

Grace Notes and Possibilities Data Team Summary

Project: The Grace Notes and Possibilities (GNP) team of LHUMC

Purpose: To gain a deeper understanding of LHUMC member's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pathways: The team did this work via three listening pathways: an online survey, group conversations via zoom, and reflective questions posted on social media.

Analysis: The GNP data team members reviewed the information collected via the GNP listening pathways, paying attention to themes that emerged out of participant responses. Each data team member reviewed one of the data pathways presenting a narrative summary of the learnings revealed.

Demographics: Since the team did not ask demographic questions as part of this project, there is not specific data regarding participants gender, age, race, membership tenure, etc. However, a review of participants seems to suggest that the majority were over 40, with less than 25 individuals under the age of 35 participating in the project. Voices of individuals 25 years of age and under seem to be missing from these conversations.

Summary: This summary reflects an initial look at the data collected and offers a balcony view of what might be learned by listening to the individuals who participated in this project. Reviewing the insight shared by the participants, several themes emerge. These themes are points of learning that help church leadership have a deeper understanding of what individuals are experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic, what they are grieving, what they are celebrating, and what they hope for. This short summary is supplemented by the narrative summary of each listening pathway, a list of all possibilities shared during this project, and the data collected from the survey including a summary of participant participation in current ministries. Themes are listed greatest to least amount of mentions via the three listening pathways.

Themes of Loss: as identified in the survey and social media posts, the zoom conversations did not include this question specifically.

- **Sense of Connection:** Overwhelmingly present was a deep sense of loss of connection with community, friends, and family.
- **Individual Impact:** Individuals noted several emotional, physical, and mental impacts in response to the loss experienced in the pandemic. These individual responses include: heightened sense of anxiety, fatigue, fear, grief, regret, release, and uncertainty.
- **Activities:** Individuals expressed a sense of loss around activities that they previously enjoyed and that brought them feelings of fulfillment, accomplishment, and self-worth. These include: play, singing/music, travel, work, and celebrations/milestones.
- Other themes that surfaced (less than 10 mentions):
 - Loss of in person worship, including the music and singing in community.

- Use of spiritual disciplines as helpful tools during this time of loss.
- Loss as it relates to life changes and the new reality COVID presents, including the increased care for children at home.
- Loss of gathering in physical spaces
- Loss of small group opportunities and connections.

Themes of Grace:

- **Faith Practices:** virtual worship including specific pieces of the online liturgy (words of witness, music, reading of scripture, sacraments) was the largest faith practice identified in individual's reflections. They also highlighted the importance of prayer including, the prayer wall, and the prayer garden. The ringing of the bells was identified as important to many too.
- **Small Groups:** Small groups mentioned in individual's celebrations include: the choir, church committees, virtual sunday school, virtual discussion groups, shared group experiences, and super adult book reviews.
- **Spiritual Gifts:** These responses include mentions of an increased sense of gratitude, hope, love, patience, peace, perseverance, perspective, space, stillness, and strength. Others include recognition of God's presence and gratitude for God's creation and time spent in nature.
- **Time:** Time is also a consistent source of perceived grace: time to think, time with family, time in nature, quiet time, and time to read, reflect, meditate, write, as well as time for hobbies and crafts. Many appreciated the space to slow down.
- **Community/Connection:** Several responses identified gratitude for connection to other people. Many appreciate the opportunities to stay connected via zoom, phone, and are grateful for renewed connections with individuals who no longer live in the San Antonio area. Participants gave thanks for new ways and opportunities to connect to family and friends including opportunities to celebrate and pray with others.
- Other themes that surfaced (less than 10 mentions):
 - Call to action: a few individuals expressed thanks for a new awareness of work that needs to be done in the church and in the larger community. This includes a call to pay attention to God and a call to be at work in the community and the world.
 - Technology: this includes zoom, wifi, and equipment that makes virtual worship possible.
 - Children's messages

Themes of Possibilities: There are a multitude of possibilities brainstormed through these listening pathways. Instead of identifying themes we have included a list of all possibilities mentioned. These possibilities fall into the following categories:

- communication
- Hospitality
- Opportunities to learn
- Opportunities to strengthen LHUMC community
- Outreach

- Social justice
- Spiritual practices
- Technology
- Virtual ministries
- Worship: online and hybrid
- Youth ministry

The three pathways of listening reveal several possibilities as the Laurel Heights United Methodist Church continues to discern how God is calling them to be present in the lives of their members, their neighborhood, the San Antonio community, and beyond. This insight can continue to guide LHUMC leadership and members as we continue to ask:

- What did we hear?
- What did we learn?
- What did we miss?
- What is God calling us to do next?