Presbytery of Charlotte Listening Project:
Key Findings and Emerging Themes for the Church of 2030

What we've gathered across these reports is incredibly rich, and when woven together, they tell a clear, compelling story about who the Presbytery of Charlotte is right now — and who it is being called to become as it approaches 2030.

Introduction
Over the past several months, the task force engaged congregations, pastors, and lay leaders across the Presbytery of Charlotte to listen deeply to their needs, hopes, concerns, and visions for the future. These conversations took place across diverse contexts — rural, suburban, urban, historically Black, and predominantly White congregations; large, well-resourced churches and small, vulnerable ones; churches with long histories and those navigating transition.

Across all reports, a remarkably consistent set of themes emerged. Together, they paint a picture of a presbytery that is deeply valued, yet facing significant relational, structural, and cultural challenges — and poised for Spirit-led transformation.

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1. Small and Vulnerable Congregations Need Strategic, Relational, and Practical Support
The most consistent message across all reports is that **small congregations are struggling**. Many are in survival mode, facing:

- Declining membership
- Limited staffing
- Financial pressures
- Overwhelmed lay leadership
- Difficulty accessing presbytery resources

These congregations are not necessarily asking for more staff positions, but they **do need access to strategic planning, guidance, and hands-on support**, whether through:

- Grants
- Consultants
- Shared specialists
- Peer mentoring
- Partnerships with larger churches

They also need **clear, compassionate, and honest conversations** about their future — conversations that honor their stories while helping them discern sustainable paths forward.

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2. Trust and Connection Vary Widely Across the Presbytery

A major theme is the uneven experience of the presbytery across different types of congregations:

- **Historically Black congregations** often carry memories of being overlooked or misunderstood.
- **Rural and geographically distant churches** feel forgotten by the broader presbytery, even when they appreciate staff support.
- **Urban and suburban churches** often feel well-connected but may be unaware of the isolation others experience.

Many congregations expressed gratitude for the General Presbyter and staff, whose relational presence has been meaningful. Yet there is widespread concern that **trust is fragile**, especially with leadership transitions ahead.

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3. The Presbytery's Communication Is Strong — But Not Always Useful or Accessible

Most leaders affirm that the presbytery communicates frequently and clearly through newsletters, websites, and stated meetings. However:

- Some congregations do not know what the presbytery actually does.
- Others feel overwhelmed by information but unsure how to act on it.
- Smaller churches often lack the capacity to engage fully.
- Technology gaps make online participation difficult for some rural or older congregations.

The issue is not communication volume — it is **communication connection**.

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4. Presbytery Gatherings Need to Be Redesigned for Relationship, Not Just Efficiency

This theme is especially strong.

Currently, presbytery gatherings:

- Prioritize efficiency and quick business
- Offer limited relational or educational time
- See larger churches leaving early
- Leave smaller churches longing for connection

The result is a missed opportunity for **mutual exchange**:

- Smaller churches miss access to the expertise, resources, and institutional knowledge of larger congregations.
- Larger churches miss the spiritual depth, creativity, and resilience of smaller congregations.

Recommendation: Redesign gatherings so that connection is built in, expected, and unavoidable. This may include:

- Structured conversations across church size and geography
- Peer learning cohorts
- Extended relational time
- Clear expectations for full participation from well-resourced churches

Efficiency cannot be the presbytery's primary value if it hopes to build the relational infrastructure needed for 2030.

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5. Expertise Exists Within the Presbytery — But It Is Not Mobilized

Across the presbytery, there is abundant expertise in:

- Strategic planning
- Communications
- Real estate and redevelopment
- Financial management
- Church growth and revitalization
- Mentoring and leadership development

But there is **no system** to connect congregations with these gifts.

Leaders suggested:

- A skills directory
- Peer mentoring networks
- Brokering relationships between churches with complementary needs and strengths
- Cohorts around shared challenges (property, youth ministry, stewardship, etc.)

This is one of the presbytery's greatest untapped opportunities.

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6. Staffing Models Are Adequate but Need Clarification and Strategic Alignment

Most leaders believe the current staffing structure is generally sufficient, but several refinements are needed:

- Clearer role definition for the **Associate General Presbyter**
- Consideration of adding **financial or real estate expertise** to that role
- Separating the **Office Manager** and **Stated Clerk** responsibilities
- Ensuring staff have dedicated time for essential duties
- Strengthening leadership in the **Anti-Racism initiative**, which has suffered from turnover
- Increasing staff capacity to proactively support congregations rather than responding only when crises arise

There is also a strong desire for a role dedicated to **fostering relationships between small/outlying churches and larger/central churches**.

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7. Property, Real Estate, and Housing Are Emerging Strategic Opportunities
As more congregations face decisions about property, leaders see potential for:

- Creative redevelopment
- Affordable housing initiatives
- Shared mission projects
- Better stewardship of underutilized assets

This will require **dedicated presbytery capacity** in real estate, redevelopment, and long-term planning.

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8. Congregations Differ on Whether the Presbytery Should Speak Prophetically
There is no consensus on the presbytery's public voice:

- Some want bold advocacy and public witness
- Others prefer a centrist, non-directive posture
- Some pastors would welcome presbytery statements to help them navigate difficult conversations locally
- Others fear that prophetic statements could fracture trust

Given the presbytery's need to build relational capital, many leaders believe **restraint may be the most faithful posture**.

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9. The Presbytery Is Valued — and Congregations Want More of It, Not Less
Across all reports, congregations consistently expressed appreciation for:

- The Commission on Ministry
- The Commission on Preparation for Ministry
- Training for clerks, treasurers, and ruling elders
- Crisis support and pastoral care
- Legal and governance guidance

They do not want a smaller presbytery.
They want a **more relational, connective, and collaborative presbytery**.

Conclusion: A Presbytery Being Reshaped for 2030
The Presbytery of Charlotte is being called to become **a relational, connective, and collaborative body** that:

- Honors theological and cultural diversity
- Supports vulnerable congregations with compassion and clarity
- Mobilizes the gifts already present within its churches
- Designs gatherings and structures that foster mutuality
- Builds trust across geography, race, size, and history
- Prepares for a future where property, staffing, and mission look different
- Cultivates leaders who are capable, caring, and attentive to the whole body

The congregations of the presbytery do not want less connection — they want **deeper, more meaningful, more mutual connection**.

They want a presbytery that helps them know and be known, support and be supported, teach and be taught, give and receive — a presbytery that forms all of us more fully into the body of Christ.