

Report on Exit Interviews with Pastors

Summarized by Diane Shallue with input from the Interview Team and Pastor Peter Hanson

Exit Interviews were held on:

October 19, 2021 for Pastor John Schwehn

November 1, 2021 for Pastor Peter Hanson

Interview team consisted of:

Deacon Krista Lind of the Saint Paul Synod Office, Mark Chace, Jill Loegering, Gordie Olson, Diane Shallue, and Paul Wilde-L'Heureux.

The team appreciated the honest feedback from the two pastors. We asked them about the accomplishments for which they were proud, about the surprises they experienced when they began their ministry at CtK and the challenges they faced. The pastors were proud of many things, some of which were creation of the bread oven, youth trips, pastoral care, recruitment of a great staff, and planning meaningful worship services.

The following insights were offered as constructive criticism:

1. CtK is in the midst of a generational shift which began before Pastor Peter's call.
2. There is a lot of looking back by members at a supposed "golden age" at CtK. It makes it difficult to do ministry in the here and now.
3. Both pastors talked about the reliance of members on the staff to do the ministry which was a heavy burden for them. CtK is in a strange place in regard to size. Is it a midsized large congregation or a larger mid-sized congregation? How are decisions made? Who makes decisions? What are the resources available? Who allocates them? Is this a staff-driven or a lay-driven congregation? The Congregation in its founding was very lay driven but as it grew moved into a more staff-driven model. But now there are not the financial resources nor the staff to support a staff-driven model. So how do we move back into a more lay-driven model of ministry?
4. Pastor Peter was surprised by the heavy administrative load placed on the lead pastor at the start of his ministry, based on documents and conversations in his interview process.
5. One challenge for lead pastor was a number of anonymous letters of criticism were sent over the years. In addition to the hurtful tone of many of these letters, there was no obvious way to respond to the concerns nor to the person who was upset by them.
6. Both pastors discussed the challenge of finding ways to strengthen the relationship between the Cristo Rey Congregation and the CtK members.
7. Consumer orientation of the congregation was challenging. People became upset when they felt that their personal preferences in worship were not met or listened to. Pastors are not called to serve the congregation but to serve God through a congregation. A solution might be a stronger emphasis on spiritual growth and less emphasis on programs.

8. We ended the discussion with a question about pastoral models at CtK. Should we stay with lead /associate pastor model or move to a co-pastor model? Positive and negative aspects of each model was shared but there was no consensus on this issue.

In conclusion, I would like to offer a biblical story from John chapter 21. The disciples went fishing. All night they fished and caught nothing. Just after daybreak, they see a guy on the beach. Like all curious on-lookers, he asked if they caught any fish. They said, "No," and he said to them, "Try throwing your net on the other side of the boat." Can you imagine this scene? Some of the disciples were expert fisherman, doing it for a living before Jesus came along. Here is a stranger on the beach telling them how to do their job. My dad was a much more experienced fisherman than me. I would have never told him where to cast his line! But the disciples give it a try and end up catching so many fish they could not haul in the net. Then one of the disciples realizes that it is Jesus on the beach.

I wonder if we at Christ the King, need to throw our net out on the other side of the boat. We can be discouraged by declining worship attendance and members who are leaving but Jesus still is there watching us and telling us to not give up fishing. So let's read these insights prayerfully and think about what we can do differently in the future. There just might be a huge catch of fish just waiting for us.