

## Netherwood 2010: Often comfortable—but something is lacking.

We find comfort in many things: our historical stability, attendance numbers, financial soundness and absence of deep conflicts. Our multiple **family** ties and long-standing friendships give great comfort to those who share in them. Many work hard at long standing ministries and activities --from youth to seniors, from camp to Tuesday school, from nursery to **missions**--and we find comfort in participating and in doing good. We pray for each other in many ways and comfort each other in our sorrows. Our Sunday **worship** is comfortable and comforting for many of us (though not all!). We rejoice when Christians new to the area, or those from other local churches, join with us. We rejoice in the friendly buzz of conversation that fills our auditorium before and after our meetings. In many ways, we are a comfortable, and comforted, community.

BUT—we know that comfort is not the real purpose of Christ's Church. And when we talk about our future, we feel important things are missing, and we search for ways to fill the voids.

We see the damage the world is doing to us. Our neighbors are increasingly ignorant of, or hostile to, Christianity. Our brothers and sisters get ensnared by things like marital and family strife, addiction, debt, gambling, and sexual temptation. When we try to help, too often we know too late and have too little to offer. We want to know better how to protect and to heal.

We feel something is missing in our Christian commitment. Some call it **discipleship**, some **involvement**, others **welcoming**, but it's the same thing. We want to be more than a Sunday morning church. We want to be a community of believers living Christ-centered lives. We want to be responsible, accountable, and have clear expectations to live up to in our Christianity. We want to overcome the things that get in our way: the pace and fragmentation of our lives and our over-commitment in the world. We want focus and achievement in growing together in Christ-likeness. We do a lot of activities, but we wonder—do they help us change who we are, and help us be what we are trying to become?

We want to encourage each other in our faith. We want deep Christ-centered relationships. We want true involvement in each other's lives-- social time, meeting each other's needs, confession, and accountability. We want friends who call when we aren't there, who know when we are hurting or need help, who offer kind words or tough love as we need it. We want more than a veneer of friendliness—in fact the veneer seems to impede us from knowing each other deeply.

As we struggle with what we lack, it is easy to decide that the problem lies with somebody else. Ministry leaders say they can't find helpers, and potential helpers say they aren't encouraged to help. Newer people say they can't penetrate the "Old Netherwood" network, but long-time members are also hungering for deeper relationships. Some point to specific processes we do poorly, others ask for clearer direction from their leaders, or better-defined ways to get involved or develop themselves.

We are concerned that we don't grow and we don't **convert** new Christians. We lack confidence that our lives and our worship will appeal to the lost. We want to do better, and we have many ideas, but we don't see a clear way to proceed. By and large, we like each other. And we like the things we have done, and do together. But we feel we are lacking in some fundamental things, and we want a shared sense of how to do them better.