

# Congregational Norms

A fun and interesting workshop designed to help Niles Congregational Church and First Christian Church identify their “norms” was held on Saturday, May 3, at Niles Church. Norms, Pastor Joe explained, can be thought of as those unwritten rules about how things work in a church or any group of people.

The workshop started with some worship and a warm-up exercise. Pairs of people shared how they would complete the sentence, “The one custom of this congregation that I’ve never quite gotten used to is ...”

After a more formal presentation on “norms,” the group brainstormed areas of church life that might be mined to identify norms. These included children, men/women, conflict, money, treatment of clergy, newcomers, worship, outreach, music, use of the building, who is welcome here, and expectations of “real” members.

Then the members of each congregation divided into small groups. Each small group took two or three areas of church life and started listing norms they could identify in that area. These lists were then shared with the whole large group. In at least one case, a small group from Niles identified norms that are contradictory: “Children are welcome to be themselves in worship” and “Disruptive, noisy children should go to the nursery.”

Finally, each participant was given six dots and members voted for which six norms they thought were most important in the life of their congregation. Through this process, several norms were clearly identified as most important (see sidebar).

The Discernment Team hopes that by comparing these norms, our congregations will get a better idea about the feasibility of merging congregations.

## Top Norms Identified

### ***Niles Congregational Church***

- Our ministry is more than one pastor can handle alone
- We are an open and affirming church, so everyone is welcome
- “Real” members attend worship regularly
- We help those in need (usually through or with other organizations)
- Children should be a part of worship – to help them learn how to be a part of worship
- Power is dynamically shared between the pastor and the council
- Music is a very important, significant, integral part of worship
- We celebrate church life by including announcements in worship

### ***First Christian Church***

- Everyone and their brother (and sister) is welcome
- “Real” members make and follow through on commitments
- We are an older congregation and we don’t have enough energy
- We have “behind the scenes” de facto leadership
- We are secretive about financial matters
- Don’t expect giving to cover monthly expenses
- We share our building with other support groups

# NORMS WORKSHOP

## Raw Data

The following are the norms identified by the small groups from each congregation. The numbers next to the norms are the number of dot “votes” each one got. The norms in red received the most dot “votes.”

### Niles Congregational Church

#### Who is welcome here?

- **We are an open and affirming church, so everyone is welcome (10)**
- We have an inner circle and you have to work to penetrate it (0)
- Coffee Hour focus is typically board business or family related (0)
- The diversity of our congregation does not reflect our ONA commitment (2)

#### Expectations of “real” members

- Participation on Boards (0)
- Teaching Sunday School (Nursery) (0)
- **Regular attendance (7)**
- Length of membership (0)
- Choir is route to real member (0)
- Family status (connections) is route to real member (0)
- Pledging (1)

#### Outreach involvement

- Committed to community involvement (2)
- Being generous with time and money (3)
- Being generous with building (1)
- Value childcare (51% low income) (2)
- **Expect to help those in need. (Tri-City HC & Vol., SAVE, W.Relief) (19)**
- Open to new members (marketing) (2)
- Not good at evangelism (4)

### First Christian Church

#### Who is welcome here?

- **Every one and their brother (and sister) (4)**

#### Expectations of “real” members

- **Real members make and follow through on commitments (4)**

#### Outreach involvement

- Able people are taxed to the limit (limited people power) (2)

## Niles Congregational Church

### Children/Youth

- Little children welcome to be themselves in worship (0)
- Young / infants –who made loud noises or cry during the service –find disruptive (2)
- Youth groups –be visible to the congregation (1)
- Time with the Children (1)
- **Children in church during service – to help them learn how to be apart of the service (7)**
- Sport is more important than church (0)
- Staffed nursery (2)

### Conflict

- It's normal (1)
- Everyone wants to know all (0)
- Some become silent instead of voicing a public opinion (hurt feelings) (2)
- Small groups talk with in themselves (1)
- Everyone expects to have input (4)
- People want to help (4)
- The church has/will survive (3)

### Power structure

- Music Director has significant influence over worship style (0)
- Core members are relied upon for specific needs (5)
- Anybody can be a core member (0)
- **Dynamic power sharing between pastor and the council (14)**
- To be involved, one needs to speak up (0)
- Dissenting voices are welcome (1)
- Tendency to form cliques for good / bad (5)
- Will seek outside help from Conference if needed (0)
- Follow policies (0)

## First Christian Church

### Children/Youth

- Don't have many (1)
- Insufficient personnel and time to work on program (0)
- **Age of members –lack of energy (3)**
- Lack children norms (0)

### Conflict

- Some people unwilling to change (2)
- If conflict then stall the issue (0)
- Don't say publicly what they think (2)

### Power structure

- **Behind the scenes “de facto” leadership (3)**

## Niles Congregational Church

### Music

- **Music is very important and a significant, integral part of worship (choir, organ and organist, choir is voluntary) (23)**
- Special music (cantada, summer contribution) is expected **(0)**

### Worship

- Components are same, but order may change (passing of peace, prayer concerns...) **(2)**
- Communion –children included **(1)**
- Special services, special music **(0)**
- Always start on time **(0)**
- Use of bell (start / end) **(3)**
- **Church life announcements included in worship (11)**
- Choir processes / recesses **(1)**
- Hand holding **(3)**

### Money

- We have a budget **(2)**
- We have a pledge system **(0)**
- We have monthly special offerings (for community, for church programs) **(0)**
- Don't talk about personal giving **(0)**
- Do receive reports and updates **(3)**

### Men/Women

- Nursery and young children taken care of by women **(0)**
- No gender specific roles, except mainly women do kitchen work and men do repair work **(4)**

### New comers

- "Welcome" announcements during service **(0)**
- No longer offered "name tags" **(0)**
- Greet them during coffee hour **(0)**

## First Christian Church

### Music

- Organ oriented
- Hymnal not screen **(1)**
- Hymn not praise **(1)**

### Worship

- Informal **(1)**
- No seasonal poster / banner **(0)**
- Same people doing same things **(2)**
- Not setting information to participants ahead of time **(0)**
- Lengthy sharing time **(0)**

### Money

- Be frugal **(1)**
- **Be secretive about what we have (4)**
- **Expectation not covering monthly budget (4)**

### Men/Women

- equality as physically able **(0)**

### New comers

- Postcards **(0)**
- When to go into worship **(0)**

## Niles Congregational Church

### Use of building

- Outside use of building is allowed **(0)**
- Members use building at no charge **(0)**
- Alcoholic beverages not allowed **(0)**
- Access to kitchen during winter relief reserved for members; overall access to regular attendees / members **(0)**
- Some people prefer sanctuary and others prefer guild room **(1)**
- Ford Hall is considered the fellowship hall **(4)**
- Use of building by outside parties for fee **(0)**
- Church functions take precedence over outside party usage **(0)**
- Building use is controlled by Board of Trustees **(0)**

### Fellowship

- Coffee hour is expected every Sunday **(4)**
- Coffee hour can be uncomfortable for visitors **(0)**
- Only a few members help make visitors welcome **(0)**
- Try to identify visitors during worship **(0)**
- "Purple pew pad" and badges **(0)**
- Opportunities exist to extend fellowship outside worship **(0)**
- Outside a select group it is not normal for 1-on-1 personal visits **(2)**

### Treatment of Clergy

- Respect days off unless absolute emergency **(0)**
- Treat with respect **(3)**
- Compensate justly **(0)**
- **Our ministry is more than one pastor can handle alone (7)**

## First Christian Church

### Use of building

- Share with other congregations **(2)**
- **Share with other support groups (5)**
- Polling place **(0)**
- Member's use **(0)**
- Contract to people / group with guidelines /charges **(0)**

### Fellowship

- Work to keep new people welcome **(0)**
- Occasional potluck **(0)**
- Invite all women to DWF **(0)**