



OUR VISION – Hearts Open to Christ — Doors Opening to His World

OUR MISSION – First Presbyterian Church is a home for your heart. We honor and care for all people, acting as family in Christ. We are open and welcoming, supporting all people wherever they are in their faith journey. We provide opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship through worship, study and prayer. We reach out beyond our walls to share the good news of Christ's redeeming power and to help those in need in our community and our world.

Mission Study Report

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Mission Study Report

Introduction

A Mission Study team was formed in October, 2017, in anticipation of the pending departure of our Interim Pastor, the need to hire an Associate Pastor and the anticipated retirement of our Senior Pastor. The goal set before the team was to prepare for the transition and for the future. Using the church's well-loved mission statement as a framework, we began the work of discerning God's purpose for the congregation in the years ahead. On a more concrete level, we sought to identify the key characteristics of the next senior and associate pastor as individuals and collectively. These findings will be foundational for the Pastor Nominating Committee in identifying possible candidates for the senior and associate pastor positions.

The team used a variety of methods to collect as much quality information as possible about the hopes, dreams, strengths and weaknesses of the congregation. In early meetings, we reviewed the financial status of the church as well as demographic information of current membership. We considered the gifts and experiences of the previous pastors. Then, after careful review of congregational assessment tools on the market, we retained the services of Holy Cow Consulting and hired Missioninsite to perform a demographic study of the area. Holy Cow's in-depth survey of approximately 100 questions measures the energy of a congregation and helps bring focus to the kind of pastor who will be the best fit. In addition, Holy Cow provides a Transition Plan and Vital Leadership Profile with tailored guidance that is invaluable for the transition period between pastors. The survey was administered to the congregation in February-March, 2018, and 239 members (80% of average attendees at worship) completed the survey, making it 99% reliable. The Holy Cow interpretation of our results was also benchmarked against 1,650 mainline churches, and provided valuable insight as to how we measure up nationally, as well as providing a rich trove of information about the heart and soul of our church members. Once the survey results became available in the "Vital Signs" report, we conducted a lengthy phone interview with Robin Strain, a seasoned Holy Cow consultant, who explained the details and nuances of the results.

The information from the survey was supplemented and greatly enriched by substantive conversations that took place in five separate small group meetings attended by a total of 80 people during April. These discussions, which were guided by 10 questions prepared in advance to provide structure, generated many creative ideas and revealed a vitality ready to be activated.

While there is trepidation about the changes ahead, as confirmed by our survey results, there is palpable energy and engagement evident in many members.

Background Information

The Census

The church's statistical report from year-end 2017 provided illustrative details about our Church family and the Missioninsite study offered useful demographic information:

- There are 969 members, with an average attendance at worship of 238
- 97.7% are Caucasian, with Hispanic, African American and Asian each comprising less than 1%
- Age distribution of members:

25 and under	227
26-45	202
46-55	163
56-65	148
Over 65	229
- The community within one mile of the church will have had a relatively stable population over the past three years
- Income levels within one mile of the church have grown at the same rate as the larger community over the past three years
- The fastest growing segment of the population in Haddonfield and surrounding communities over the next 10 years will be those 65+; those 35-64 are expected to show the greatest decline
- At the other end of the spectrum, we may be facing a mini "baby boom" as young school age children increase to represent a greater percentage of the school age population.

The Financial Status of the Church

While we have been challenged in recent years to achieve our pledge goals, we have been able to sustain and grow our programs while retaining competitive salaries for our pastors, primarily through other sources of income (building rentals, etc.) and recurring gifts. Notably, we have been able to budget for both a senior and associate pastor for the past 18 years and have sustained a substantial music program that is highly valued and a priority for the congregation. We had to undertake a staffing reduction in 2017, involving two administrative personnel positions. While very painful for the congregation

and staff, from an emotional perspective, this measure has greatly stabilized our financial position and put us on a more sustainable footing.

Recent History: Church Leadership

The three senior pastors who served the church prior to our current minister (Robert Veon, Roger Dunnavan and William Levering), all were known for their charisma in one form or another. Fine preachers with an innovative edge, they displayed a mix of exuberance, innovation and dynamism that at times bordered on theatre. They all encountered personnel problems beyond the scope of this report, and they all left the church under less than comfortable circumstances. Rev. Bill Getman was a balm for turbulent times and brought to the church an immeasurable calm and peace.

Current State of the Church

Based on our congregation's responses to the Holy Cow survey, we are a "healthy" church, with 70% of the congregation expressing satisfaction with current conditions. Energy is also high, which, according to Holy Cow, makes us a "**Transformational Church;**" one that is ready to focus on strategic opportunities, versus being primarily internally focused. The consultant from Holy Cow also noted that ours can be considered a "**Magi Church,**" one that possesses the following characteristics:

- Members who are concerned with the rational integrity of faith and the application of faith to life
- Members who exhibit intellectual curiosity and engage in social advocacy
- Members capable of embracing meaningful changes necessary to engage a changing society
- Members who tend to want the church to try to be everything to everyone

According to the Vital Signs report, the key **drivers of satisfaction** in our congregation relate to our pastors, particularly the way they communicate, keeping the congregation informed and connected. The quality of the worship services was a key driver, especially the relevance of the sermons. Other key drivers of satisfaction involved the quality of lay leadership, including the degree to which the leadership represents the congregation and the way different approaches are considered in decision making. These are important qualities in the eyes of our congregation, common to a Magi Church.

As noted earlier, First Presbyterian Church of Haddonfield possesses many of the characteristics of a healthy church:

1) We offer a **vital worship experience**

On the Worship and Music Performance Index, First Pres scored higher than 90% of other churches. Music is deemed to be a particular strength (90% felt the music is “outstanding in quality”), as is the quality of the sermons. This was particularly evident in the comments received during the small group discussions and in the responses to the open-ended survey question “*When have you said ‘Now THAT’s what it means to be the Church.’*” Of the 134 responses received to that question, more than 50% mentioned the worship experience (sermons, music, youth-led services, Candlelight/Easter, Dinner Church). In the small group discussions, comments on the recent changes in the worship service schedule were largely positive. Our members like having children attend worship and they like the sense of community by having more people in two services versus spread across three services. One quote is representative of the sentiment contained in many of the comments regarding worship: “*The Pastors’ sermons draw the congregation together and challenge us all to consider ways to understand our faith better and carry it into the community. They provide thoughtful spiritual sustenance.*”

2) The church has **representative governance**

There’s general consensus that when important decisions are to be made, there’s adequate consideration of different approaches and that the leadership is representative of the membership. More than 70% of the congregation feels the leadership shows genuine concern about how members are thinking when important decisions need to be made. While some expressed concern that a small group of members make all the decisions, that sentiment could be alleviated as we intentionally seek to involve more members in church activities, programs and leadership (addressed later in this report).

3) We’re a **hospitable church**, offering meaningful connections within the congregation

The survey reflected the shared belief that we are an inviting and supportive community. More than 90% of the survey respondents think a friendly atmosphere prevails and that there’s an attitude of genuine care and concern among members in times of personal need. More than 80% feel that being part of the church has brought new meaning to their lives. There were many references to our caring community in the “*THAT’S the church*” survey response and many members expressed gratitude for the pastoral care they’ve received from Pastor Getman. As one member said on the survey,

“I deeply appreciate the way many people in our church respond to others with openness, kindness, non-judgment and action.”

While we acknowledge that we’re a caring community, it’s clear from the survey results and the small group discussions that we need to do more to connect church members to ministries, leadership activities, small groups, etc. to promote greater connectivity. This topic is explored later in this report.

4) Creation of **lay leadership**

More than 90% of the membership believes our church provides opportunities for members to engage in active ministry, in the church and beyond. The assessment was slightly less positive when it came to how well the church prepares members for ministry by discerning their gifts. This will be addressed in the section of this report describing priorities for the future.

5) **Spiritual Vitality**

The Spiritual Vitality Index measures the degree to which members believe their faith is central to their lives. Our membership scored lower on this dimension, compared to other churches in Holy Cow’s database. One-third of the congregation agreed with the statement “Although my faith is important to me, I feel there are other things more pressing in my life right now.” As the consultant from Holy Cow pointed out, this can be the case in a “Magi Church” like ours with a highly-educated congregation involved in a variety of activities and causes outside of church. According to Holy Cow, there’s a direct relationship between the spiritual vitality of a church and its giving levels. While “Magi” churches tend to have lower giving levels, since their members tend to spread their giving over a number of different charities, our giving patterns are exceptionally low, comparatively (only 1% of average annual income). The consultant noted that church members for whom the church is a priority and who incorporate spiritual practices into their daily activities tend to demonstrate increased giving patterns.

The survey results also bear out the theological diversity of our congregation and our more progressive theological orientation. Answers to questions regarding the nature of scripture and other theological questions spanned the spectrum from strong agreement to strong disagreement. One of the things our members value about our pastors is their acceptance of this theological diversity. In fact, one of the most important and valued tenets of our Mission Statement is *“We...support all people wherever they are in their faith journey.”*

6) Lifelong Learning Orientation

There is a strong sense that our church provides high quality education that is appropriate for every age and stage of life. However, there is less agreement that our members understand that they have a spiritual responsibility for life-long learning. This is probably connected to the results of the Spirituality Index. In the small group discussions, members expressed a desire for more and varied adult education opportunities, although there's been resistance to the new time for adult ed (after the 11am service). There was also some concern that Sunday School teachers now don't have the option to worship regularly due to the change in the worship schedule. This may be part of the reason it's proving difficult to attract Sunday School teachers.

7) Flexibility

One of the reasons our church doesn't have much internal conflict is because we demonstrate flexibility in our approach to many aspects of our ministry. Nearly 90% of the survey respondents agree that we are willing to adapt our program and worship structure to the needs of our members and those we want to reach in the local community. A church with a high degree of flexibility is more likely to be able to adapt its strategic priorities to the needs of the congregation and community.

In summary, the core strengths of our church, according to our members, include the quality of the worship services (sermons and music), the prevailing sense of caring and community, the flexibility and theological fluidity of our pastors and the strength of church leadership. Please note that while the Holy Cow survey did not specifically ask about the strength and weakness of individual programs, it was noted in the small group discussions and the comments in the survey that other strong and valued programs include our Mission programs (particularly the Feed My Starving Children initiative) and the Pre-school. While our church can be deemed "healthy" by many measures relative to other mainline churches in the Holy Cow database, our ongoing financial situation continues to pose challenges, as described below.

Priorities for the Future: Where should we put our energy?

According to the Holy Cow consultant, "You are doing fine as a Church; but you could be exceptional!" The Vital Signs report provided insight into where energy should be directed in the church to enable us to become exceptional. According to our members, three areas warrant the most energy in the years to come:

- 1) Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church
- 2) Develop the spiritual generosity of the members to financially support the ministry of the church.
- 3) Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.

Priority 1

The goal of reaching new people and incorporating them into the life of the church was a top priority across all segments of the congregation, spanning all age groups, frequent attendees, as well as infrequent attendees. And it was a desire most often mentioned by those attending the small group discussions. It seems this desire extends not only to those who are new to the congregation, but those who may have been members for a while, but feel they have not yet found their place within the life of the church. While our members acknowledge we're a caring church community, there's a general sense that even more can be done to promote connectivity; more small groups, more communication about individual needs (illness, deaths, etc.), more information about church programs and opportunities to serve, etc.

Priority 2

Another top priority was to develop the spiritual generosity of our members to provide financial support. The church has struggled to adequately finance its ministries through envelope giving for many years. In part, this is due to the departure of a number of large donors 20+ years ago during the era of pastoral turbulence; donors who have not been replaced. Plus, according to the survey, our church members contribute, on average, only 1% of disposable income to the church (versus an average of 3% for the churches in the Holy Cow database). Historically, the shortfalls in the operating budget have been made up by the withdrawal of funds from investment accounts and, two years ago, the painful decision to release two long-time administrative staff members. That decision, together with the receipt of several large recurring gifts in recent years, has helped stabilize the budget and allow for overdue salary increases for the remaining staff. Our Stewardship Committee has set a goal for members to work toward a 5% contribution level, and last year, more than half of those who pledged increased their giving. Even an overall increase to a 2% contribution level would double our funding base. In addition to the need for a growing and balanced operating budget, we are constantly challenged by our aging church properties, including the Church building and two residential properties, all of which will require ongoing investment in the years to come. We will be faced with the challenge of finding new sources of capital funding and/or the possibility of divesting of one or more of the residential buildings.

Priority 3

As evidenced by the survey results and the comments made by many in the small groups, we need to expand our healing ministries. Positive comments were made about the Pastors' presence and caring in times of need, but we need to empower our members to engage in ministries of care and concern ("We are the Church!"). That could take the form of a formal lay ministry like a Stephen Ministries program and/or include the formation of small groups connecting people suffering through grief and loss, divorce, disability and other challenges faced by our members.

Role(s) and Characteristics of the Pastor(s)

The Vital Signs report revealed that our congregation is, basically, happy with the way things are and is somewhat apprehensive about change. There are attributes of both pastors that have been positive and affirming for our congregation and we feel it will be important to seek those characteristics in the new Associate and future head Pastor. Specifically, we will need to continue to be guided by pastors who are:

- grounded in reformed theology, are theologically progressive and accept theological diversity;
- display personal warmth, compassion and acceptance;
- have superior preaching skills;
- are of strong moral character;
- are gifted administrators, able to help congregational members discern their gifts and then delegate responsibilities effectively.

It was also strongly recommended that we seek leaders who will value and collaborate with the music ministry and the pre-school as important programs within the church.

The Holy Cow consultant cautioned us that we tend to be a "clergy-focused" church and expect our clergy to take primary responsibility for most aspects of church life. Typically, a church our size would fall into the "program church" category where the laity takes on more responsibility for caring ministries, program development, etc. It will be important for us to recognize that "We are the Church!" and take on more responsibilities as lay leaders.

Overall, the feedback we received through the surveys and group discussions reflected our congregation's desire to keep the division of responsibilities between the two

pastors basically the same as it is now, with the Senior Pastor having primary responsibility for:

- worship leadership
- pastoral care
- visioning and strategic planning
- administration, including oversight of church finances and property management

Based on the Vital Signs report and the small group discussions, we recommend that the Associate oversee:

- Christian Education (adult education and Sunday School), including oversight of the Director of Christian Education
- Youth Ministry, including oversight of the Youth Director
- Congregational Care

The last two Associate Pastors (Rachel Rhodes and Jeremy Sanderson) both focused on youth ministry in their roles. While we imagine the Associate Pastor will have oversight of Youth Ministry, s/he will also serve in a larger Congregational Care role. The Associate would continue to have an important role in worship leadership and preaching.

A more detailed summary of the professional interests, abilities, leadership style and core motivations of potential pastoral candidates, given the context within which they'll be serving, can be found in the "Vital Leader Profile" provided by Holy Cow as an Appendix to this report and should be included in the deliberations of future search committees.

It should be noted that a number of comments reflected the congregation's preference to have the pastors live in Haddonfield, or close by. Many felt that the ministers should be visible in the community and more accessible in the event of emergency situations involving church members. When pressed, however, there was general agreement that where future candidates choose to live would be less of an issue if they meet the criteria and have the characteristics we are seeking.

Transition Planning

The Holy Cow consultant emphasized the need for us to spend the years before Pastor Getman's retirement developing the leadership and pastoral caring skills of the laity. Lay leaders need to be in a constant state of succession planning. This would reduce the anxiety over the pending change in leadership and enable the church to continue to function at a very high level during the interim period.

Holy Cow submitted a Transition Summary as part of its report, identifying some important steps that could be taken in the next few years to lay the groundwork for transition to a new Senior Pastor. These include:

- Implementing a "gift discernment" process to identify the skills and capabilities of our members and help them find avenues for involvement and leadership. People want to be asked to participate in the life of the church in meaningful ways.
- Developing and implementing structured training programs for those serving as Church leaders, as well as those called to be involved in caring ministries.
- Over-communicating about church programs, changes underway, new ministries, etc.
- Providing different ways to explore the meaning of stewardship, including a variety of approaches to deal with the church's financial issues.
- Exploring best practices for reaching people with the message of God's love in Christ.
- Providing opportunities for leaders and members to learn about different approaches for serving those living on the margins of society.
- Exploring ways to heighten the sense among our members that involvement in the church gives new meaning to life and is a priority.

From an administrative perspective, the report recommends that church leaders should review the personnel policies of the church to make sure they comply with current law. The rolls should also be reviewed since the membership roll is three times the active attendance.

While the Vital Signs report indicates our church is good at dealing with change, the survey results obviously captured the congregation's desire to keep the church moving in the same direction compared to the recent past. It was also clear that members do not want to see a significant change in the skills and responsibilities of the future pastors. It will help ease the transition if the lay leadership is able to sustain the level of confidence evidenced by the members in the report.

Programmatic Recommendations

In addition to the specific tasks noted above that need to be undertaken through the transition, there are other recommendations that came out of the small group discussions that are summarized below. (Please note that these are fairly high level recommendations; there are many ideas, dreams and goals that came out of the discussions that will be provided to the appropriate Session Committees at the appropriate time.)

- 1) Reshape the new member program to ensure new members have a smooth transition into the life of the church, helping them feel welcomed and engaged
- 2) Improve communication, external, as well as internal. Let people in the communities we serve know about what's going on in the life of the Church; provide consistently more information about the church's ministries and areas needing volunteers; make sure Sunday School teachers have access to information shared in worship services; promote transparency when it comes to Session decisions and actions; incorporate greater use of technology/social media to enhance communication with younger members.
- 3) Consider implementing formal caring ministries like Stephen Ministries to equip our members to support the pastoral care effort.
- 4) Expand the small group ministry beyond the Lenten studies, to include book studies, Bible studies, groups organized around different segments of the congregation, etc. Our members like the connectivity and fellowship afforded by small groups.
- 5) Seek creative ways to encourage our members to expand their spiritual practices beyond worship through study, prayer and reflection.
- 6) Formalize an internal structure for taking care of the physical plant; conduct a physical inventory of what needs exist and prioritize projects.
- 7) Continue to seek creative ways to finance the church programs and infrastructure.
- 8) Ensure the Nominating Committee is aware of the need for specific areas of expertise on the church boards so they can seek out members who offer that expertise.

The Mission Study Team

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