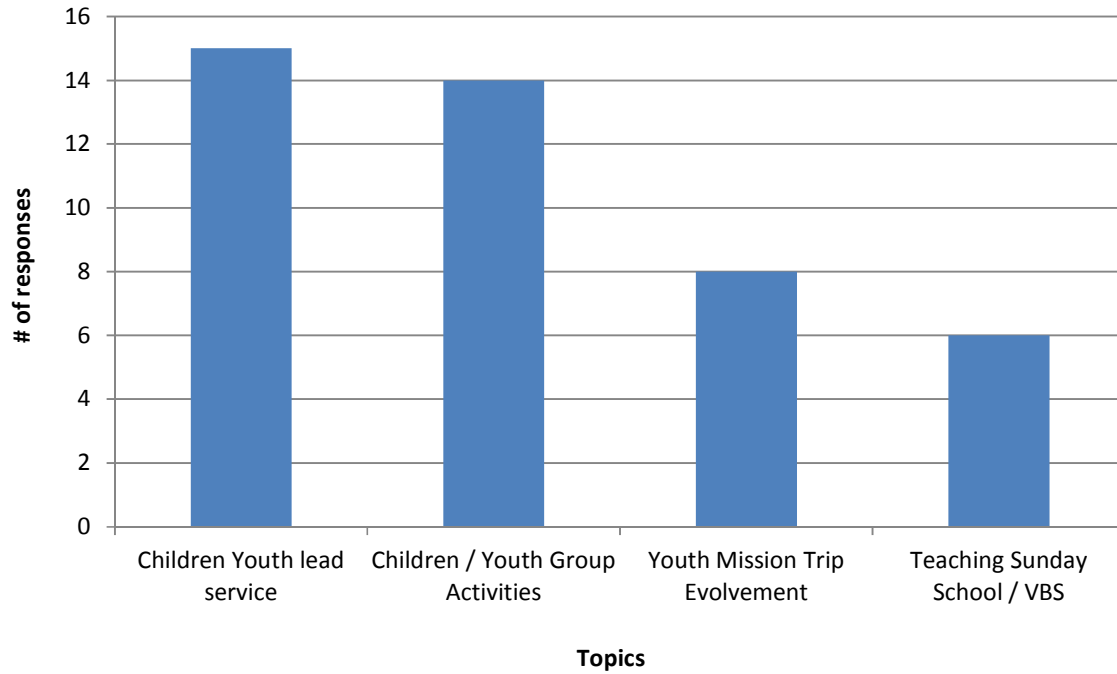
# APPENDIX

## GRAPHS INDICATING FREQUENCY OF THE MOST COMMONLY OCCURRING THEMES

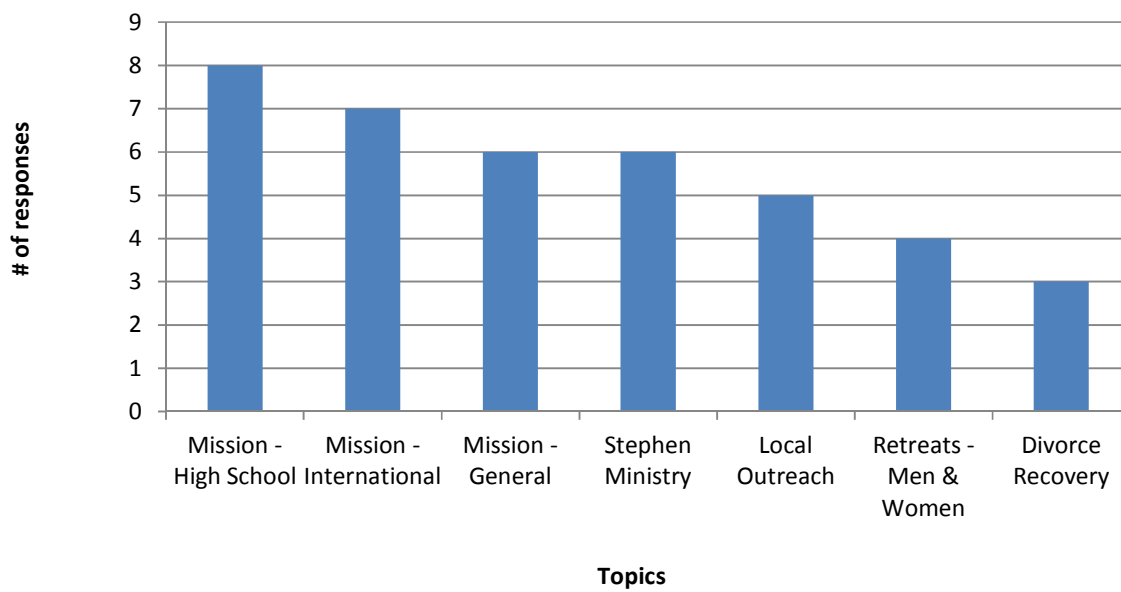
**Q1: What is the most meaningful or exciting experience you can remember at First Presbyterian Church?**



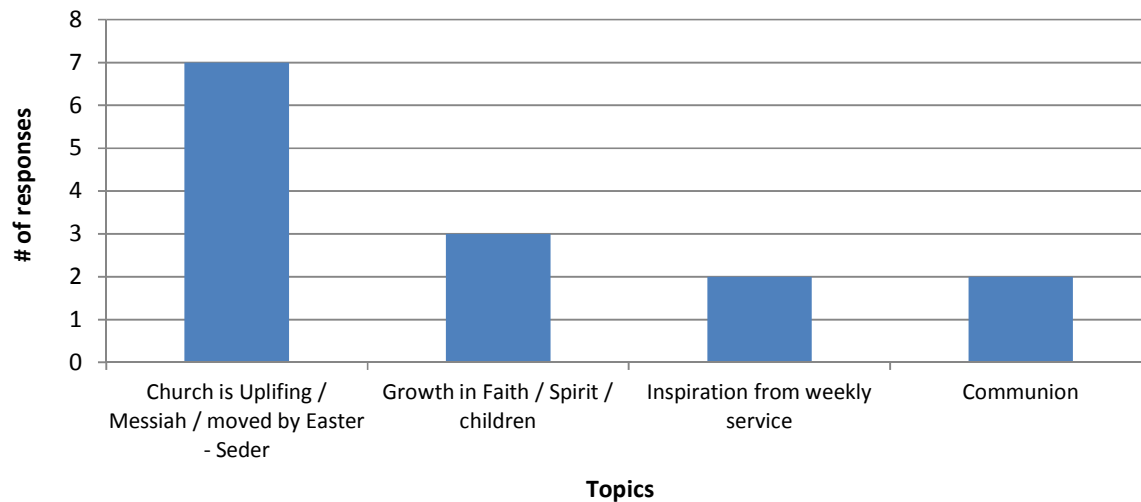
### Q1 - Children & Youth



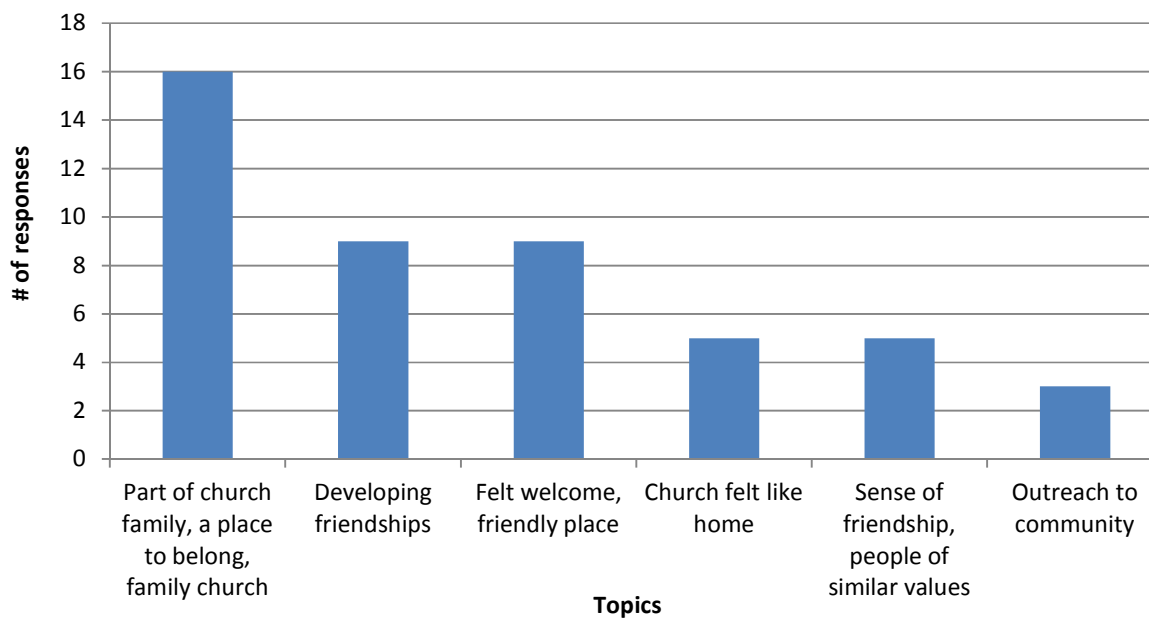
### Q1 - Compassion



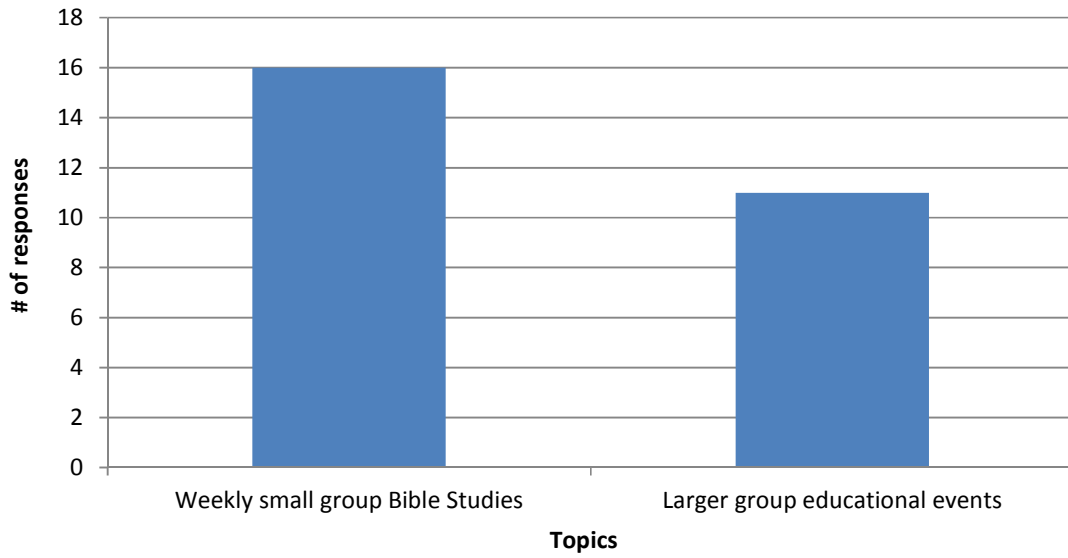
### Q1 - Spirituality



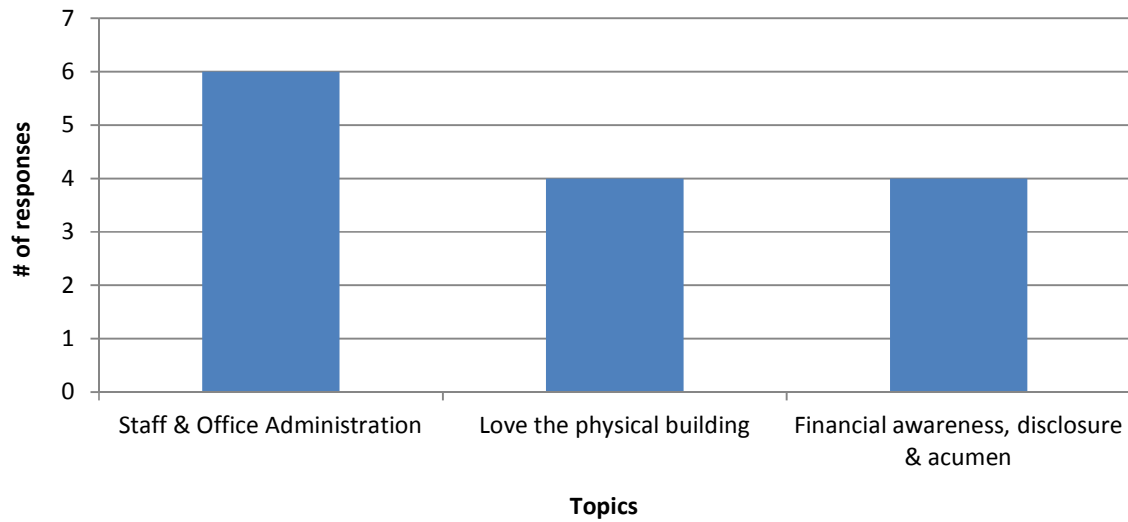
### Q1 - Community



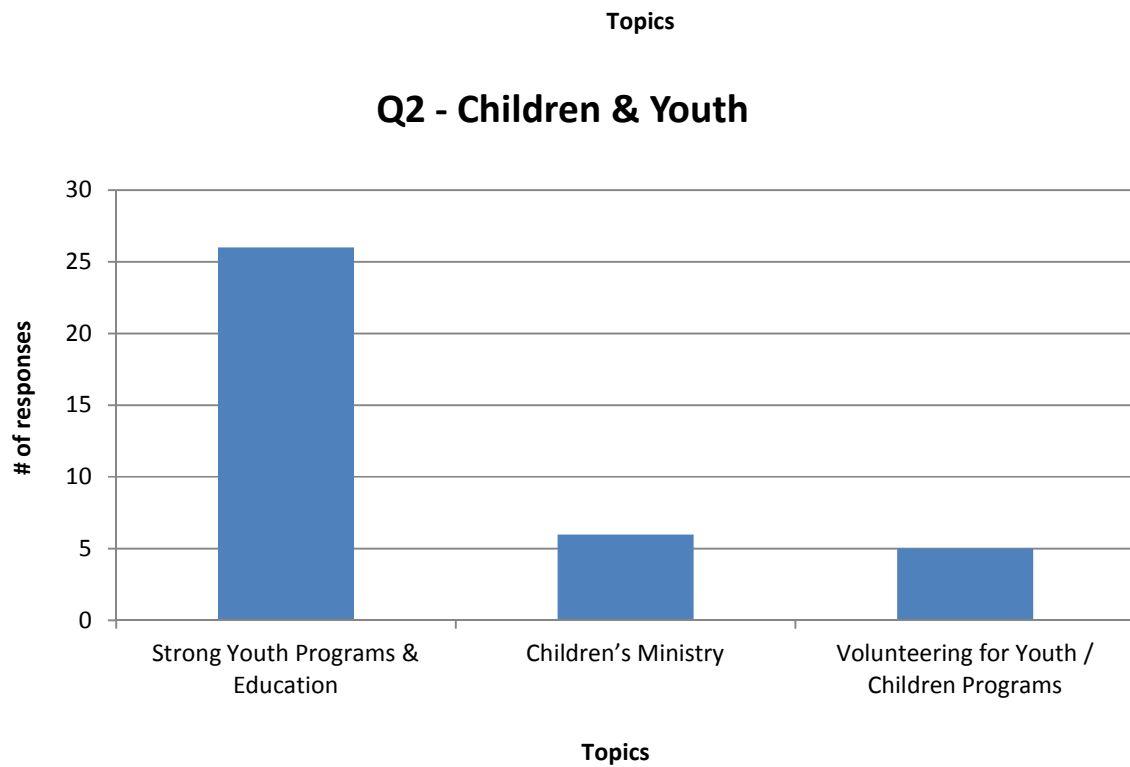
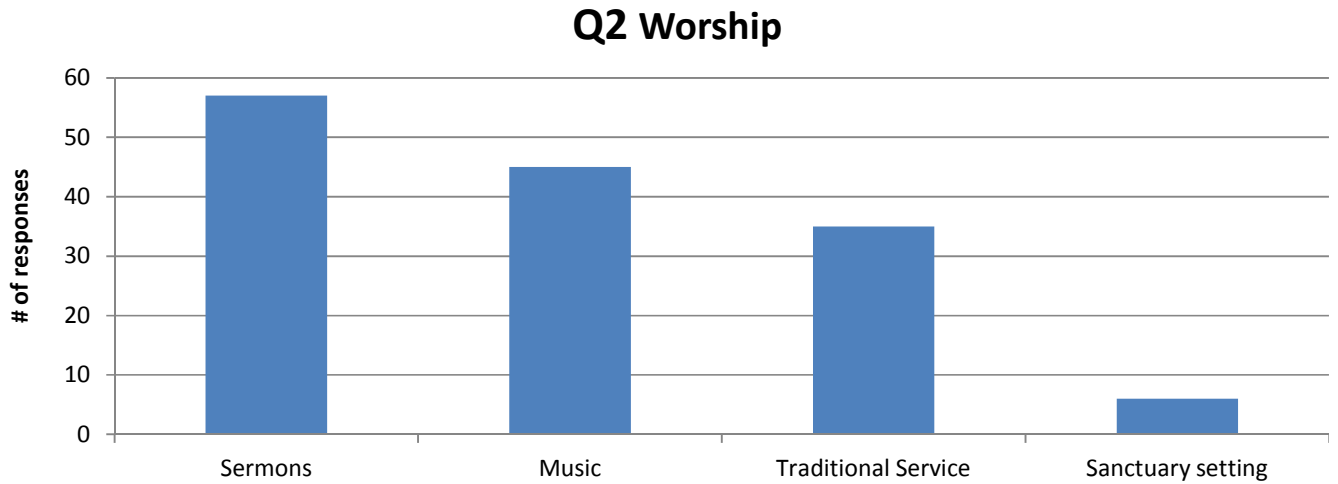
### Q1 - Adult Education



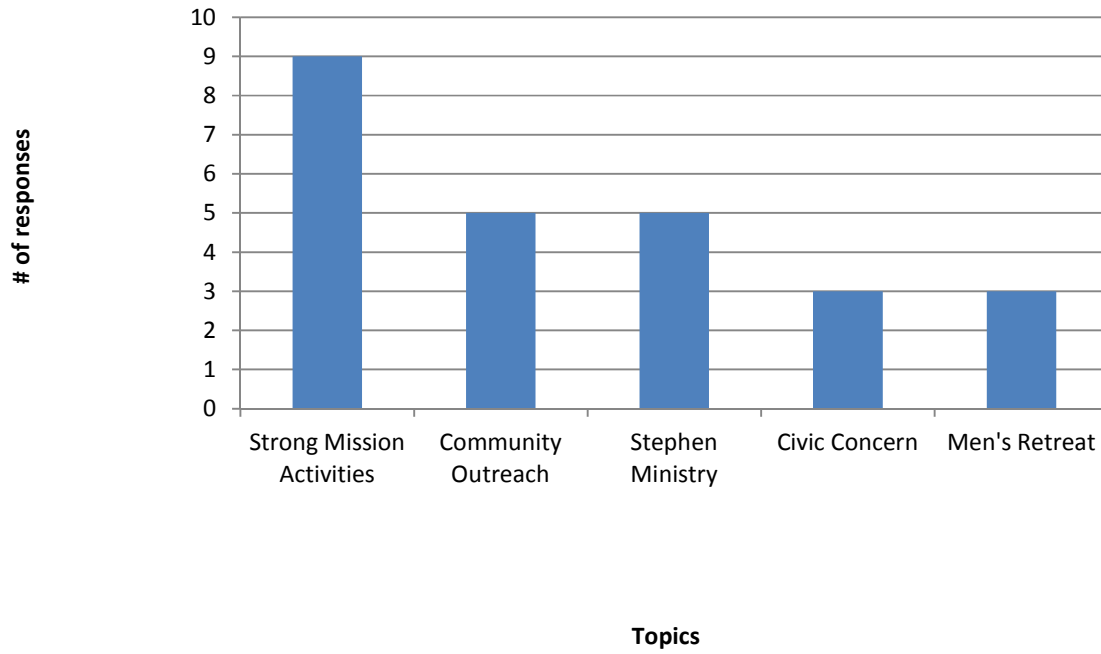
### Q1 - Operations



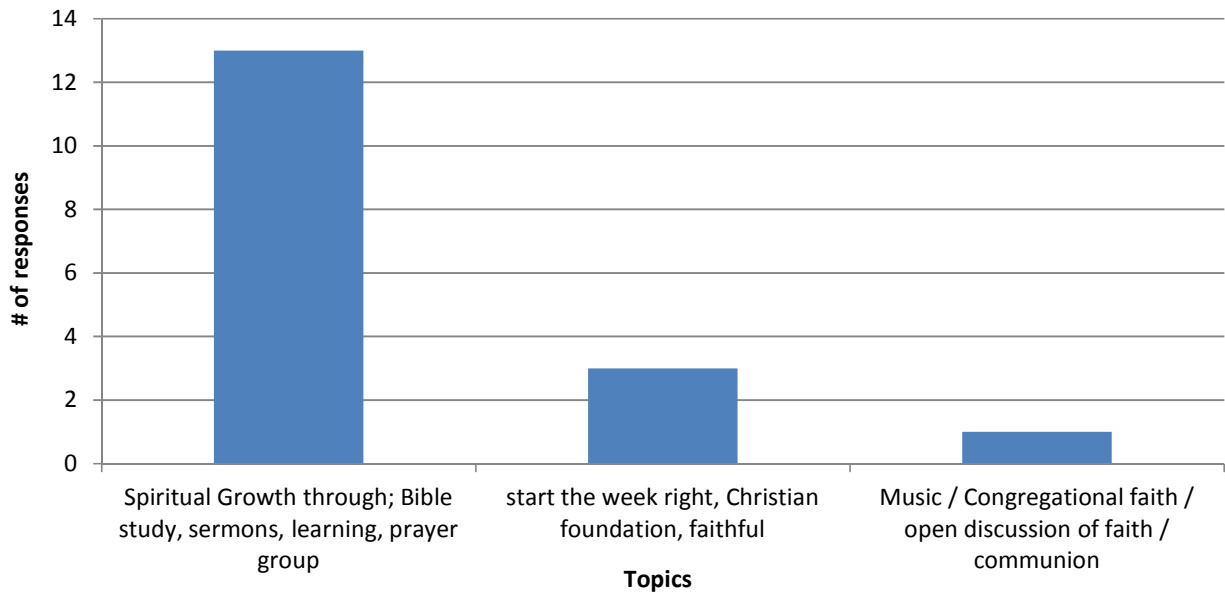
## Q2: What do you value most about our church?



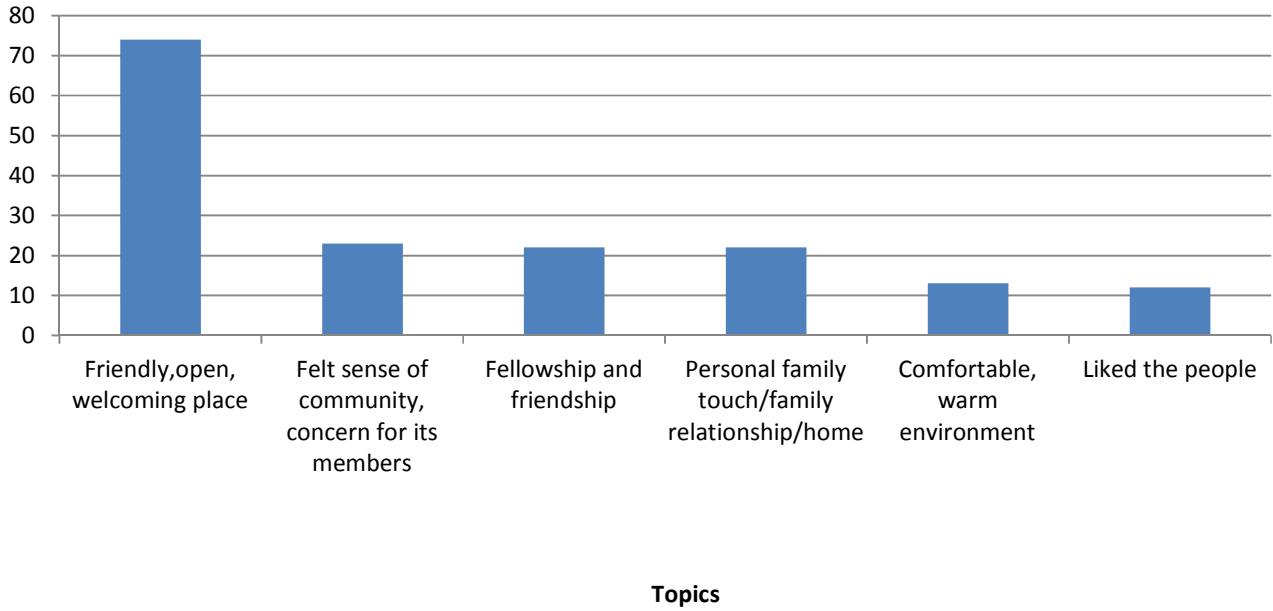
## Q2 - Compassion



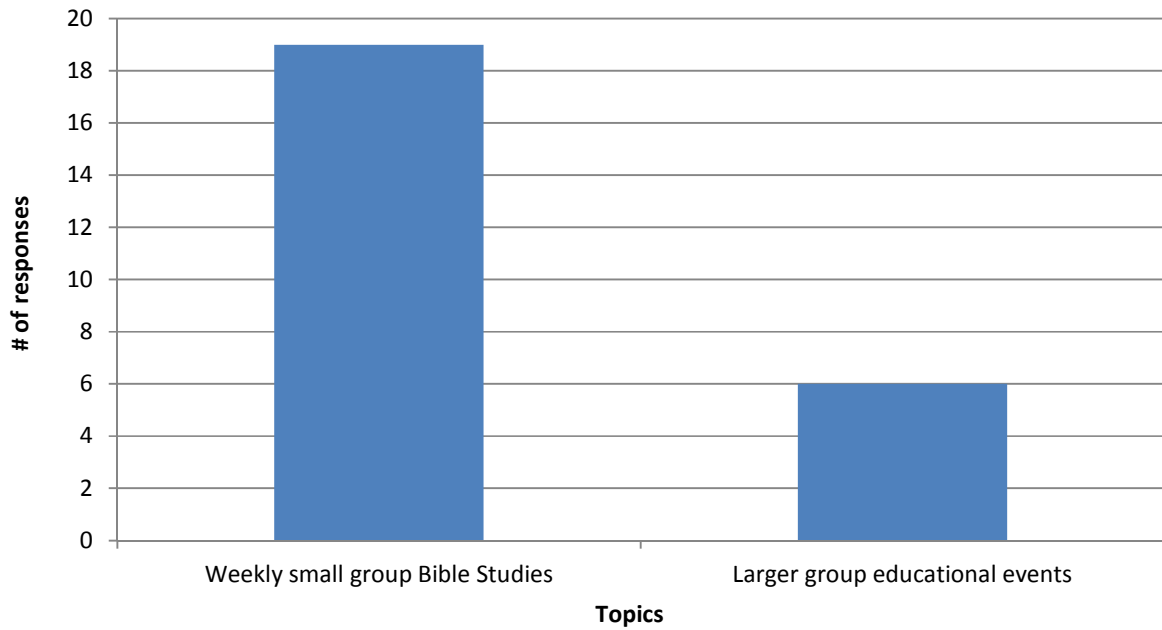
## Q2 - Spirituality



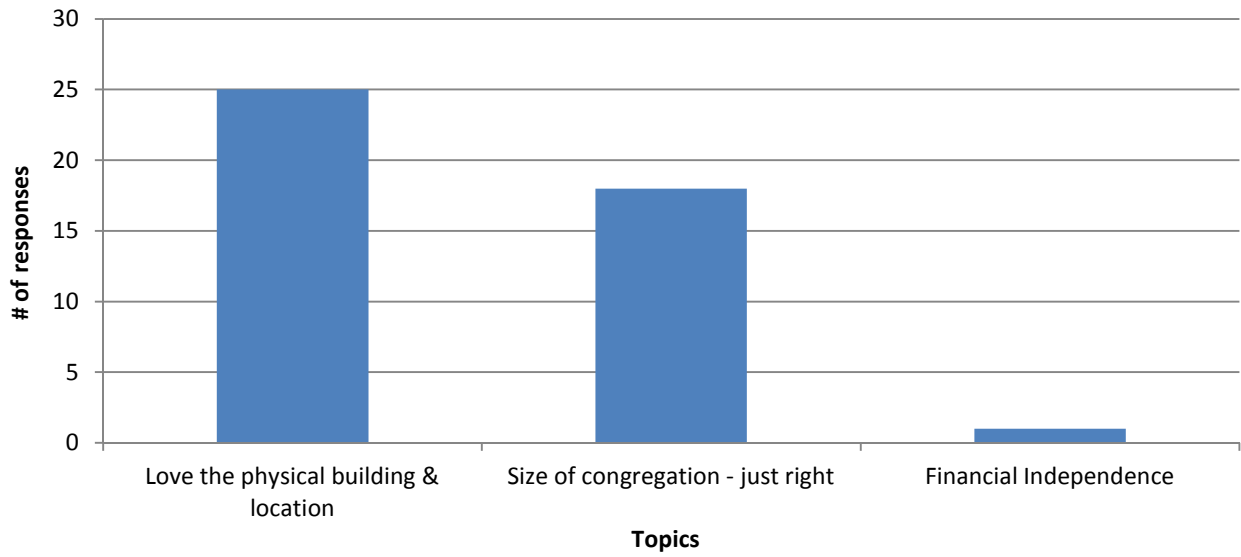
## Q2 - Community



## Q2- Adult Education

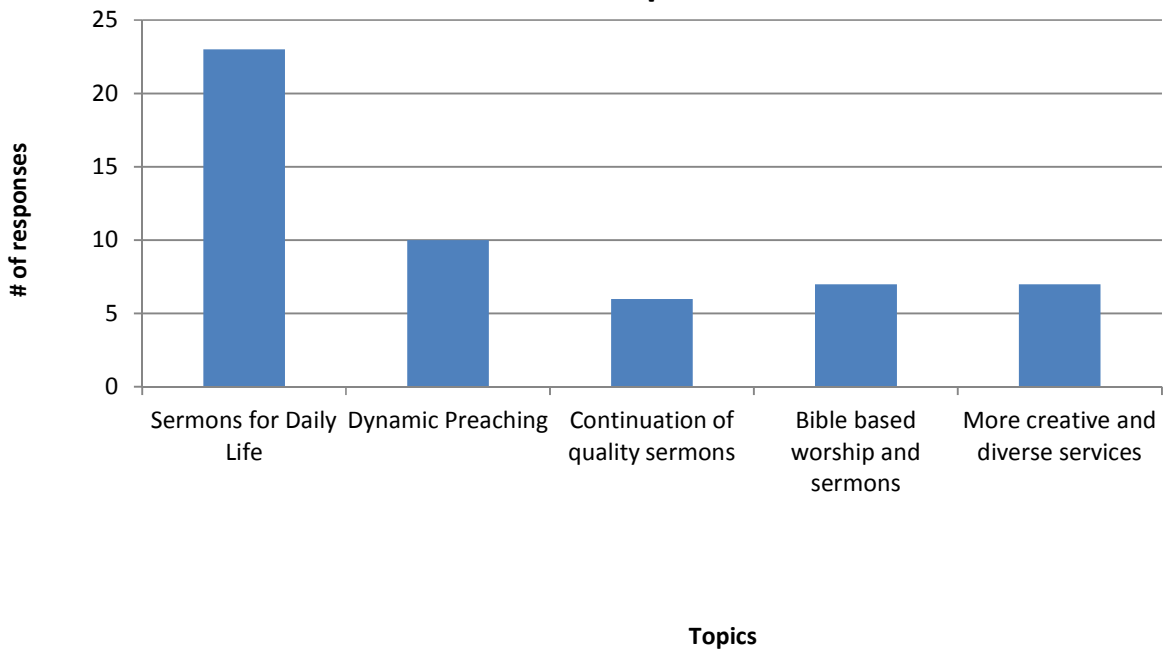


### Q2 - Operations

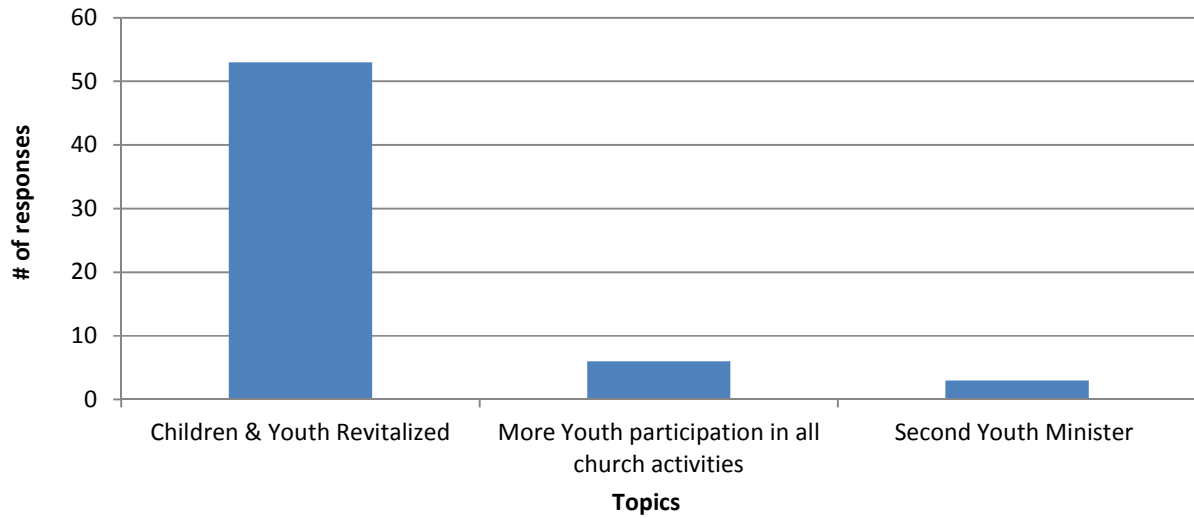


### Q3: What is your vision for the future of our church?

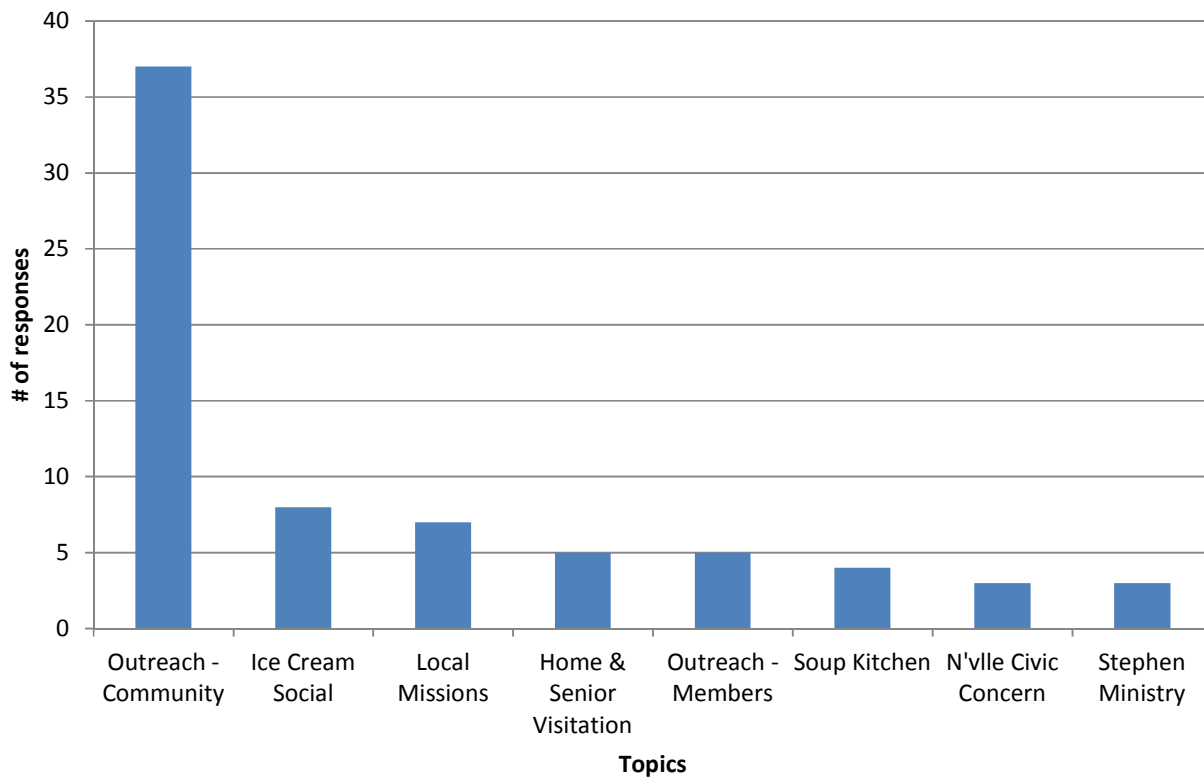
#### Q3 - Worship Services



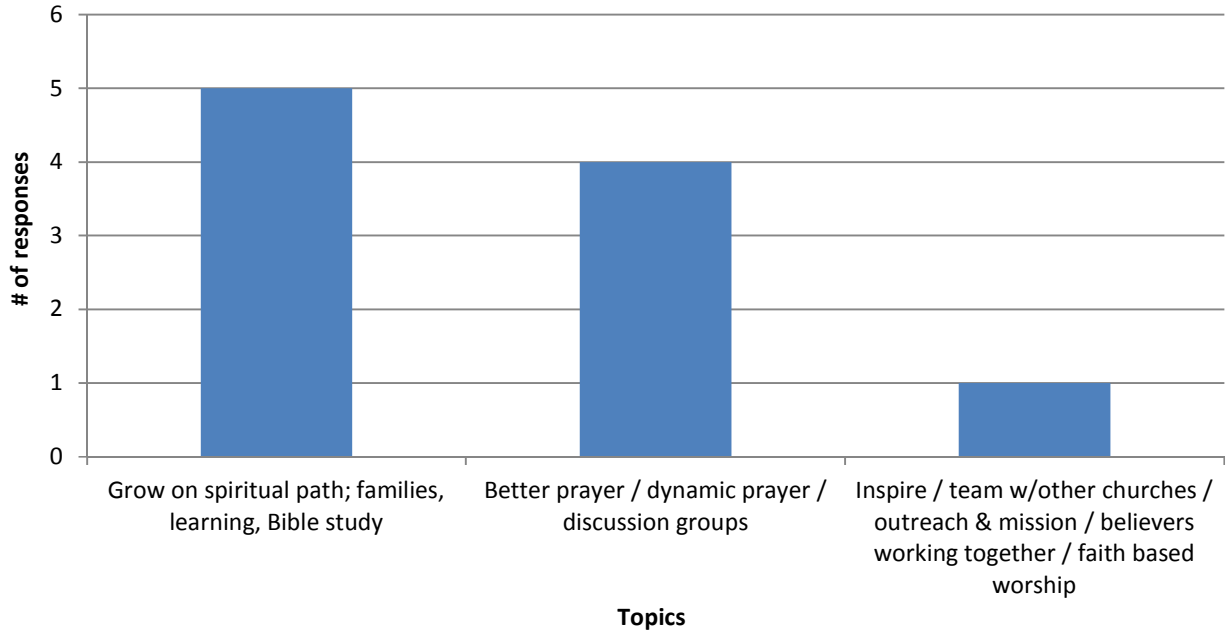
### Q3 - Children & Youth



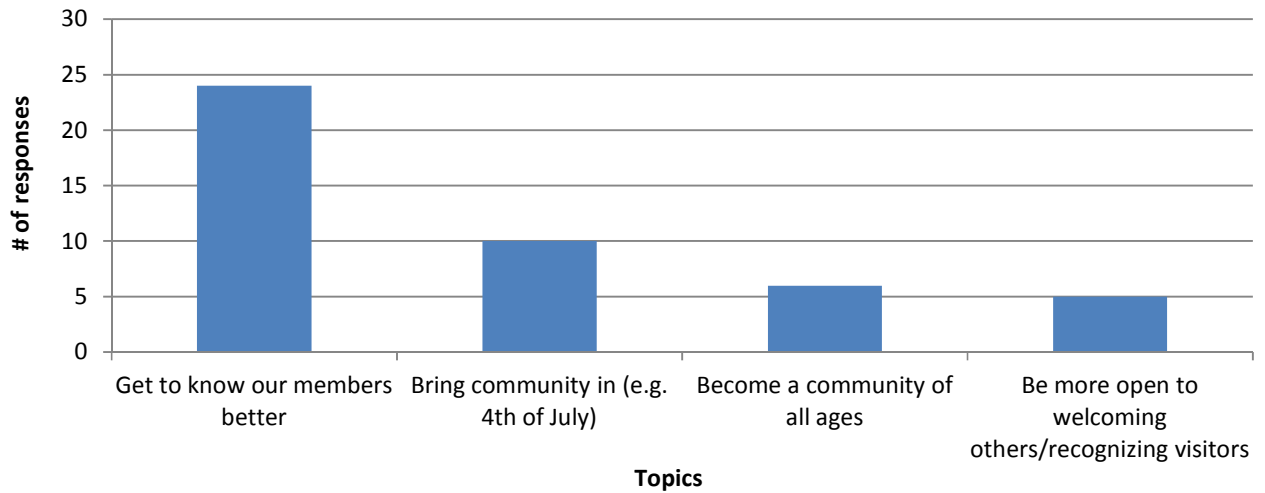
### Q3 - Compassion



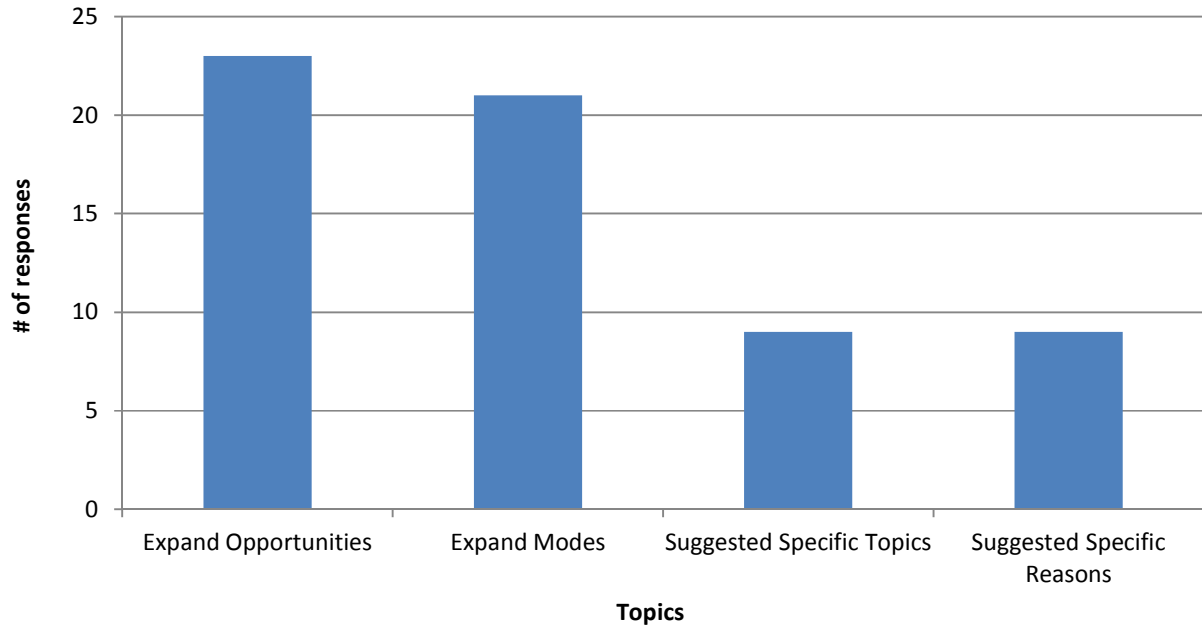
### Q3 - Spirituality



### Q3 - Community



### Q3 - Adult Education



### Q3 - Operations

