



A STRATEGIC PLAN for First Presbyterian Church of Concord, North Carolina 2018-2023

OUR HOPE

In all that we do, our hope is in Jesus Christ. The gospel assures us that he is our light (John 8:12) and our life (John 11:25). He is the bread that sustains (John 6:35) us and the living water that nourishes us (John 4:13-14). He creates the path that guides us (John 14:6) and is the gate opened to us (John 10:7). He is the good shepherd who always hears us and lays his life down for us (John 10:11). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of us (Revelation 21:6). Therefore, as Presbyterians, when we affirm “with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope” (*Book of Order, F-1.0204*).

Because our hope rests so clearly in Christ, we share in the transformative hope that Christ offers to the world. Writing to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul expressed this hope in words that continue to call and challenge the church in every time and place: “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect*” (Romans 12:1-2). Our hope is that we, as the church of Jesus Christ, will be transformed by the good, acceptable, and perfect vision of Christ in our midst.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

As members of the First Presbyterian Church of Concord, North Carolina, our mission is to sustain and actively participate in a vibrant community of faith based on Christian fellowship, service and love.

- We **worship** God through prayer, proclamation, music and scripture with depth, sincerity and awe;

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- We **teach** children, youth and adults, through education and example, to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed;
- We **share** the goodness and love of God through our gifts, talents and service in the world with glad and generous hearts.

OUR CONTEXT

Our Community

As an established, traditional church in an established, traditional town, First Presbyterian has been and remains an influential voice in our community. While we continue to be grateful for our very rich history, we sense that the rapid growth of Cabarrus County in recent years is changing the established, traditional patterns of our city. The new residents driving the population growth in the southern and western portions of the county seem more connected to Charlotte than to downtown Concord, and we are wondering how we might broaden our base to embrace these new people. At the same time, we are noticing new, urgent social needs in our own neighborhood on and around Union Street. As families continue to be stretched thin by busy schedules and the challenge of juggling more choices and options than we have ever had before, we perceive a need to bring the good news to them with creativity and relevance, trying our best to “meet people where they are.” In this context of rapid, radical change, we as a church community seem ready to engage our faith and our community in new and more active ways.

Our Theology

As we walk the path of faith through this changing societal landscape, several key theological ideas from the Protestant Reformation continue to shape us:

- (1) As Presbyterians, we continue to believe that our communal life is grounded in the living Word of God (*Book of Order, F-1.0401*) and that “the reading, hearing, preaching, and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship” (*Book of Order, W-2.2001*). Because the **witness of scripture**

remains the highest and best guide for our discernment of Christ's will for the church (*Book of Order*, F-1.0203), every nuance of this strategic plan assumes and depends upon honest, consistent, and intentional engagement with the Bible.

- (2) This strategic plan is also guided by our conviction that our goals, purposes, and **“great ends” of our participation in Christ’s church** are: “the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world” (*Book of Order*, F-1.0304). Our aim as the body of Christ should always be pointed in these directions.
- (3) Last, but certainly not least, is our certainty that Christ is not done with us yet. As Presbyterians, we believe that the hands of the divine potter of Jeremiah 18 are still upon us and still shaping us. Accordingly, we still wholeheartedly affirm the motto of our ancestors in the faith, “*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*, that is, ‘The church reformed, always to be reformed according to the Word of God’ in the power of the Spirit” (*Book of Order*, F-2.02). In the hopes and words of this plan, we humbly pray that, whatever steps we may take as the church, God will continue to reform us and conform us into something that draws ever nearer to the image of Christ.

OUR METHODOLOGY

On August 9, 2016, the Administration and Personnel Committee proposed to the full session a slate of seven members to comprise a Strategic Plan Vision Team for our congregation. In the composition of this Vision Team, the committee sought to include a diverse spectrum of members who are invested in the church, valued and respected by the congregation, and dedicated to both our past and our future. This Vision Team proposed by the committee, which was unanimously and enthusiastically elected by the session, included *Kevin Garrison, Carrie Myers, Harris Morrison, Holly Cagle, Britt*

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Leatherman, Todd Phillips, and Pat Chaffin. Senior Minister Peter Bynum, Treasurer Toby Prewitt, and the immediate past moderator of the Administration Personnel Committee Susan Schneider were also designated to assist and support the team in its work in *ex officio* capacities. As a whole, this team was commissioned to envision, compose, and share a five-to-seven-year strategic plan for all aspects of our church life, including measureable goals for success.

As the Vision Team began its work, it decided early that it could not hope for transformation of the congregation without hoping for transformation of their own hearts and spirits. The group therefore began with a shared study of a current study of the church by Diana Butler Bass called Grounded. Reading and sharing together, the Vision Team discussed the changing landscape of faith in today’s world. Team members also became convicted that the place and calling of the church in the world is now in a moment of transition — that God is even now causing a “new thing” to spring forth in and around us (Isaiah 43:19).

In order to explore this awareness in a deeper way, the Vision Team arranged and scheduled two theological reflection sessions to be facilitated by In Christ Supporting Ministries (“ICSM”), a Charlotte-based organization of Reformed Christians who specialize in theological and spiritual education and seek to assist individuals and churches through transformational experiences. Wishing to share their enthusiasm and bring others into the conversation, the Vision Team invited all current elders and deacons of the church to take the training with them. On February 24, 2017, and February 28, 2017, ICSM led two vibrant and illuminating sessions with our church leadership. Conversation at these sessions was both honest and hopeful, and a solid foundation for the Vision Team’s work was laid. We left with the message that Christ, who is “in the room” with us, lightens our yoke and brings joy to our hearts as we go about His work through the church.

The team then turned to a period of listening. Their hope was to glean as much information from the congregation as they could in the conviction that the guidance the Holy Spirit was giving to individual consciences would be an excellent indicator of the guidance

the Holy Spirit was giving to the church as a whole. From conversations at the 2017 church retreat in Kanuga, to a town hall meeting at a Wednesday night fellowship dinner, to the comprehensive congregational survey distributed to the entire congregation, and through many individual conversations over the past year, the Vision Team began to formulate both an accurate picture of the current state of our ministries and some very hopeful ideas of where God may be leading us in the future.

From the very beginning, the Vision Team has followed an organizational principle that divided our shared mission and ministry into five focus areas or “buckets”: Worship & Music; Mission and Outreach; Christian Formation; Building & Grounds; and Congregational Care. Early on, each team member was assigned to a particular bucket and charged with building a larger “bucket team” comprised of interested officers, staff members, and other stakeholders. These larger teams would then help the Vision Team study and dream about what God has in store for us in that particular aspect of our church ministry.

After several months of conversation with the session regarding current states, target states, and specific action items for each bucket, the elders of First Presbyterian Church approved this Strategic Plan on February 14, 2018.

KEY THEMES FOR OUR CHURCH CONTEXT

In its work, the Vision Team noticed several overarching themes that apply to each of the five “buckets” of our church ministry. The committee shares these themes in the hope that they will serve as lenses through which the current states, target states, and proposed action steps will be viewed by the session and the congregation as the transformative power of Christ continues to work in and through us:

- (1) *Engagement* — It is our prayer that the members of our congregation will engage more deeply and regularly in the mission and ministries of the church. As the church meets people where they are, we can both (a) **invite** disciples into existing opportunities for devotion and service and (b)

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empower them to be self-starters in the development of new missions and ministries.

- (2) *Stewardship* — Although faithful stewardship of our time, talent, and treasure is certainly a part of our calling to engage fully in the life of the church, the Vision Team believes that this aspect of commitment is important enough to highlight on its own. As this plan is implemented, we hope that members will be both invited and empowered to support the congregation’s ministries with consistency and generosity.
- (3) *Communication* — As you will see, many of the action steps identified in this Strategic Plan seek to increase the effectiveness of our communications about all that is happening in our congregation. Our hope is that greater transparency will allow the inspirational and transformational work of Christ in this place to shine more brightly for our members, our ministry partners, and our neighbors.
- (4) *Technology* — At almost every turn, the Vision Team saw ways that new technologies might improve the work we are doing in Christ’s name. It is our hope that congregational leaders, as they implement this plan, will be vigilant in identifying modern tools and approaches, explore ways to increase the effectiveness of our communications through technology, and be bold in the investments we make in new technological strategies.

KEY AREAS FOR OUR TRANSFORMATION

Attached on the following pages are reports from each of the five “bucket” areas identified in our planning process. This documentation describes “Current States” (the status of our ministries today), “Target States” (the places we believe Christ is calling us to go), and “Action Steps” (a partial list — which is only a beginning — of things we may decide to do to begin the journey toward our identified Target States).

Building and Grounds

“Jacob says, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven.’” (Genesis 28:16-17)

Current State

Resources. Resources are being used deliberately to maintain and improve our buildings and grounds, and our staff and congregation work well together to take care of these gifts. There is some lack of congregational understanding, however, as to the financial resources available to support our buildings and grounds.

Plans for Future Work. There are mixed opinions from the congregation about making major changes to the facilities. While there is strong support for maintenance of existing facilities, the support for more discretionary projects is varied.

Openness and Welcome. Our campus is currently being used by members and community groups for fellowship and mission-oriented activities. There is a sense in our congregation that we can open our doors even wider.

Accessibility. Our campus, while beautiful, can be confusing to visitors and members alike.

Action Item

- The Building & Grounds (“B&G”) Committee, in conjunction with the Foundation Board, provides an accounting of foundational assets that are available for B&G improvements.
- Session representatives and the B&G Committee create and update a Strategic Facilities Plan, which, among other things, educates the congregation on financial resources and maps out paths to fund projects.

Action Item

- The Strategic Facilities Plan, approved by the session, prioritizes routine maintenance, future projects, creative and alternative uses.
- We execute the 2018 sanctuary remodel, incorporating modern technology, such as enhancements to sound, lighting, and video capabilities.

Action Item

- Work with ‘24/7’ Charlotte to develop a prayer room that is open to the community located in Rec Hall.
- Work with church officers to develop showers and living quarters for guests and groups we host as part of our mission.
- Expand the identity and availability of Davis Hall as a hub for community programs and events, possibly with a specific agent or committee.

Action Item

- Improve lighting, signage, access and safety with a goal of inviting members and visitors to enjoy more of our campus.
- Incorporate our new church logo wherever possible, particularly on our signage and the website
- Incorporate a campus map and floor plans on the church website.

Target State

Resources. Our congregation better understands the means and resources available for the maintenance and future development of our campus. We prioritize projects to maximize the use of our campus for mission and community service, as a place of worship, education, and refuge.

Plans for Future Work. A strategic facilities plan addressing routine maintenance, improvements, and alternative projects has been developed and is guiding creative decisions about the property. This plan incorporates continued commitment to Earth Care and integration of new technologies.

Openness and Welcome. Our campus is known as a community hub and is alive with creative uses of our facilities for worship, mission, outreach, and fellowship.

Accessibility. Our campus is viewed through a visitor’s eyes, and obstacles to comfort and accessibility have been eliminated.

Christian Formation

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” (Eph. 4:11-12)

Current State

Faith Formation: FPC has many established programs and missions that serve the members at various stages on their spiritual journey. There are dedicated resources with leadership to facilitate Christian Formation programs (*i.e.*, Sunday School, VBS, Youth Fellowship, First Kids, Wednesday Night Fellowship, Presbyterian Women and their Circles, the FPC annual retreat, etc.) that meet the needs of the congregation. Current programs are not as coordinated as they could be, resulting in a culture that is complacent and not as proactive to current needs as we need to be. Current offerings are structured around traditional times and services that may not accommodate congregants with complex schedules and non-traditional needs for their personal spiritual journey.

Discipleship: Congregants rely on the ministerial staff and church officers to develop, deliver and lead many of the primary Christian Formation efforts. There is an urgent need for volunteers to actively engage in the programs as teachers and leaders.

Communication: There is not a formal communications strategy that informs and promotes awareness of the needs and offerings within Christian Formation that results in a lower level of active member engagement. This includes an absence of current data regarding membership, trends and interest by age group that limits ability to direct and focus resources to meet the needs of the congregation and community.

First Kids: First Kids Preschool is a historically significant and vibrant early childhood education program affiliated with First Presbyterian Church. There is limited integration with congregational leadership (Session) for Christian Formation from birth to Kindergarten with events and programs to fully engage both preschool families and FPC members.

Action Item

- Develop and implement a documented and maintained Scope and Sequence plan from birth to age 100 plus.
- Publish a Christian Formation offerings document that fully informs members, visitors and the community of ALL programs, missions and outreach at FPC.
- Consistently gather, maintain, and review membership and attendance data to determine and adjust specific offerings and opportunities, timing, audience, improvements, and appropriate level of focus.

Action Item

- Encourage active congregational participation and recruit Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and program directors that support the mission of the church with a determined focus on volunteerism. Recruitment will include monthly ministerial led “train the trainer” classes to foster participation for lay leadership development.

Action Item

- Develop a deliberate communication approach to ensure members and non-members are invited and clearly and timely informed of resources, contacts, offerings and opportunities (tools, classes, activities and events) available to support faith formation and discipleship through each phase of life. This should be continuously updated with the latest communications channels to ensure the channels remain relevant.

Action Item

- Promote and develop, through the establishment of a formal Board of Directors by the Session, an enhanced partnership with First Kids Preschool. The Board of Directors will provide consistent oversight and leadership that will guide the ministry and achieve greater success in the overall partnership with the Church and community at large.

Target State

Faith Formation: Implement a foundational Faith Formation Scope and Sequence plan that will provide a plan for members to engage in continuous life-long growth that follows and informs trends in faith and spiritual development, faith milestones, and curriculum selection and implementation that meets the needs of all disciples.

Discipleship: Members are engaged, involved, and empowered in Christian Formation in an effort to connect ongoing programs and foster an environment of proactive lay leaders and discipleship.

Communication: Timely, effective, and consistent communication delivered via numerous portals and published as if for a new member.

First Kids: A vital ministry of First Presbyterian Church that is supported and integrated into the mission of the church by congregational leadership, whose mission is to form young disciples while providing excellence in early childhood education as it serves the FPC congregation, as well as, the broader Cabarrus County community. First Kids Preschool and First Presbyterian Church seek to provide engaging events and programs to create a supportive and thoughtful learning environment for students, First Kids families, and FPC members.

Congregational Care

“All of you together are Christ’s body, and each of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:27)

Current State

Nurture. Congregational visitation is assumed to be handled by the pastors, with some exceptions for visits to nursing homes or by the FPC Visitation Ministry.

Team-Building. Pockets of our membership are currently engaging in congregational care as an individual calling. Many members, when asked personally, are willing to respond to needs as they occur.

Communication. Communication of church activities and opportunities has not been as effective as we would like.

Action Item

- Include a Congregational Care Ministry as a standing committee, either with the Session or the Deacons, coordinating various programs already in existence.
- Expand our current home visitation to include visits and/or phone calls by volunteers after pastoral calls, for our shut-ins, prayer chain follow-up, or other ways to improve contact.
- Start a Flower Ministry to share the bouquets from Sunday services.
- Make personal contact with those on our membership list who are not active, or who may not have been in communication with the church in a while, in an effort to reestablish connection and relationship.

Action Item

- Review the latest Time and Talent survey, and, through phone calls and personal contact, encourage volunteering in existing programs such as visitation.

Action Item

- Include, in the Banner and in Sunday’s bulletin, activity by the Deacons involving our congregational family.
- Design and print a simple and attractive pamphlet for guests, new members and others, giving an overview of church activities and suggestions on how to get involved.

Target State

Nurture: As a loving church family, the entire congregation joins the pastoral staff to support one another through friendship, spiritual moments and compassionate care during times of challenge and joy.

Team-Building: All members, through small groups and coordinated efforts, contribute their time, talents and gifts to create a culture of caring in our church.

Communication: Current and effective platforms provide consistent, purposeful, complete and timely communication to encourage members and others to engage in congregational opportunities.

Missions and Outreach

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Matthew 25:40)

Current State

Community. First Presbyterian partners with many organizations in the community in financial, volunteer and leadership capacities; we have occasional partnerships with other churches, but there are limited cross-racial alliances, and limited activities for new alliances to be created.

Engagement. We are connecting people with needs in the community, but there is a perception that not everyone is engaged, perhaps because they are not being asked. The structured volunteering environment sometimes promotes an individual mentality to follow when called, rather than a spontaneous, vibrant, inclusive and empowered mentality to serve.

Unity. There is a perception by some that we seem fragmented, as we support more than two dozen projects and organizations. We look back with pride on defining projects begun a generation ago, but our church is not known for one, current, signature mission today.

Utilization. When we use our facilities, we use them well; we have capacity to use many of our facilities more frequently and fervently, both for church sponsored activities and for guests.

Action Items

- Establish a pulpit exchange, service project, race workshop and/or social events with a Logan Community Church. Commit to a certain number of events per year.
- Organize a group from First Pres to attend the MLK memorial service at the round-about.

- Create a website marketplace (accessible and visible to members and visitors/guests through all channels of technology) where people can post their talents, availability and connect with others to do service projects.
- Create a program which engages guests in service opportunities from the moment they first visit.
- Designate a person to serve as chief engagement officer.

- Have the strategic planning missions/outreach committee, in concert with the diaconate, settle on a bold signature project. In determining the project, consider the Church Mission Statement, SWOT analysis, congregational input, and community input.

- Open the Rec Hall and Davis Hall (and the kitchen, tables, chairs and other assets) to the community for meals, forums and events that fit within our mission.
- Strongly consider a regular lunch/dinner in Davis Hall to raise money for the signature project.
- Open a 24/7 prayer room in the Rec Hall.
- Leverage our music program & orchestrate music lessons for children within our church, First Kids & the community.

Target State

Community. First Presbyterian serves as a catalyst to build communities and embrace diversity, partnering with other organizations and churches.

Engagement. First Presbyterian fosters a warm and inviting environment where members, guests and non-members feel connected, needed, empowered and called to serve the least of these and minister to each other using their talents.

Unity. First Presbyterian is united in one signature mission that energizes and transforms our congregation, inspires the community, and provides a cohesive identity in shared mission.

Utilization. First Presbyterian fully utilizes our church campus and physical assets to serve others and honor God.

Note on Outreach. There are three components to Outreach. There is the mission to serve the least of these, and we have identified, and we will continue to identify, ways to serve. Second, there is the mission to our fellow believers, that is, to provide them with spiritual guidance, strength, nourishment to uplift their souls. Third, there is the outreach to others who are seeking a congregation where that person can be both served – by feeling God’s presence and love from us – and provided the skills and support to serve others. Our congregation must be engaged in all three areas.

Worship and Music

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (Romans 12:2)

Current State

Worship Generally. Regular worship services are offered only on Sunday mornings (with the exception of additional Easter/Christmas season services)

New Expressions. Openness exists for a non-traditional worship service but not at the expense of the 11 a.m. service.

Spiritual Practices. Within the traditional services, some new worship elements have been tested with mixed acceptance. (Examples include The Passing of the Peace and Communion by Intinction)

Action Item

- Institute changes to 8:45 a.m. service that reflect strategic plan data collection.
- Identify best uses for the worship spaces.
- Initiate additional worship opportunities.
- Explore more variety in musical offerings.
- Intentionally increase youth involvement in worship and music.
- Plan and implement a weekend evening service.

Action Item

- Create a task force to develop a prayer and worship outreach space in Rec Hall with assistance from ‘24/7’ Charlotte.
- Create ‘Art Exploration’ small group to examine/update FPC’s use of art on campus.
- Strengthen the use of visual and performing arts in worship and the daily life of the church.

Action Item

- Develop spiritual practices that expand our understanding of worship.
- Seek out worship elements that create a deeper encounter with God.
- Encourage communication of ideas by church members that may broaden use of different worship elements that will deepen our faith.

Target State

Worship Generally. Worship services are multiple, varied and offer many ways of experiencing the transformative nature of God’s love. Worship is energy filled, inspirational and with an identifiable sense of vitality.

New Expressions. Worship and music meets people where they are in their faith journeys through a variety of worship forms and music styles.

Spiritual Practices. We are open to new worship elements and respect others experiences during worship services.

Current State

Comfort and Challenge. Some are not comfortable being challenged or confronted by scripture and look simply to be encouraged from the pulpit. Others are looking for more direction through scripture for help in coping with the challenges of our current world.

Diversity and Welcome. There is a noticeable lack of diversity in our congregation. (i.e. race, age, ethnicity, socio-economically)

Action Item



- Expand our hearts and mobilize our hands through the spoken word in worship.
- Through individual, small group and collective study, reacquaint ourselves with our call from the *Book of Order*.

Action Item



- Form a ‘Hospitality’ team and identify areas where we are unintentionally inhospitable.
- Evaluate Sunday services regarding inclusiveness and welcome.
- Improve visibility in the community and increase engagement in joint worship and service opportunities.
- Make our campus identifiable as a safe place where all are welcome through signage, community communication, our website, and other means.

Target State

Comfort and Challenge. We understand the balance between being comforted and challenged from the pulpit through scripture. We are comforted, at times, and challenged, at others, to think differently about what scripture may be teaching us. We actively seek ways to address the concerns of the world, personally and as a church.

Diversity and Welcome. We have a church where ALL feel welcome at worship services that are intentionally inclusive and characterized by a communal experience (with God and each other)