

CONGREGATIONAL
STUDY 2016
**First Presbyterian Church
West Chester**

Full Report

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RADICAL HOSPITALITY - WHAT WE LOVE

Caregiving gives real support

- Caregiving groups really support people
- Programs that take care of our members, but like being outward-reaching
- Caregiving
 - Visits to homebound members
 - Agape team
- Caregiving ministry
- There is a lot of one on one contact re: caregiving
- Caring for one another like Family/ relationships
- Agape team - hospital visits

Bridge

- Wed night Bridge
 - Intergenerational
 - Bridge Kidz (might be only exposure to church for some?)
 - Bridge connects kids to First Pres & others
- Bridge Dinner
 - Fellowship
 - Diversity of Membership
- Bridge
 - Bridge Kids
 - Intergenerational
- The Bridge dinner (4 checkmarks)
- Bridge dinner cooks
- Bridges, food is good, fun to be together

Small group ministries

- Being a part of a small group - ability to make connections
- Sharing opportunities - especially with peer groups
- All men's ministries and "crew", includes Bonding as men
- Women's groups

Welcoming to visitors

- How welcoming we are to visitors-
- Hospitality
- FPC has a friendly atmosphere

- When I visited, every week someone greeted me

Fellowship after services & activities

- Fellowship - especially after services, this occurred even before Fellowship Hall existed.
- I have so many friends in the church that I look forward to seeing them every week
- Fellowship/activities
- First Pres travelers
 - First trip to Ireland

Culture of greeting

- Outreach when entering church (greeters/Radical Hospitality)
- Here to Serve and the culture of greeting
- Strong welcoming efforts/ hospitality- Red shirts

Community events

- Events for the community: Egg Hunt, Pet Blessing, Halloween
- Outreach events like Halloween & Easter Egg Hunt
- Music program and outreach to the community through Column Classics

Non-judgmental

- Acceptance after divorce - “tolerance” of different people
- An acceptance of peoples’ foibles here (not judgmental)

Personal invitation

- Knew people who went/go to First Pres; received a personal invitation

Come as you are

- More casual now - come as you are (not having to be dressed up)

Faith Community Nurse

- Faith Community Nurse and all that they do for the community including sharing equipment

RADICAL HOSPITALITY - BLUE SKY

Updated and more welcoming building

- renovate the 1st and 2nd floors! (5 checkmarks)
- rooftop terrace (like the one at MAS) for church events
- Remodel building to make more inviting
 - Larger welcome space

- Institutionalized greeting
- Better space for our Welcome Center
- Lobby renovations - handicap access
- Social Hall reno / ?fellowship hall
- Playground behind the church, in the courtyard?
- Updated youth group room
- new signage (interior and exterior)

Ongoing community outreach

- Where to find opportunities to engage? We used to have fairs... something to get the ideas and word about opportunities out.
- Church visibility in town
- Bible school is a great opportunity for community outreach
- general outreach (like truck/ car night)
- Re: Reaching out to community, participate/ donate at fairs? More Hawk nights/ lock-ins
- Reach out to and follow up with those who attend the outreach events
 - Pet blessing
 - Where's the follow through?
 - Trick-or-treat
 - Easter eggs with an image of the church - some kind of branding
- Coffee shop for the Community
- Regarding membership, We know there is a difference between advertising and attracting people. We need to pay attention to attracting non-standard parishioners.

Caregiving and connection between members

- Love the Bridge - it is important and unique because it is intergenerational and fun!
- Add to the ways our congregation can socialize with low commitment - couples clubs
- Who's having surgery - cards - no one knows about this... announce at services?
- Interpersonal connection is important -
 - How can we connect person to person? Liked the notes that confirmand mentors sent to college students. Can also reach out to new members
- More cards for others (congratulations, condolences, thinking of you, etc.)
- Grief support group
- Figure out a context to do small groups again. I never had the opportunity to join one.
- Realize the benefit of small groups (many come and are engaged as part of a group). The Church thrives on this...groups need to be open to new members
 - Need to have new groups start and that can be hard but very important. It's a hard transition to move from a tight group to bring in new people.
 - Sometimes you see that in coffee hour - looks like cliques.

Parking issue resolved

- Parking vouchers during the week
- parking (4 checkmarks)
- Free parking on nights for Bridge, studies, etc.
- Solution to parking
- More parking
- Parking solution
- Parking lots

Increased support and connection with members who cannot get to church or have trouble getting to church

- Bus or transportation arrangements for children's/youth/elderly programs (more people might like to attend but can't because of transportation)
- Offer more programs during the daytime especially during winter gets dark earlier tough to drive for some
- More visiting with people who can't get to church anymore
- What about non-travelers (i.e.-Whitehorse Village)

Outreach to those not attending regularly

- Talk to people who left FP and those who show just for church. Meet face to face to ask what is missing and what are your gifts.
- Perhaps reaching out to those who seem disconnected with a call or visit from an Elder.
- How are we engaging those who are not regularly attending?
 - newsletter, word of mouth, on line or letter

Increased and improved methods of communication

- Name Tags
 - For everyone (members as well as special ones for visitors)
 - Printer with name tag (Christ Community uses to track attendance as well as for children)
- Bulletin
 - Look more professional - think about how it looks as a visitor
- Printed pieces more often, monthly calendars available to pick up to see all activities at a glance

Visitors are greeted and welcomed by all

- Love greeters
- "Train" all to be welcoming to new faces and get them involved
- Youth greeters outside on Sunday

Strong connection to our neighbors

- strong sustained connection with immediate neighbors (community)
- Focus on programs that can bring in the neighborhood

Shepherd new members so feel welcome

- Be more assertive in greeting people, help them find a small group. Have members "adopt" new members providing a personal touch/ connection.
- New members
 - Shephard them for a year, get them involved

Outreach to youth and young adults

- WCU outreach/Youth outreach (discussion about multitude of existing opportunities)
- Young Adults (20 somethings)
 - Reach into the community
 - WCU connection

Other

- Allow Pets to church
- Radical Hospitality / would like pastors to know members of the congregation by name.

PASSIONATE WORSHIP - WHAT WE LOVE

Music program

- Music (all choirs)
- Choir
- Choir - enthusiasm and commitment
- Music program
- Choral scholars!!!!
- Music program - especially that it includes all ages
- Music program - traditional
- Marcia has courage to do challenging pieces
- Opportunity to participate in choir
- When people appreciate our contribution (choir)

Sunday morning worship and special worship services

- Services and quality of church as a whole
- The 8:00am worship
- Traditional worship
- Candlelight Christmas
- The 9:00am worship service (4 checkmarks)
- Lunch services
- Sunrise service
- Evening prayer
- Evening prayer service
- I love the evening prayer service. Beautiful.

Kids/youth in worship

- Children's messages at 9:00am
- That parents bring their kids to church
- Kids in worship
- Having the children in church and being a part of worship
- Glad when youth participate in the service (usher and lead in worship)
 - I had that opportunity to do that when I was in youth group and it gave me confidence to keep doing that as an adult.

Sermons/preaching

- Preaching - specifically reputation of Bill Hess
- Preaching
- Creativity of Greg

- Scripture based sermons - biblically based.

PASSIONATE WORSHIP - BLUE SKY

Sunday morning offers classic and alternative/contemporary worship

- Contemporary worship
- Contemporary worship with appropriate timing
- Contemporary service - like a retreated, more casual feel, more "upbeat"
- Contemporary Worship - what is it?
- Go to contemporary worship to experience it
- Contemporary service!! Alternative. what does that mean? risk to relax, feeling comfortable to make the church an everyday meeting place. Building relationships helps with adjusting
- Contemporary music programs offered for everyone in the community
- Contemporary worship opportunities (doesn't have to be every Sunday)
- Alternative/contemporary worship ** Finance analogy (millennials and older adults)
- Other/alternative type of worship
- Alternative/contemporary worship
 - Music
 - Service delivery/space
- Casual interaction!!! Sermon does not always need to be delivered from the pulpit
- Want to create opportunities for 18 to 25 year olds (before marriage)..contemporary worship, use technology that will create options for this group to participate
- Update facilities for things like contemporary worship

Worship services are more informal and participatory

- Get the congregation involved more during the service - reading responsively from the selections in the back of the hymnal. Like when we picked someone on the other side of the church and pray for them. Or Steve standing in the middle of the church to preach.
- Would like to see increased diversity in services; feeling that service energy has declined.
 - Would welcome a more informal, relaxed atmosphere including pastor interaction and music selection that is uplifting using smaller groups more often.
 - Allow the congregation to have more ownership regarding format, perhaps including more congregational responses allowing the congregation to feel more alive.
 - Use familiarity to encourage participation, for example, singing "Jesus Loves Me" after children's chat should draw more voices and it's a song the kids should learn and know.
 - Take risks /try something new!
- Help with regular services, including leading, more often
- bake our own communion bread

Worship service schedule allows for full services and CE opportunities for adults

- Right size the number of services based on attendance
- Ability to participate in worship and also Sunday C.E. opportunities for the choir
- Evaluate how many times we have a service on Sunday morning.
 - When we come in and have so few people it feels empty. I think I'd feel better having a lot of people around me.
- Being in the choir and sitting through a second service can be tedious.

Services give visibility to what is happening outside of worship

- Want to see the Youth leader be more visible. Bring Youth into the service
- Bring back a routine Moment for Mission to let the congregation know what is going on and who is involved.
- Sunday “Shout Out” to recognize things that go on behind the scenes.

Chapel space for intimate worship

- build a chapel (3 checkmarks)
- Small chapel space somewhere in First Pres

Services have classic and familiar hymns

- Classic (easy to sing) hymns
- Sing Christmas Carols ALL through the month of December

Services are uplifting and have a sense of energy

- Need to bring a sense of energy
- Sermons should be uplifting and inclusive, something to relate to and carry you through the week. (right now sermons are interesting and informative but not relatable)

First Pres is preferred worship place for WCU students

- To become the preferred worship site for West Chester University students.

Other

- More choral scholars

INTENTIONAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT - WHAT WE LOVE

Bible studies and faith development programs

- Bible studies led by pastors
 - Feel there was a “higher” level/quality of studies
- Spiritual learning and development opportunities
- Bible studies
- Bridge Dinner
 - Bible Study
- Men’s Groups/Men’s Ministry and opportunities for Faith Development
- Bible Studies – like when they are led by a minister (because of their expertise in the scriptures)
- The women’s day Bible Study
- Faith and Issues Class

Sunday School

- Sunday school
 - Specifically, the family’s kids knew from school/sports/etc.
- Sunday School programs
- Sunday School for both Adults and Children
- Kids programs- youth groups and bridge
- Our Sunday School teachers – they really make a difference.
- JAM

Small groups

- Circles & small groups (different themes)
- "Basic Training" that started in 2000- feel this program should be repeated to stimulate men's ministry - be cautious! This model may not fit all ages
- Men’s ministry
 - Accountability through the various groups
- Small group opportunities
- Spiritual Connections has been very important. I like that it involves people from other churches.
- Koinonia group (small group) – we stayed together for 2 years and then we had to split and start new groups

Youth program

- Active youth group
 - Parents running at the time
 - Invited to youth group by parents of kids’ peers
- Youth program and opportunities for faith development by the youth

- Youth program
- Youth group, fun interactive learning!!
 - Break away, retreats with different churches
 - Giving, i.e. Making a playhouse for another group

Other

- Nursery school (the space)
- Bible-based - not trendy “at the time”
- Christian Ed
 - Teaching and participating
- Pleased to see so many kids coming up for children’s chat
- Variety of programs – long and single
- Nursery ministry (it’s not just childcare)
- Vacation bible school, because it connects different generations and the community

INTENTIONAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT - BLUE SKY

Youth more involved and visible in the church

- They feel that youth in the church is extremely important, and they’d like to see more. Enough “to improve and warrant a terrific youth program.”
- Youth partnerships
- Have the youth being more involved – it’s a whole group of people that I don’t know who they are.
- More visibility of the youth and their activities – i.e. Confirmation class
- Youth Programs- look at long term service to our future, a way for them to relate and carry on for us

Children's programming has vibrant music, learning goals and strong pastor support

- The CE program needs to draw interest from young families - fun children's choir.
- Learning goals for each grade level in Sunday school
- Want pastor participation in the Sunday School
- Have kids singing in Sunday School. Maybe larger gathering during first part where there is music. Then split for lessons.

Members attend worship and Sunday School on Sunday mornings

- “Two hour Sundays”
 - Dedicated Sunday school hour
- Two hour Sunday – Church and Sunday School separate.

People developing their faith through small group ministries

- Grow women’s groups

- Desire for more options in addition to mother's groups
- Small Bible groups / more offerings– different time, alternate locations, in partnership to make church feel smaller

Technology supporting faith development

- Upgrade electronics
 - Teaching classes/studies
 - Ability to Skype in as needed
- Technology
 - Live stream more than just service – also CE opportunities

Other

- People bring their Bibles to church
 - They were discouraged with VBS week being canceled due to decline of volunteerism. They recognize that most young families have two parents working.
 - Feel faith development lacking
 - Love bible studies to showcase minister knowledge and make more connections
- Building renovations to provide better classroom space for needs of today with up to date technology

RISK TAKING SERVICE - WHAT WE LOVE

Service opportunities in the community

- Providing service in the community (multiple)
 - Summer mission “fundraising” projects - it has been great to raise awareness of needs in our community.!!!
- Community outreach/helping others (some thought this started with or evolves from circles)
- Anything that serves the community (named many times) - through pointed, well defined, specific, time limited
 - Feed my Sheep
 - Habitat
 - Stop Hunger Now
 - A Roof for Every Child
- Give back to community
- Join together in service to our community:
 - Barn and Chester projects, next door building
- We do community outreach well.

Specific mission opportunities (named)

- Stop Hunger Now
- Stop Hunger Now
- Good Works - First Crew
- Guatemala mission
- Christmas toy drive

Variety of mission opportunities

- Opportunities to meet people and to serve
- Quantity & Variety of Missions
- We like that we can be " flexible amongst doers" to do or help where there is need without needing formal approval

Financial mission giving

- Mission opportunities
 - Local mission
 - Focused campaigns
 - Christmas Giving
- Intentional/specific mission focused giving

Youth mission

- Youth missions - dedicated & caring Youth Leaders

Global missionaries

- Connecting with missionaries

Volunteer commitment

- The commitment of volunteers

RISK TAKING SERVICE - BLUE SKY

Volunteer programs are structured to engage many members

- Everyone at FPC volunteers for something (6 checkmarks)
- Volunteer base
 - Needs to grow
 - Recognize volunteers more
 - Make clear what commitment of volunteering fully entails
- More volunteers
- We are not a culture of volunteerism (we do better at giving \$). Our culture of volunteerism and mission needs to change by setting expectations for members. Regarding volunteerism: some felt that the younger generation needs a "reward" to participate, many feel that this group would respond to more family oriented projects and activities along with needing to know specific times to make it work. The idea is that they will share the opportunity for quality time together with friends. (Recognized from other churches)
- Create a volunteer culture
 - Make it easy to know what volunteer opportunities exist
 - Ask people individually and not just "sign up genius"
 - Thank volunteers
- Develop an automated volunteer database with service opportunities (not unlike a search engine/vacation planner, etc)
- College outreach
 - Let college kids know about service opportunities
 - Give opportunities to serve
 - Determine how credits can be issues for service
- Mission oriented events - "Stop Hunger Now" also intergenerational and fun! With limited commitment

Deeper community impact

- Recognize a metric of how many of us are involved in service. Do we know how many are doing this? How well is First Pres doing in the area of service? We should ask ourselves this test question,

" if First Pres disappeared, would the community know it was gone?" We know at this point that some of our community would miss us. We'd like to do better.

- For everyone to know more about what we do in community outreach. Not sure if we can do more. But people can learn more about what we do.
- Expand on the work that we've done with the summer mission - partner with others in the Community to really make an impact

Increase youth mission opportunities

- More youth mission trip opportunities- ? Closer to home
- Summer camp similar programs - "would like to help people while there"

Other

- Use of properties next door for mission-related purpose
- Fundraisers with a specific purpose
- Short term projects help with momentum. (Last summer)

EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY – BLUE SKY

- General fundraisers to support budget

LEADERSHIP – WHAT WE LOVE

Great staff

- We feel that " we have the best combination of pastors since 1983" regarding creativity, energy, optimism and ideas (spoken by more than one participant)
- Fantastic Staff - they are the lifeblood
- Very blessed with our staff
- The staff =)

LEADERSHIP – BLUE SKY

Members have a strong sense of transparency

- One thing someone brought up was the perception that Session is a group that meets somewhere in the church and just makes decisions at random without explanation. The feeling that Session operates separate from the congregation seemed to be affirmed by a couple other people present.
- Transparency - personnel decisions, finances (what is our situation)
- Transparency - discussions/decisions of Session, more communication, names of Study Team and ways to contact, Finances - where does this stand

Set expectations and challenge members

- Set expectations regarding involvement as a member.
- Challenge the congregation - What are your gifts? How can you help?

Other

- Staff stability - perception of a large amount of turnover
- Need long term & full (?) time staff person to coordinate all of the children's programs. Offer a compelling package to attract (and retain!) best & brightest.
- People comparing Bill to Greg and that's a hard comparison. They have different gifts. Maybe that's stopped and hopeful that we're stable and on the upswing.
- Please, no politics from ministers
- We should share what our 5 values "look like" at this point
- Re-look at the 2040 recommendations

OTHER – WHAT WE LOVE

- Size of church - able to "get lost" if desired

- Working with other churches
- My work at First Pres.
- Tradition
- A good healthy mix of a foot in the past and a foot in the future
- A good healthy mix of head and heart Christianity
- Anything interactive and hands on

OTHER – BLUE SKY

Growth in number of members

- Numerical congregational growth
- A new members class of 40

Redefine success beyond packed pews

- Redefine success beyond packed pews in services

Other

- Re-emphasize “Above All Love” tagline
- Build on church strengths (somewhat vague)
- Find ways to set us apart from the secular world
- Know that Expectations and experiences are different.
- Communication - it’s easy to miss things!
- Church is a social network of small groups, not a congregation. Too many members in name only.
- Want to understand what happened with Vacation Bible School
- Partnerships
- Use Resources - sponsor families
- Some of my friends have left and I hear their negative things, but that’s not true for me
- Solve the situation with the buildings next door (sell, build)
- yoga classes for all ages
- build a gym
- alternative structure or system to the ever-present evening meeting madness
- the “1+1” or “W+1” formula for everyone (worship plus one more thing (service, study, etc))

