

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church—Survey on Vision

Jennifer M. McClure

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INTRODUCTION

Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires. In early March 2014, 112 questionnaires and return envelopes were mailed to all adult members of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church. By April 13, 2014 (Palm Sunday), 60 questionnaires had been returned, for a response rate of 54%.

BASIC RESULTS

In this section, I provide basic descriptions of how people responded to each question. I split these descriptions into four sections: characteristics of respondents; involvement in HTOC; what respondents value about HTOC; God's will for HTOC.

Characteristics of the Respondents

This section presents a number of findings related to basic demographic characteristics, like age, gender, and marital status. It also examines survey questions related to transportation to HTOC and parking at HTOC.

First, let's start with the basic demographic characteristics:

- **Age:** Seventeen percent of respondents are 18-30, 32% are 31-45, 30% are 46-60, and 22% are 61 or older.
- **Gender:** Forty-seven percent of respondents are male, and 53% are female. Having more female respondents reflects two common trends that social scientists have observed: (1) women are more likely to be involved in religious communities; (2) women are also more likely to participate in surveys.
- **Penn State students:** Ninety percent of respondents are not Penn State students, 7% are undergraduates, and 3% are graduate students.
- **Marital status:** Fifteen percent of respondents are single, 78% are married, 3% are widowed, and 3% are divorced or separated. Note: Of the respondents who are married, 80% have spouses who also participated in the survey.
- **Children:** Respondents reported between 0 and 5 children age 17 or younger who live at home. The average respondent has one child, but the most common response is having no children.

These numbers suggest that a wide range of members participated in the survey. Older, younger, and middle-aged members participated, as did both men and women. It is also encouraging to see that the survey includes both PSU students and non-PSU students, both married and non-married people, and both people who have kids and people who do not have kids. This ensures that specific demographic groups are not having too much influence on the results.

Now let's examine the findings concerning transportation and parking.

- **Travel time:** On average, it takes respondents 11-15 minutes to get to HTOC. Ten percent of respondents can get to HTOC in 5 minutes or less, while getting to HTOC takes more than 15 minutes for about 30% of respondents.
- **Transportation:** Over 85% of respondents use only one mode of transportation to get to HTOC, and less than 15% use two or more modes of transportation. The most common mode of transportation is driving one's car (95% do so), followed by getting a ride from someone else (10%), walking (8%), and biking (5%). Of the respondents who do not drive to HTOC, none have a car that they can drive. Of these three respondents, two get a ride to HTOC, and one person walks.
- **Parking:** For this question, a number of people selected multiple answers. The most common parking location is Sparks St. (52%), followed by the church parking lot (40%), the ACS parking lot (26%), an adjacent street (19%), or another spot, like the former Montessori School (7%).

Again, it is helpful that there is variation in how far people have to travel to HTOC, what modes of transportation they use, and where they park. This helps us to ensure that the results are not too heavily weighted toward people who live close to the church or to people who use a certain mode of transportation.

Involvement in HTOC

Having examined different demographic characteristics and transportation/parking, let's move on to involvement in HTOC.

- **Membership:** Over 90% of respondents report that they are members; one person, however, says that he or she is not a member, and three respondents do not know whether they are members. These results are very interesting because we only sent questionnaires to adult members. They suggest that, while the vast majority of respondents know that they are HTOC members, a few members may be unaware or uncertain that they are members.
- **How long respondents have attended HTOC:** A quarter of respondents have attended HTOC for 5 years or less. Twenty-eight percent have attended for 6-10 years, 19% have attended for 11-15 years, 12% have attended for 16-20 years, and 15% have attended for 21+ years. Overall, about half of the respondents have attended HTOC for 10 years or less, and half have attended for over 10 years. Since HTOC is a growing church, it is good that the results contain information from people who have been involved in HTOC for a while and from people who have come to the church more recently.
- **How often respondents attend services at HTOC:** Over a third of respondents (37%) attend services at HTOC more than once a week, 46% attend services usually every week, 15% attend between one and three times a month, and 3% attend less than once a month. Overall, about 80% of respondents attend services usually once a week or more.

While it is important to note that some people say that they attend services more often than they actually do, it is also helpful to know that the data have been mainly provided by people who regularly attend services at HTOC.

- **How long respondents have been Orthodox:** Ten percent of respondents have been Orthodox for 5 years or less, 13% have been Orthodox for 6-10 years, and 13% have been Orthodox for 11-15 years. Eight percent have been Orthodox for 16-20 years, and 55% have been Orthodox for 21 or more years. Again, it is nice to see that there are respondents who are newer to Orthodoxy and respondents who have been Orthodox for multiple decades.

In summary, the survey has a good mixture of people who have attended HTOC for a long time and people who started to attend more recently, and it also has a good mixture of people who are new to Orthodoxy and people who have been Orthodox for a while. The results are heavily swayed toward people who attend services regularly, but that is good. We want to base decisions about the future on regular attenders, not on people who only attend once or twice a year.

Next, let's look at different ways in which HTOC communicates with members.

- **Trisagion newsletters:** Sixty-eight percent of respondents read the Trisagion Newsletter every month, and 12% read it most months. Five percent read it some months, seven percent read it rarely, and seven percent never read it. One respondent does not receive this newsletter. Overall, 80% of the respondents read the Trisagion Newsletter most months or every month, and 14% read it rarely or never.
- **“This Week at Holy Trinity” emails:** Forty-eight percent of respondents read HTOC's weekly emails every week, 18% read them most weeks, and 13% read them some weeks. Ten percent read them rarely, and 5% never read them. Three respondents do not receive these emails. Overall, almost 70% the respondents read these emails every week or most weeks, and 15% read them rarely or never.
- **HTOC's website:** Twelve percent of respondents visit HTOC's website at least once a week, 5% visit it most weeks, and 32% visit it some weeks. Forty percent rarely visit it, and 10% never visit it. One respondent was not aware that Holy Trinity has a website. Overall, less than 20% of respondents visit HTOC's website every week or most weeks, and 50% rarely or never visit it. [Note: This is not because older people are less likely to look at the website. Within each of the age categories, some respondents frequently visit the website, and other respondents visit the website rarely or never.]

It is encouraging that the majority of respondents read the Trisagion newsletters and the weekly emails at least most of the time. It is concerning, however, that few respondents visit the website frequently. We do have a nicely designed and maintained website, so the design should draw people to the website. People may not visit the website much because they can find most of the information on the website in the Trisagion newsletters or in the weekly emails.

Let's turn to involvement in ministries at HTOC. Twenty percent of respondents are not involved in any ministries. Thirty-seven percent are involved in one or two ministries, and thirty percent are involved in three or four ministries. Thirteen percent are involved in five or more ministries. These results suggest that many people are involved in activities at HTOC. We can encourage some people to become more involved, but other people may be over-committed and at risk of burn-out. We may need to suggest to ministry leaders that they should recruit people who are not involved in many activities, not people are already involved in a number of ministries.

Here is a break down of ministries in terms of size:

- **Large ministries (15% or more of respondents):** Hosting Coffee Hour; Choir; Greeters; Men's Fellowship
- **Mid-sized ministries (6-14% of respondents):** Matthew 25; TLC-2; Housing Transition; Vacation Bible School; Altar Society; teaching Sunday School; Young Adult Fellowship; Adult Study Group; Bookstore; TLC.
- **Small ministries (5% or less of respondents):** Bridge of Hope; Cantors/Readers; Grounds Maintenance; Jr. OYA; Raising Orthodox Christian Kids; giving rides to church; Lending Library; Altar Servers; OCF; OYA.

Before moving on to what people value about HTOC, I want to focus on a question about friendships at HTOC. Scholars tend to use a variable like this to measure "social embeddedness" or how intertwined one's circle of friends is with people at his or her church. The responses are:

- I have little contact with others from HTOC outside of activities here—**14%**
- I have some close friends from HTOC, but my closest friends are not involved here—**17%**
- I have some close friends here as well as close friends who are not part of HTOC—**54%**
- Most of my close friends are part of HTOC—**15%**

Most of the respondents indicate that they have some close friends here as well as other close friends who are not part of HTOC. This is good. Too few church friends can lead to negative outcomes, but so can having too many church friends.

First of all, having too few church friends relates with being less likely to get involved in church activities, to pray and read the Scriptures at home, and to volunteer in the community. People who have less church friends are also less satisfied with their congregation. So, not having church friends can have potentially negative outcomes for individuals, congregations, and communities.

Having too many church friends can also have negative consequences. Attenders who have lots of church friends may not have many other friends that they can invite to church, and they may not have time or energy to build friendships with visitors at church. Having too many church

friends can limit church growth by shrinking the pool of friends that people can invite to church and by making it hard for new people to become integrated into the church. So, it is good that the majority of people have close friends at HTOC and close friends from outside of HTOC. We many want to reach out to people that do not have many friends here, and it may be good to encourage other people to make friends outside of church, too.

What Respondents Value about HTOC

Let's turn to what aspects of HTOC respondents value the most, starting with current values. The values are listed from the most commonly chosen values to the least commonly chosen values. The values are categorized into three groups based on the percentage of respondents who selected each value.

- **Most common values (40% or more of respondents):** Worship (91%), spirituality (55%), and fellowship (50%)
- **Moderately common values (20-39% of respondents):** Tradition (34%), programs/ministries (24%), and accessibility (21%)
- **Least common values (less than 20% of respondents):** Beauty (9%), outreach to campus (9%), stewardship (5%), and "other" responses (3%)

It is important to note that differences in percentages are only "real" or meaningful if the difference is greater than 15%. So, we can conclude that people value worship more than fellowship, but we cannot say that they value tradition more than accessibility.

Two respondents offered "other" values, including accessibility to people from diverse backgrounds, living close to the church, and the large number of children who come to church with their parents.

Next, let's examine what respondents want to value in five years:

- **Most common values (40% or more of respondents):** Worship (81%), spirituality (56%), and fellowship (44%)
- **Moderately common values (20-39% of respondents):** Programs/ministries (38%) and tradition (29%)
- **Least common values (less than 20% of respondents):** Accessibility (16%), beauty (12%), outreach to campus (11%), "other responses" (5%), and stewardship (4%)

Again, please note that differences in percentages are only "real" or meaningful if the difference is greater than 15%. We can say that people want to value spirituality more than beauty in five years, but not that people want to value fellowship more than programs/ministries in five years.

Three respondents offered "other" values, including: building a new traditional Orthodox temple with room for parking, fellowship, and education; accessible parking; rooms for programs;

accessibility to people from diverse backgrounds; the large number of children who come to church with their parents.

There are a couple of things I would like to note about values. The percentage of people who want to value programs/ministries in five years is substantially higher than the percentage of people who value it now. Also, people's current values are very similar to what they would like to value in five years.

God's Will for HTOC

Finally, let's examine the question about what God may want HTOC to have done by 2020.

- **Most common choices (40% or more of respondents):** Will have grown much larger in membership (58%) and will have paid off the mortgage (44%)
- **Moderately common choices (20-39% of respondents):** Will have built a new temple (36%), will have increased overall giving by 50% (34%), will have bought the ACS building, should it become available (25%), will have built up a sizeable building fund between \$500K and \$1M (22%), and will have bought land but not built anything yet (20%)
- **Least common choices (less than 20% of respondents):** will have added additional programs (19%) and other responses (17%)

Remember, differences in percentages are only "real" or meaningful if the difference is greater than 15%. So, we cannot conclude from this data that we should build a new temple instead of buying ACS. We can conclude, however, that people want to grow in membership more than they want to add new programs.

Other responses that regard concrete next steps include the following: starting a church plant in State College or Centre County (2 respondents); increasing parking (2 respondents); buying an existing church building (1 respondent); using creative ways to raise money (1 respondent). Additional respondents also expressed their hope for a healthy parish.

There is much more that we can learn from the data on values and God's will for 2020. Let's turn to that now.

SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSES

Most people think of Facebook or Twitter when they hear of social networks, but social network analyses more broadly examine how people or objects link together. I developed network data for the values and for the different possibilities that God may want us to pursue by 2020. The network ties should be interpreted in the following way. If $A \rightarrow B$, then about 40% or more of the people who choose A also choose B. In these analyses, I also incorporate information about respondents in order to examine which types of people are more likely to pick certain values or options.

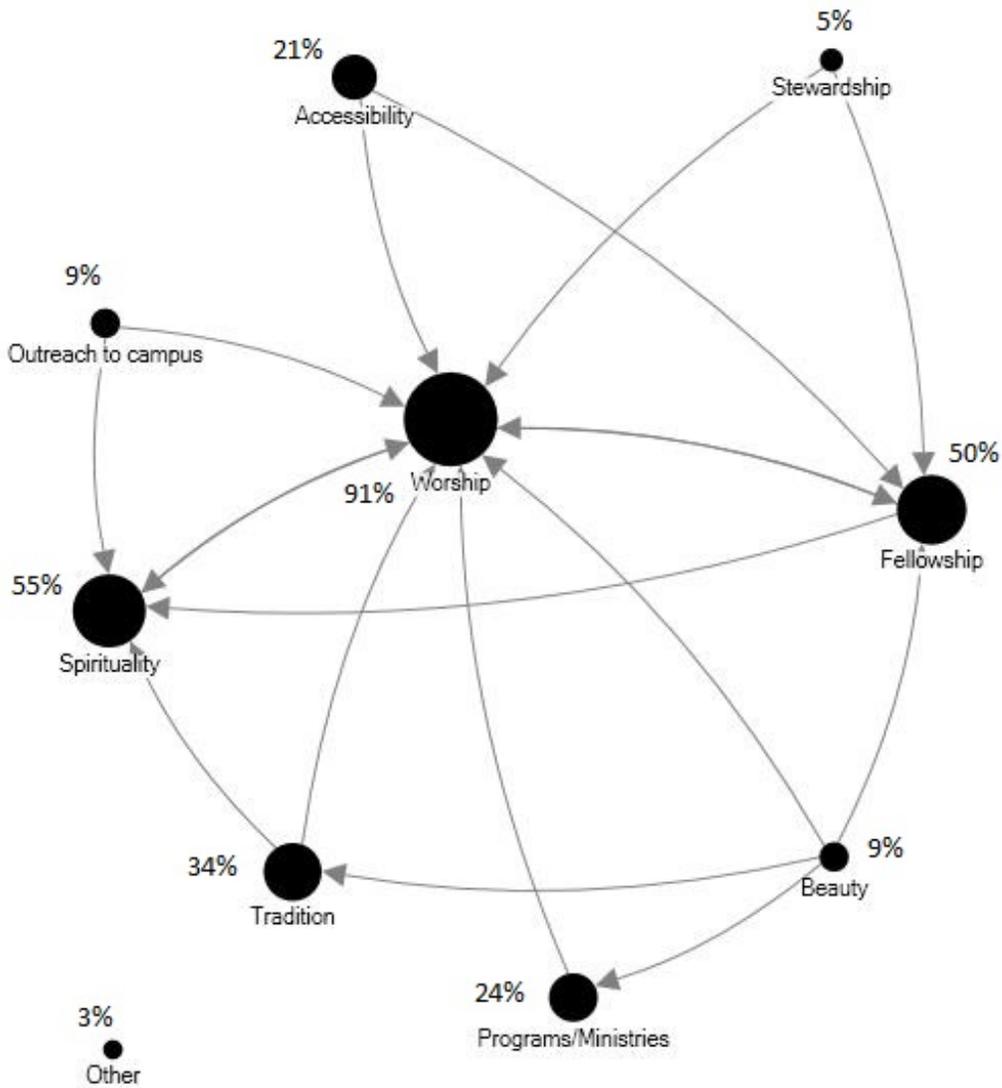
Current Values

Using the diagram in Figure 1, let's start by examining the connections among the values that respondents currently hold. Worship is a commonly selected value (commonly selected values are depicted as larger), as are spirituality and fellowship. Worship, spirituality, beauty, and fellowship are also highly interconnected with other values. In analyzing what respondents currently value, three characteristics matter: age; frequency of attending worship services; length of being Orthodox.

- **Age:** Older respondents value worship, spirituality, tradition, and accessibility more, while younger respondents value outreach to campus, stewardship, beauty, and "other" responses more.
- **Frequency of attending worship services:** More frequent attenders value outreach to campus, stewardship, and fellowship, while less frequent attenders value tradition and spirituality.
- **Length of being Orthodox:** People who have been Orthodox longer are more likely to value stewardship, accessibility, and spirituality, while people who are newer to Orthodoxy value outreach to campus, fellowship, programs/ministries, and beauty.
- **Notable others:** People who have attended HTOC for a longer time also value outreach to campus.

Figure 1: Social Network of Current Values

Current Values



Created with NodeXL (<http://nodexl.codeplex.com>)

N = 58 out of 60

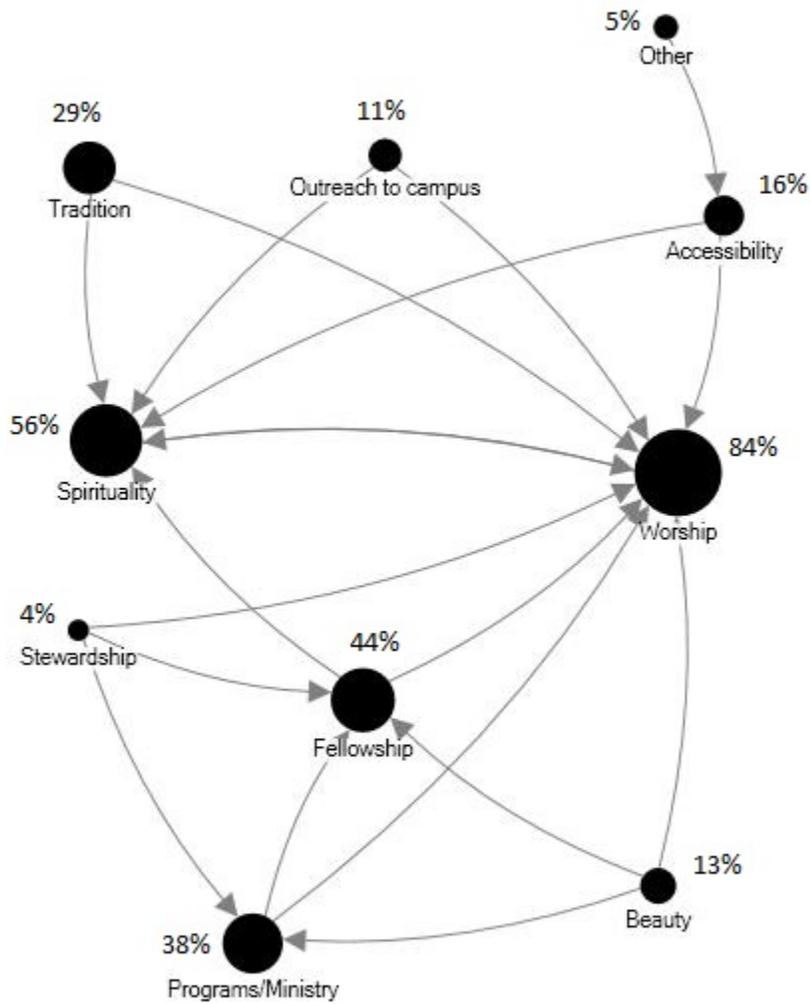
Values in Five Years

Using the diagram in Figure 2, let's examine the connections among the things that people want to value in five years. Similarly to what we saw in Figure 1, worship is a frequently chosen value, as are spirituality and fellowship. Worship, spirituality, and fellowship are also very central (inter-connected). Interestingly, programs/ministries is more interconnected with what respondents want to value in 5 years than it is with what they currently value. In analyzing what respondents want to value in five years, two characteristics matter: age and frequency of attending worship services.

- **Age:** Older respondents want to value tradition, beauty, and accessibility in five years, while younger respondents want to value outreach to campus, programs/ministries, and “other” values in five years.
- **Frequency of attending worship services:** More frequent attenders want to value outreach to campus, stewardship, and “other” values in five years, while less frequent attenders want to value tradition, beauty, and accessibility in five years.
- **Notable others:**
 - People who have attended HTOC for a longer time also want to value outreach to campus in five years.
 - People who have more friends at HTOC want to value stewardship in five years.
 - People who have not been Orthodox very long want to value programs/ministries in five years.

Figure 2: Social Network of Values in Five Years

Values in Five Years



Created with NodeXL (<http://nodexl.codeplex.com>)

N = 55 out of 60

God's Will for HTOC

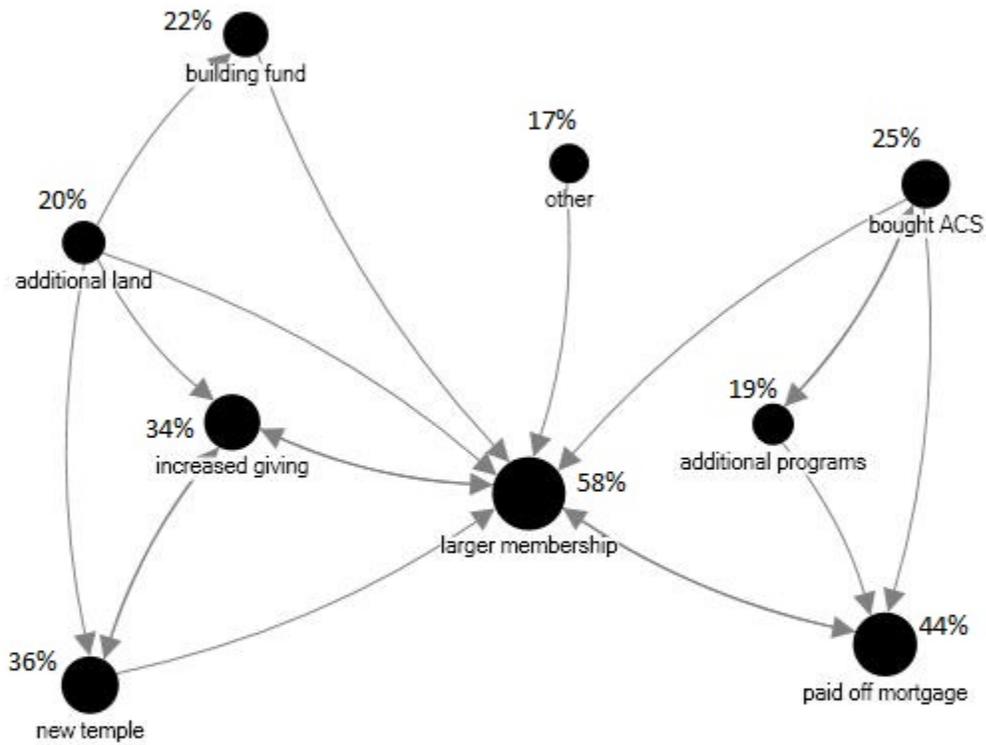
Finally, let's examine the interconnections among the responses concerning what God wants HTOC to do by 2020. Figure 3 depicts that having a larger membership and paying off the mortgage are the most frequently chosen options. Growing in membership is also the most interconnected value. This diagram also breaks into different components that are only connected through people's desire to grow in membership. Of these three components, one focuses on moving to a new location (building a new temple, increasing giving, buying land but not building yet, and developing a building fund), another focuses on staying where we are (buying ACS, adding programs, and paying off the mortgage), and the last contains only the "other" responses. In analyzing what options people would like to see HTOC pursue, five characteristics matter: age; frequency of attending worship services; length of attending HTOC; length of being Orthodox; and friendships.

- **Age:** Older respondents want to develop a building fund and buy additional land (but not build yet), while younger respondents want to increase giving, add more programs, build a new temple, and explore "other" options.
- **Frequency of attending worship services:** More frequent attenders want to grow in membership, build a new temple, buy additional land but not build yet, and increase giving, while less frequent attenders want to add programs, buy ACS, develop a building fund, and explore "other" options.
- **Length of attending HTOC:** People who have attended HTOC longer want to buy ACS, while people who have begun to attend HTOC more recently want to pay off the mortgage and build a new temple.
- **Length of being Orthodox:** People who have been Orthodox longer want to buy additional land but not build yet, buy ACS, and pursue "other" options. People who are new, however, want to build a new temple, increase giving, grow in membership, and pay off the mortgage.
- **Friendships at HTOC:** People who have more friends at HTOC want to increase giving, build a new temple, and buy additional land but not build yet. People with fewer friends want to pay off the mortgage, buy ACS, and add programs.

Differences in frequency of attendance and in friendships tend to occur between different components, or groups of options. More frequent attenders want to relocate (buy additional land and build a new temple), while less frequent attenders want to stay where we are (buy ACS and pay off the mortgage). Similarly, attenders with more friends want to relocate (again, buy additional land and build a new temple), while attenders with fewer friends want to stay where we are (buy ACS, pay off the mortgage, and add programs).

Figure 3: Social Network of God's Will for 2020

God's Will for 2020



Created with NodeXL (<http://nodexl.codeplex.com>)

N = 59 out of 60

Next steps:

As HTOC proceeds in its strategic planning, there are a number of important things to consider. People at HTOC have different values, but our value of worship unites us. We also have different opinions about what God would like us to do by 2020, but growing in membership unites most of us. While we do not necessarily need to let go of our different opinions or change our values during future discussions and transitions, it is important that we focus on the values and options that bring us together--worship and growing in membership. HTOC's final decision may not coincide with all of the values that you selected or with all of the options that you think God would like HTOC to pursue by 2020. This study indicates, however, that our future decisions must help us to enrich our worship and to grow in membership.