



What We Heard in the 2023 Listening Season from the Leaven Listening Season Team

October 15, 2023

Summary

- **Leaven is alive!** Lots of folks participated and articulated the same values and dreams we remember from years ago.
- **We are longing for connection.** We want to be seen, to belong, and to be together in milestone moments and in daily life.
- **We are experiencing the pressures of capitalism.** Folks shared about being busy, overstimulated, and stressed, and named longings for sharing resources and labor.
- **We focused on inner and community change - but less so systemic change.** Few of us pointed to systems change or community organizing as a means to addressing the pressures we're facing in our lives.
- **Now is the time to act on our longings.** We have lots of ideas and energy - but no one is going to create what we're longing for except ourselves!

Background

75 people attended six house meetings that took place from September 6 through September 24, 2023, hosted by members of the Listening Season Team: Sam Yerke, Fumi Tosu, Matt Smith, John Rodgers, Cheryl Lohrmann, Derek Fenwick, Jules Nielsen, and Jane Keating.

Three House Meetings were hosted in people's homes, two at Leaven, and one took place on Zoom. Two house meetings provided child care, one of which was offered in collaboration with the Collab at Leaven. A BIPOC only House Meeting was planned but canceled due to low turnout. The Spanish language House Meeting was also canceled due to low turnout. Those who had RSVPed were invited to attend the House Meeting on Zoom with simultaneous translation in English and Spanish.

House meetings were offered using a World Café format, inviting attendees to consider three questions in small groups that changed with each question:

- What are the moments in your life that you most long for community?
- How does the world we live in contribute to or exacerbate these longings for community?
- What do you want to create together at Leaven to meet some of these longings?

Following the final question, the large group shared key takeaways and “a ha moments” from their conversations. The Listening Season Team members recorded their notes from each House Meeting to share with each other.

On September 28, 2023 the Listening Season Team gathered together to distill insights and discern next steps to reflect back to Leaven Community.

What We Heard

There were several themes that emerged through the six house meetings. The Listening Season team was glad to hear **many of the same longings, values, and visions were rearticulated from Leaven’s founding 10 years ago**. Lots of warmth and affection for Leaven Community, the place and the people, was shared, and both new and seasoned members of the community named their desire for a reinvigorated Leaven Community. We felt that renewed excitement palpably in the House Meetings themselves.

As Leaven Community re-forms and re-members itself in the wake of the pandemic shutdown years, we heard a **longing for connection and relationship** at every single one of the House Meetings. Over and over again people shared a desire to be in community: to be seen, to belong, and to attend to the heights and depths of life, both in the milestones moments and in daily life. This community longs to form small groups for building relationships such as book clubs, groups to heal from religious trauma, to cook, can, and eat together, watch movies, sing, and “just be” together. The Listening Season Team observed that the House Meetings themselves seemed to address the very longing for connection that people were articulating.

Our community spoke to the experience of profound loneliness and isolation, made even more pronounced by the overlapping oppressions, climate grief, capitalism and addictions we are experiencing. **Capitalism and the climate crisis, in particular, were named frequently as concerns**. Some folks shared about being busy, overstimulated, overworked, and stressed - so much so that we are often too fatigued at the end of the day to go to a community event, which is actually the thing that many of us are longing for. Others spoke to the loneliness and isolation that comes with aging. Many folks mentioned that proximity to Leaven is very helpful, and that it would be easier to connect with the community if it were closer to home. Some suggested “Little Leavens” or “Leaven Pop-ups” as a way to address this issue in particular.

The community also named longings for **sharing resources and labor**. Many of us pointed to different forms of mutual aid, such as collaboratively growing, cooking, canning and sharing food, organizing child care swaps and an elder care collective as a means to addressing loneliness, busy-ness, to care for our elders and children, and to address the climate crisis. Leaven's garden in particular was named by many as a successful example of this kind of project.

The Listening Season Team was surprised to notice that **working for systems change and practicing community organizing were rarely mentioned** as what we are longing for in the Leaven House Meetings. Many folks noticed how many symptoms of systems of oppression are impacting our lives, and even named capitalism, white supremacy, anthropocentrism and xenophobia as being at their root, but nearly all of our ideas for how to respond to these systems focused on our local community action. Our group wondered whether the House Meeting questions simply didn't prompt this kind of discussion, but given Leaven's commitment to and culture of community organizing, we felt it was important to highlight the disparity that emerged between our [community's stated values](#) and the longings that were articulated in House Meetings.

Specific Ideas for Action Raised in House Meetings

- **Mutual aid activities** - both anti-capitalism action and to build community: childcare swap, cooking, canning, growing food, elder care collective, skill sharing/swapping
- **Small groups** - for action and organizing, for prayer and contemplation, for relationship building, men's group, for unlearning and healing, and more
- **Crafting secular rituals and sacred spaces** to hold community for milestones and daily life

Recommendations for Leaven's Next Steps

Based on what we heard this Listening Season, Leaven should consider some of the following steps:

- **Start organizing at Leaven!** If there's something any Leaven member wants to do with others at Leaven, find 1-2 other people, organize it, and invite the community! Get it on the calendar and in the enews (via Ali and Alison) and go for it. Don't worry if it's not in the building - it can still be a "Little Leaven." No one is going to do it for us - it's time to get started!
- **Recommit to a culture of community organizing and systems change** through practices such as: offering regular Sacred Organizing trainings at Leaven; sending Leaven members to community organizing trainings such as those offered by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF); integrating community organizing into new member orientation and materials; re-establishing a Leaven Community Core Team
- **Consider becoming a [Community Resilience Hub](#)** - Leaven becoming a Community Resilience Hub would combine many of the longings people have named for climate action,

mutual aid, and community building in one overarching project that the community could organize around and engage our neighbors in.

- **Follow the leadership of BIPOC communities organizing for climate justice and anti-capitalism.** Show up at events and actions, build relationships, amplify their work and voices, support the movement with our bodies and our resources, and organize others to join us.
- **Experiment with cultivating secular sacred community spaces at Leaven,** to mark big life milestones and make meaning of the world around us.

The 2023 Leaven Listening Season Team is: Sam Yerke, Fumi Tosu, John Rodgers, Cheryl Lohrmann, Derek Fenwick, Julia Nielsen, Jane Keating and Alison Killeen

Resources:

[All House Meeting Notes](#)

[Notes from Listening Season Team's September 28 Discernment meeting](#)

[Leaven's Purpose, Values and Activities](#)