

2024 Listening & Reflection Process Final Report - January 2025

Introduction

In the summer of 2024, as Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church prepared for a leadership transition and search for a new co-pastor, the Session appointed a Transition Team to lead a process of congregational listening, reflection and discernment. The goal of this work was to carefully assess where the church is today, what are our areas of strength and our areas for continued growth and evolution and what do we want for our church moving forward. The findings of this work are intended to support programming and operations today and inform the work of the Co-Pastor Nominating Committee (CPNC).

Methodology

Montview Church hired [Holy Cow! Consulting](#), a data-driven, mission-aligned consulting firm that works with organizations, including churches and faith organizations, to use an evidence-based discernment process to support vital, healthy organizations. At their direction, we implemented a two-part process to engage and gather input from the Montview congregation.

- *Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT) Survey*

The CAT survey is a customizable assessment instrument that HolyCow! has used with more than 6,000 congregations, including approximately 2,900 congregations in the last six years, allowing them to benchmark data and provide comparative analysis. Montview's version of the CAT was approximately 100 questions, mostly multiple choice, and took most people between 15 and 20 minutes to complete. The Transition Team worked with Holy Cow! to customize the CAT in early August and released the survey to the congregation on August 25, 2024. It was open through September 30, approximately five weeks. The primary mode of response was online; however, paper copies were made available upon request (for in-person pick up or mailing) and mailed to select Montview households where we assumed that digital participation could be more difficult. The opportunity to participate in the CAT was promoted through the This Week @ Montview email, bulletin announcements, a mailing to Montview members and reminders from the pulpit. Additionally, the Transition Team was present in the Commons and the Heritage Center on two Sunday mornings during the five-week period with computers set up and hard copies available for people who wanted to complete the survey in real time. The survey was open to members and attenders. In total, we received 380 responses. This reflects approximately 23 percent of Montview members.

- *Listening Sessions*

In addition, Holy Cow! facilitated three listening sessions in early November. Two were held in-person, at the Church, and one was held online. The listening sessions were intended to allow members and attenders to explore topics covered in the survey in more detail and offer more nuanced and detailed feedback in a real-time, interactive format. The listening sessions were open to lay leadership of the Church, but not staff. These listening sessions were promoted through the This Week @ Montview email, bulletin announcements and reminders from the pulpit. About 40 people participated across the three sessions.

The Transition Team, Session and Co-Pastor Nominating Committee received more detailed analysis and reports from Holy Cow! following each phase of this work. This summary memo has been created to share with a broader audience.

Major Findings

- 1. Montview is a healthy and vibrant church in a strong position to continue growing and deepening our impact.**

People at Montview have very high degrees of energy and satisfaction with our church – both in absolute terms and relative to other congregations with which Holy Cow! has worked. Respondents indicated satisfaction with Montview overall and with component elements, including our current leadership, specifically including our co-pastor, and staff. Additionally, the survey showed satisfaction with the quality, depth and breadth of our worship services, musical offerings, mission and social justice work, congregational care activities and educational programming for every age and stage of life. We have a strong sense of identity and are in a good position to attract a new co-pastor. Montview has a lot to give thanks for and be proud of!

- 2. Montview exhibits an intellectual, progressive theology and is very adaptable to changing circumstances.**

When we say Montview has an intellectual, progressive theology, this describes how our congregants view “the nature of the Scripture, the role of conversion in social change, and their relationship to the historic declarations of the church.” (It is not an assessment of the political leanings of the congregation.) It is worth noting that Montview is uniformly progressive and, compared with other churches that have worked with Holy Cow! Consulting, the theological diversity within our congregation is low. While there can be comfort in this alignment, we must protect against “echo chamber” effects and ensure we continue to be open to new perspectives. The flexibility assessment measures “the degree to which the church is willing to adjust in the way it goes about its ministry.” A flexible congregation, like ours, is willing to adapt to the context in which it is serving to meet either the needs of its members or those of the community, as opposed to seeing a particular style or approach as central to our identity. Churches that share these characteristics can sometimes be overly rational and risk over-thinking issues and/or trying to be everything to everyone. It is important that we remain focused on the relational and emotional aspects

of life in community and recognize that emotion can be a powerful motivator for action and investment in the life of the church. Importantly, none of these characteristics come with judgment (they're neither "good" nor "bad" characteristics) but understanding them is helpful to understanding how we function and our opportunities for growth and evolution.

3. Montview values and demonstrates steadfast commitment to social justice and mission work within our congregation, our community and our world.

Not surprisingly, our Church's strong commitment to social justice and mission work came through strongly in both the survey and the listening sessions. In the survey, Montview ranked high in our Hospitality Index, which measures the degree to which "members perceive that the congregation is engaged in offering themselves and their resources to folks who are new, different, or in need." In the listening sessions, people expressed strong appreciation for Montview's service and mission work, specifically mentioning our support for and engagement with local elementary schools, our participation in gun violence prevention work (specifically the Guns to Gardens initiative) and our long-term and sustained international mission activities. People said that this work helps them feel they are living their faith and driving change in the world. In the listening sessions, some participants expressed interest in more flexible service opportunities, specifically suggesting expanding mission work to include more short-term and family-friendly projects to help engage a wider range of congregants. Finally, several people also noted the value and importance of Montview's anti-racism work, acknowledging the courage required for the work and expressing appreciation for the commitment to it. A few people noted that, despite this work, Montview remains a predominantly white congregation. Additionally, some commented that our all-white, mostly female clergy and staff is something that the CPNC should prayerfully reflect upon and consider in the search for a new co-pastor.

4. Like any healthy organization, Montview has room for continued growth and evolution. These are not criticisms or critiques, but areas that present priorities for continued improvement. Three specific opportunities emerged through the listening process:

- a. **Fostering deeper connectivity within the large congregation** – We heard repeatedly in the survey and listening sessions that Montview is a warm and welcoming place, but with 1,600+ members and average in-person attendance on Sundays of 500 people, Montview can feel big. It can be difficult for people (members and attenders alike; both new and long-time congregants) to find their point of connection within the church and build deep and meaningful relationships. There is clear interest in and support for (a) efforts to help incorporate people into the life of the church and (b) continuing to foster connection among congregants. Offering more short-term and time-limited ("light touch") opportunities for engagement (e.g. one-off events and activities rather than on-going commitments to serve on committees or participate in multi-part events) and more small group activities – social, spiritual and service-oriented activities – were specifically identified as potential priorities. In reflecting on this feedback, it has been pointed out that Montview does offer a lot of short-term, time-limited and small group activities and programming, so part of the opportunity here may also focus on ensuring members and attenders are aware

of and feel invited to participate in all the smaller-group activities that Montview already offers, in addition to building out new and different activities.

- b. **Supporting more opportunity for contemplative and spiritual growth** – As an intellectual congregation, embracing a progressive theology, there is a risk that Montview may not be giving adequate time, attention and resources to contemplative reflection and spiritual growth. We heard some of that identified in our work this fall. Montview’s Spirituality Index score from the CAT, which measures “the degree to which members believe that their faith is central to their lives rather than peripheral or episodic,” was relatively low. Additionally, in our listening sessions, spiritual engagement was identified as a priority for some, with members and attenders seeking structured ways to grow together in faith. Expanding small group Bible studies and creating more time and space for silent prayer and meditation were both specifically suggested. Additionally, this may be something for the CPNC to prayerfully consider as they evaluate the gifts and talents of our next co-pastor.
- c. **Deepening a sense of ownership of and responsibility for the continued vibrancy of our church** – Interestingly, the Spirituality Index score (referenced above in 4b) is also relevant to financial giving to the church. In describing the index, Holy Cow! says, “the Spiritual Vitality Index relates strongly to the percent of household income that members give to the church. This would seem to confirm what Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” In looking at Montview’s financial data, we find uneven giving among members – a small number of members contribute a large portion of the church’s annual revenue, and many members make little or no financial contribution on an annual basis. This reality is an important one for our Session and Stewardship Committee to consider as they develop strategies to sustain Montview in future years.

- 5. **Clergy are very important to Montview. The congregation sees many strengths of the co-pastor model and believes it is working well for our church. People expressed confidence in our current co-pastor and eagerness to welcome a new co-pastor to our community who will complement the gifts and talents of our current clergy.**

Montview can be characterized as a “clergy-focused system” in the sense that members’ satisfaction and energy tend to be derived largely from perceptions of and relationships with clergy, more so than many other congregations who have also utilized the CAT. A strength of being a clergy-focused system is that Montview deeply cares about and holds consistent support for our clergy. At the same time, it is important to recognize that a wide range of factors, including but also beyond clergy themselves, play a role in our overall well-being as a church.

Members like the co-pastor model and recognize it as beneficial for balancing responsibilities among clergy, meeting the needs of a large congregation and managing leadership transitions. Additionally, they expressed strong confidence in our current co-

pastor. They noted that, in order to continue the success of the model, it will be important to emphasize collaboration and to hire a co-pastor who will complement the skills of and work well with current clergy and staff. Participants in the listening sessions were thoughtful in reflecting on what role the congregation can play in welcoming and supporting a new co-pastor.

We are grateful to everyone in the Montview community who participated in this work, offering their time, experiences, perspectives and constructive feedback with an open heart and generous spirit. We give thanks to God for this vibrant and strong church!

This report was authored in January 2025 and submitted to the Session and the Co-Pastor Nominating Committee by the Transition Committee:

Stephanie Williams (co-chair)

Cody Belzley (co-chair)

Michele Horn

Cory Kalanick

Soojin Kim

Paul Lingenfelter

Rob Mathes

Jamie Moyer

Leena Waite