

COMPOSITE SUMMARY

QUESTION #4 — What metaphor or image do you have for AMC?

5 or less years

20's

30's

This was really hard for both her and her husband. The usual thoughts are a quilt or a puzzle, where all the pieces fit together but are very different.

He sees AMC like granola, full of individual characteristics and not too sweet nor too hard, but a balance of disparate elements. Christianity is not overly sweet, nor easy but neither is it overly difficult or arduous.

AMC is a deep well. it can hold a lot, it is nourishing, it is a gathering place, it is expansive, with much of it underground. From above the surface, it is a place that one wouldn't necessary assume would be that valuable, but people who have lots of "baggage" can come and be accepted and nurtured. They don't give up, despite their struggles. They keep returning and the "subterranean workings" take effect.

Something that is not linear or clearly described! There is ambiguity about who are the leaders (pastors? elders? someone else? etc.)

40's

AMC is like an anthill/mound. There is much earnest activity, it is collaborative, everyone is busy and creative and active. There is a deliberative nature that may not fit this model but is very much a characteristic of AMC. Assembly even attempts to be earnest and work hard at their humor (Carnival). There is an organic nature to AMC.

A tree that has branches and complexity above the ground, while also having roots and complexity below the ground that is unseen.

She also has the image of someone who goes spelunking on behalf of those who don't want to go into caves.

Assembly is like a mother hen with her chicks. It is a warm feeling, there is safety and caring demonstrated, but there can be lots of noise in the henhouse at times!

An amoeba is what I think of when I think of Assembly. There is chaos and it is not always well-formed, but there are many beautiful things about it that happen, often in an unprogrammed way.

50's

There is an arrogance about Assembly. We feel we've discovered how to be church better than our neighbors w/o recognizing that they may feel the same way about their decisions to be faithful. We offer love to a pretty narrow group of people in the wider society. We are not a church of extroverts.

It is a book that is being written in which one needs to read the beginning chapters to fully understand the current chapters.

60's

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Family comes to mind, but the group is too big for that image.

A powwow, with lots of people/tribes sitting in a large circle; occasionally a leader speaks.

70's+
6-10 years
20's
30's

Assembly is a 30-something who is growing into adulthood. They want to kick back and be spontaneous yet there is this growing measure of administrative work that needs to be taken care of even though we consider admin work "bad". We are not the small, young church anymore that we used to be. How do we navigate as a larger entity in the world? We aren't quite ready to settle down just yet but we want the stability that settling down offers.

The best image that comes to mind for her is that of a collage. There are different materials that go into the picture. There can be pictures and words as parts of it. Each item is unique in its own way as well as contributing to the whole. She sees Assembly as a very unique congregation. She has not experienced anything like it in her life anywhere else. Yet it all fits together and it all works!

Assembly is like a sporting event in which we are seated on crowded bleachers. We go because it is fun and we are all rooting for the same thing. Living in a "red" state there are many discussions in which the topic is not safe. This is a safe place to be authentic, where most all the "spectators" want the same thing. We are all rooting for the same team.

It is a sanctuary.

AMC is like a 12 year old Little League all star player who grew over the summer and is now so awkward in their new body that they can only play at a modest level of proficiency.

It is like people sitting on the front porch with flood waters lapping at their porch's edge but no one is doing anything. Newcomers arrive (in a boat) and observe how close the floodwaters are to entering their house, but the response is one of lack of concern because it has been a gradual phenomenon.

It is a family that has its normal quirks, with no one in particular in charge, but they come together and celebrate as family.

40's
An octopus with many tendrils going in different directions. So many people at Assembly are involved in so many different activities outside of church but much of that work grows out of their faith commitment. There is strong interest in taking care of the core (internal work) while at the same time reaching out in many different ways (environment, immigration, peace and justice, children's education, etc.) beyond the walls of the church and into the community.

Another image is growing up in a family where one feels safe and secure and thus can take some significant risks because there is a safety net.

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As an introvert, one comes into Assembly and it feels like one is shot with a fire hose of opportunities and responsibilities that one can have. This is not a contemplative, quiet place in which to center, but a boombox of raucous noise and activity.

If she were asked to answer this question 10 years ago she would have said a tree in which there is a nest that is nurturing and peaceful and accepting and quiet. Now one has to step out of the solitude of quiet space to come to church.

“Eclectic” is a word that comes to mind. There are lots of people with varied experiences, beliefs, and practices, yet we are all together. For their son it is that of the MYF going around barefoot all the time.

Maybe there are times when Assembly’s satisfaction level with themselves is higher than it should be!

Karl Shelly crossing the Potomac with a rainbow flag. The congregation may be a bit too proud of themselves, displaying some elitism and arrogance around their congregational positions.

It is a family reunion in which everyone is invited because they are a part of the family. They are strongly attached to one another but there is a large unspoken history about which we know very little. There is the weird uncle that everyone accepts and acknowledges because they are a part of the family.

Assembly is inclusive of those people who are already like us. Our insecurities bind us together and cause us to hold our positions tightly rather than lightly.

50’s

An active popcorn machine that just keeps on popping and is overflowing. There is lots of activity and it doesn’t stop.

60’s

A symphony or a garden are good metaphors for her. There are many aspects that all work together, different parts that co-exist and together form an incredible, creative and inclusive and colorful project. The symphony has a limitation in that it is usually led by a single conductor, and that is definitely not Assembly’s experience. But the collaboration and working together still fits.

Another image would be a tree that is rooted in ways unseen, but those roots very much contribute to the growth of the tree and what happens above the ground.

There are lots of moving parts in Assembly, sometimes they seem to be random or going in opposite directions.

The French impressionist Claude Monet. Up close it is difficult to make sense of all of it, but if one steps back to get a larger perspective, then the picture becomes clearer.

An orchestra with lots of instruments that make beautiful sounds, but with multiple conductors or sometimes “self-conducting”.

Perhaps Assembly resembles an elephant. It is getting bigger and can seem to be frightening to its environment. Assembly has a tendency to be a bit “judgy” and our neighbors may be

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offended or put off by that, not wanting to get too close to this elephant. We want both brilliance and blue jeans from our people. Actually elephants are really friendly with one another and other parts of their environment. They are kind and are good for the environment but sometimes misunderstood.

70's+

The centrality of the small groups which link one another to each other and the whole (not sure how to visualize that).

She sees it like a lantern. One can look at it from each of 4 sides and see a different color (like Christian, Hindu, Jew, Muslim) and see a different perspective.

Assembly is a family. There is acceptance of diversity w/o a focus on how we look, what we believe. People are not crowded in the same box. People respect one another's path/journey. If they needed support, they feel they could find it at Assembly.

Her metaphor is that of a welcoming place. She also believes that Assembly should be more intentional in having a welcoming ministry rather than having new people rotating in as greeters. This does not help (with so many different people assuming that responsibility) in quickly identifying who the newcomers are.

She gave me a copy of her image—that of a mother hen who nurtures so that she can go into the world to share God's love and tender loving care.

More than 10 years

20's

She sees Assembly as a healthy family reunion. Everyone is welcomed just as they are and where they are while always wanting everyone to be their best.

30's

A tangled ball of yarn that someone has played with. It is a lovable mess. There has been much good nurture and learning here, but it has perhaps happened in spite of the structure or organization rather than because of it.

There was the time when Heidi was sick and dying, Mary left the pastoral team because of Mike's illness, and a couple of other heavy tragedies happened. AMC did a wonderful job of holding hope, joy, sorrow, and despair together as they collectively walked through that time. Assembly does well at holding the tension together (a tightrope?). There is an intimacy of sharing that is valued and valuable, to be treasured.

AMC is about living faithfully daily. There is also a perception that there may be more pushback to new ideas or processes than what there actually is.
(They couldn't really come up with an image or metaphor.)

The Pentecost recovenanting artwork is a beautiful metaphor for AMC. There is this beautiful center in the middle that is surrounded by people, some who are inside the lines and others who are outside the lines, some who are closer to the center with others further from the center. There is the smudge of grape juice on the paper from someone who apparently had grape juice

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on their hands when they signed. The lines are very faint (sometimes hard to distinguish). Some folks followed instructions on which pen to use in the signing, while others obviously didn't.

This place feels like home to me. It is a nurturing and safe place in which to grow.

It is a community that is rebuilding a house. There is food for all, laborers who come and help, and materials necessary to complete the project.

It is a human pyramid, where people are holding one another up.

Their daughter says it is "people".

40's

The image of herding cats comes to mind. There are lots of introverts, independent thinkers, sometimes an elitist quality.

Another image is that of a house. It is a place where one can be who they are and still feel cared for.

The idea of a web or network that distributes the work widely, not a web that entraps people within! It is a dispersed network.

Another image is that of planting oak trees such as was done in the Middle Ages when cathedrals were being built. The planters knew that in 30-50 years they would need strong sturdy beams for the building and these oak trees would be ready by that time. Thinking about what is good for the next generation or beyond is a part of this planting process. Like Native Americans that consider the effects of their potential actions on the next 7 generations before they make decisions about what to do. (Steve Shantz's interests and involvement of the children from the congregation, urging them to think and act long-term rather than short-term.) It is the act of planting an orchard.

It is a congregation of cats with scratching posts, lounging corners, and others wandering around independently (as cats do).

It is a boat adrift in which only a few of the passengers recognize they are adrift.

It is a tree with really deep roots, with marks/scars from surviving severe storms, but it keeps growing, casting shade over its environment, providing a home for a growing number of birds.

It is a safe place that is accepting of one another.

She thought of a crazy quilt, but it is not animated (alive). Their son suggests a quilt garden that is alive, large things made up of smaller things. She noted it doesn't fit quite right because it is made up of annuals rather than perennials. But there is variety and color.

He thought of trees, then of a forest with different kinds of trees and leaves. It is home to wild animals and other creatures.

AMC is a big group hug. It is well-suited to help during times of loss. He has personal experience with this. AMC does a good job of caring for people.

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50's

One considered an amoeba as one metaphor. The other considered was the ebb and flow of the ocean. The congregation is not a static entity. Yet with all this movement there is continuity even though the congregation now is markedly different than the original vision.

For her it is a mobile. There is a high degree of interconnectedness and involvement among all the parts. Touching one aspect affects the whole mobile, not just a few elements. There is more movement and dynamism than in many other organizations.

A chameleon. We are trying to decide what we want to look like. Are we a big church and if so, where do we go with that—activist, large pastoral staff? Or are we a small church that is an activist, engaged in “skinny ministry” w/low overhead?

She is concerned about the fatigue factor as we deal with all that is on our plates. It seems that we have many pools in which to swim, but no hot tubs in which to periodically rest and rejuvenate.

60's

For her the image of a plant called “hen and chicks” represents AMC. There is the hen surrounded by her chicks, with runners connecting the chicks to the hen. And sometimes a chick’s runner may exceed the boundary of the hen. This is when a church plant happens.

A Miata! It is a sports car that is “on the edge” and works pretty well. There are a variety of jobs that need doing, and like the body imagery of the NT it functions pretty well when all work together.

It is like a family. Everyone is in it together, they care about one another, there are rough spots that must be weathered, the family can be too clannish, but they stick together and have each other’s back.

Assembly is a family, one that takes care of one another.

She first talked about how she feels when attending AMC. She feels like a teenager with regards to her spirituality—that she has a lot to learn. Then she talked about her Assembly experience as a bridge (and she had a drawing) in which when she came she was not only under the bridge but underground. Then she saw herself as above ground, but under the bridge and drawing closer to it. She pictures God high above the bridge in the sky and envisions herself someday being on the bridge. (She indicated that she felt pretty intimidated when she first came with the intellectual nature of the congregation.

An elephant that people see from their own perspective. Each one is partially right but not totally correct.

A dragon that provides fire for the conference on the LGBTQ issue. It is growing larger, look out for its tail! At the same time dragons are not always hostile, yet they can be intimidating.

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Bird murmuration in the sky without crashing into one another. Are they in tune with one another, or are they following some master plan? This is vital and beautiful, yet some sort of a mystery.

The Assembly sign is a harbor or a place of refuge for many from their former faith communities. It is a gathering of questioners, a safe place (harbor) for navigating. It is a place where everyone helps one another. (The question may be: "Are we hesitant, as questioners, to pin ourselves down in terms of our convictions?") It is a sanctuary or refuge where people can heal and be themselves.

Cattle without a fence. They wander with a disregard for boundaries. They go off in a lot of different directions and each one of those directions is the most important to those wanderers! Some strong voices can tend to pull the congregation in different directions and this can sometimes be seen as competition.

Growing like Topsy with no parental figures (Uncle Tom's Cabin). Functioning without noticing what is happening.

AMC is sometimes described as the "last church stop on the way out of organized religion". At other times it is observed that this is the first place wanderers from no faith observance land.

The biblical body with many parts. He feels that AMC does this very well, it is a very participatory congregation. It is like a beehive, an organism in which the worker bees, the queen bee, and the drones all need one another to survive. They could not survive alone.

He thinks of AMC as like the little children and their openness and acceptance of new friends. There is a level of inclusion and caring that is unreserved until they grow and mature and develop (appropriately so) more inhibitions.

A net in which one can reside without falling through, yet one in which one isn't trapped if they want to get out.

Siamese cats, haughty cats (We are a model of how to do and be church well! We are full of ourselves.)

It is a congregation of small groups. Each one is unique and different. Diversity is appreciated. There is racial diversity, especially among the children. That diversity is an appealing draw for young families. Assembly is more uniform educationally, which may be a more difficult barrier to break through for diverse populations.

Family is the image that comes to mind. It is a family that is real, with a collection of people that see things differently, that sometimes disagree on certain matters, yet there is still a bond that holds them all together. The key is communication and the desire to work things through.

She thought of a many-faceted, constantly moving entity.

Jesus as a shepherd with many "undershepherds" who assist in nurturing the flock. AMC does a good job of helping the young ones understand the biblical stories so that they can internalize them.

She offered a page with a mandala and full explanation.

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70's+

A tree with many different colored leaves, each distinct, yet all belong. All are equally important and vital.

A wild cottage garden with all varieties of plants, both large and small, both beautiful and strong, that is both showy and plain.

Growing our children for future church involvement (at all levels) as well as helping them just to be good kids.

"Something in 3 or more moving parts."

A sign that says "Everyone's welcome" and they really means it.

Openness is their image of Assembly.

For her the image is that of a bank vault in which precious items are placed. She sees the people of Assembly as precious and Assembly is a place to preserve them and keep them safe. He sees a middle-aged tree representing Assembly.

A gathering of small groups is still an image, but it does not fit Assembly today precisely (not everyone is in a small group). It is still the best image.

People are there to make the world a better place. The connections within the community are also important.

A country club where you meet nice people who are your friends and think like you do. It is more of an enclave than a diverse group of folks.

She had difficulty with this and could only offer a flailing of hands (w/o words) as an example of who and what Assembly is. He said, "Let 1000 flowers bloom!"

Church as family does not cut it anymore because it is too big (the congregation). There is a strong desire for community among the participants.

Worship is rich and deep and emotive. "Breathing together" may be a metaphor.

Light and love, especially with an emphasis on light (as opposed to darkness).

A light and loving grandpa who doesn't want to get any new clothes even though the current ones no longer fit him.