Hidden Valley Congregation originated in the late 1990’s as a church plant in an urban setting just outside the city limits of Chicago. The congregation was planted by a dynamic leader with a passion for making the neighborhood a better place. The congregation formed as a result of a series of community meetings to discuss an increase in youth violence, drug crimes, and vandalism in the neighborhood.

The pastor formed relationships around common concerns and then invited neighbors to become part of the solution. Over time as relationships developed, conversations occurred about life, love, concerns, and hopes for the future. In the midst of these relationships the pastor shared his story about how God had moved in his life. Through his example, love, and relational nature persons in the neighborhood experienced the gospel in powerful ways.

Inviting people to church became a natural extension of relationships. Seeds of the gospel were planted in the community as people came together out of their concern for one another. It was an exciting time as the congregation grew in a local community center. Over time a building was purchased. The congregation continued to grow to an active membership of 85 on a weekly basis. Things were going great until the pastor was transferred out of the Chicago area due to a job change.

The congregation was devastated. The pastor was behind every major initiative in the congregation. To make things worse there was no one with the charisma or leadership skills of the current pastor. A newly married couple agreed to serve as co-pastors and guided the congregation through a building expansion and then an eventual move into a nearby suburb. It was a difficult and controversial move but many felt the area around the church was no longer safe. Many members were now driving into the congregation from the suburbs.

Three years after the move the congregation declined from a high of 125 active members to 40 members (mainly over the age of 50). The congregation had a large debt on their building of $175,000. There was a general sense the members had lost their clarity around mission that originally resulted in the formation of the congregation. As they approach a business meeting there is uncertainty about who will be pastor next year.

The current pastor and his leadership team feel something needs to be done. They are considering meeting with a church growth consultant to help them put a plan of action together. It has been difficult to bring the congregation together to discuss their current situation due to the busy schedules of many. Some members feel the current pastor has done little to help the congregation address its concerns. They are frustrated that he wants to spend money to hire a consultant. They are considering a nominating committee to identify a future pastor.

You are part of the pastor leadership team and are planning a four-hour meeting next Saturday morning to consider the congregation’s future. What questions do you think are essential in guiding the conversation and discernment that needs to occur?