

**Problem Solving Report
First Presbyterian Church of Allentown
Allentown, Pennsylvania**

Saturday, September 10 and Saturday, September 17

LMPC team members travelled to Allentown to engage in two problem-solving sessions. Based on information gleaned from the events up to this point, LMPC team members facilitated a brainstorming session on how FPCA might move forward in a flourishing way given the challenges being faced. Over one hundred people attended each session. LMPC staff felt participants exhibited a lot of enthusiasm for this part of the process. Each session ran from 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM. Participants were given a short break to enjoy a substantial snack that was provided by volunteers from FPCA.

Saturday, September 10, 2022

The first session began by meeting as a group in the fellowship hall of the church. Ten stations were established around the perimeter of the fellowship hall. Each station represented one of the areas identified during the information gathering phase as being workable problem areas that needed to be addressed moving forward. They included: 1) Mission/Theology/Identity, 2) Membership/Belonging/Community, 3) Worship/Education/Spiritual Formation, 4) Children/Youth/Families, 5) Transition/Leadership/communication, 6) Finances/Stewardship/ Campus/Physical Plant, 7) History/Reputation, 8) Conflict/Change/Disruption/Discomfort/COVID, 9) Diversity/Friendliness/Welcoming, and 10) Staffing/Volunteers.

Pieces of newsprint were fastened to the wall at each station and supplied with markers. During the first part of the session, participants were given the opportunity to peruse about the fellowship, visiting stations as they wished and jot down ideas on how to address each area. There was plenty of good interaction as people moved for station to station, discussing what was written on the sheets with others around them. Provision was also made on Zoom for those who were unable to attend in person. The created their own lists which was added to the general discussion. Before the session was adjourned for the day, photos were taken of all of the sheets. Those photos can be accessed by following this [link](#).

After a break, the fellowship hall was arranged in eight sets of tables. Each set of tables represent one of the workable problem areas, except for two table which represented two areas: 1) History/Reputation and Conflict/Change/ Disruption/Discomfort/COVID, and 2) Diversity/Friendliness/Welcoming and Staffing/Volunteers. Participants were then invited to choose an area that they wished to work on in coming up with some initial proposals that would then be the basis by which participants on the following weekend would derive solid proposals to present to Session. Each group assigned a recorded who would be responsible for

taking notes and then typing those notes and sending them to LMPC to compile and disseminate for the following weekends work.

Again, this latter part of the session created lively discussion among participants. Each group engaged their area creatively and submitted thoughtful responses and proposal that would inform further work. The notes submitted by each group can be found in Appendix H as they were received by the office of LMPC. The notes were also made available to members ahead of time to allow for reflection prior to the second problem solving session on September 17.

Saturday, September 17, 2022

The second problem solving session was held on Saturday, September 17. Participants gathered in the fellowship hall to receive their instructions for the morning. Because it was difficult for participants to hear each other in the fellowship hall], rooms throughout the building were made available for groups to do their work. Each group represented one of the workable problem areas and were provided with the document produced by the work of participants the previous weekend.

Each group was asked to come up with one to three concrete proposals, complete with a timeline and who would be responsible for carrying out the proposal. Each group was given newsprint to write on, laying out their proposals which they would then present to the larger group for feedback, questions, and support. Groups were given several hours to work on these proposals. Besides the groups that met in person, there were several people who met on Zoom who worked on the area of Worship/Education/Spiritual Formation. The proposal each group came up with have been transcribed and can be found in Appendix I.

After a break, the entire assembly met in the sanctuary due to technical issues encountered with the sound system in the fellowship hall. Participants were given three note cards: one blue, one yellow, and one red. The Blue notecard was to represent support for the proposal; the yellow represented questions about the proposal; and the red notecard represented a lack of support. Before the groups presented their proposal, LMPC explained that individuals might only partially support individual proposals but that if there was widespread support from others, they would agree to support it implementation one hundred percent.

Each group then presented their proposals and to the rest of the group. The work of these groups demonstrated considerable creativity and willingness to adapt to a changing environment. Overall, there was strong support for most of the proposals. Support for individual proposals is included in the Appendix I which contains the proposals as presented by each group.

Sunday, September 18, 2022

The Sunday following the problem-solving session on Saturday, September 18, Devon Miller remained in Allentown to deliver the message for FPCA's casual and traditional services. Miller's message focused on the importance of adaptive change in the Church's ability to thrive and flourish. The sermon is included in its entirety in Appendix J.

Summary

To bring LMPC's current engagement with FPCA, Jay Wittmeyer and Devon Miller will meet with Session on September 26, 2022, to go over and discuss the outcome of the problem-solving session.

Items to discuss in this meeting are the proposals that were made, the priority that should be given to each proposal based on the work undertaken thus far, the interconnective nature of the proposals, and the process that needs to be undertaken to carry through with them.

From LMPC's perspective, the proposals might be categorized in at least three categories in order of priority keeping in mind the way in which each proposal contributes to the renewed belonging (see Interim Report) frequently brought up by participants throughout the process.. The first category might include the mission statement, questions of worship style, meeting the needs of young families, and the use of the building. A secondary level might include the search for a new settled pastor and becoming more welcoming. A third level might include how to increase better communication between leadership and the congregation and ways to record a living history of FPCA. Of course, Session will make the final determination as to what will be prioritized and what the process will entail to see these proposals through to their outcome. It should be noted that LMPC would be available to assist in the formulation of the process should Session feel the need for assistance and accountability.

After LMPC's meeting with session, LMPC will submit their final report with any further actions that will follow.

Appendices

Appendix A

Problem Solving Session #1 Initial Proposals for Problem Solving First Presbyterian Church of Allentown September 10, 2022

1. Mission/Identity/Theology

Information we used to generate concrete proposals:

- A need to recognize that mission outreach was strong prior to COVID.
- A need to recognize that the church has done well in representing Christ in the past.
- A need to recognize that mission and outreach has taken a backseat recently and needs to be revived.
- A need to recognize that the current mission statement is not an action statement.
- A need to consider if we are directionally challenged.
- A need to recognize that mission and job descriptions and structures exist but have been lost in the shuffle.
- A need for a mission statement beyond an identity statement.
- A need to recognize the pandemic has caused the church to drift.
- A need to recognize the church has been very inward focused.
- A need to recognize the mission statement has been set aside.
- A need to recognize there was no person to oversee the vision.
- A need to recognize that we can become self-centered.
- A need to redefine ourselves in the community. In the past people have seen FPCA as a large congregation with lots of money. That has changed.
- A need to recognize that there is potential to engage the urban community.
- A need to clarify what we keep and what we will let go of.
- A need to be innovative with the church such as outreach charter schools to get money for the building concerns for membership and finances.
- A need to assess what leadership style is needed looking forward to be innovative and take advantage of technology and the Internet.
- A need to understand how mission helps people connect with each other.
- A need to recognize that an outreach and mission program will help unite the church.
- A need for more local mission in a city with a lot of opportunity.
- A need to explore and innovate how technology can be effectively used moving forward.
- A need to invest in sound systems.
- A need for clear goals.
- A need to continue the mission programs.
- A need for the church to focus on what its needs are in the future not on what I prefer now.
- A need to recognize that the process LMPC offers gives us hope for the church in the future.
- A need to allow God to work on our lives outside of our preferences.
- A need to find a new way of being.
- A need to listen to younger people.
- A need to recognize that FPCA is a suburban church not an urban church.
- A need to recognize the church needs to find its DNA.
- A need to recognize we need to rediscover who we are.

- A need to recognize who the congregation is in order to meet their needs.
- A need for the church to get grounded and find a new direction.
- A need to recognize that we do not know how to move forward.
- A need to recognize that there is pushback when new things are attempted.
- A need for good communication for new things to be birthed.
- A need for the congregation to be vibrant if it wants to move forward.
- A need to be open to change.
- A need for worship to be vibrant and thriving for things to move forward.
- A need to recognize current potential opportunities for change.
- A need to listen deeply and responsively to various voices within the congregation.
- A need for long term strategic planning.
- A need to clarify our goals—the flywheel metaphor.
- A need to be willing to change while also keeping what is important.
- A need for the church to be willing to face its challenges as it moves forward.
- A need to maintain quality as we consider new things moving forward
- A need to recognize that we will need to create something new.
- A need for an openness to be innovative and thought as we move forward.
- A need to focus on the basics.
- A need to focus on the gospel.
- A need for clear theological teaching on how to relate to the world around us.
- A need to ask what the fundamental beliefs and teachings of FPCA entail.
- A need for a deeper theology that is relevant to the church today.
- A need to allow pastors to do theological work.

From these responses, the 100 people gathered on 9/10/22 responded with the following concrete proposals:

✦ PRAISE and WORSHIP GOD, GROW IN FAITH, SERVE OUR COMMUNITY

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This fits several of the statements but is too general to be a good proposal.

✦ What Does DONE Look Like? What are We (FPCA) Trying to do?

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Several statements suggest that FPCA needs to “find itself” and these questions reflect those statements but offer no proposals as to how to achieve that goal.

✦ Before selecting a new lead pastor, I propose that we discern what do we affirm. In particular, how do we align with the PC(USA) regarding racial and sexuality justice issues?

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Some of this proposal falls under the statements, but the question about aligning with the PC(USA) is a new idea from today’s session.

Falls under:

- A need to recognize the church needs to find its DNA.
- A need to ask what the fundamental beliefs and teachings of FPCA entail.
- ✦ Ask whether we are bending biblical truths to adjust to social change or whether we are acting in Bible-based truths as society changes.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits under:

- A need for clear theological teaching on how to relate to the world around us.
- A need for a deeper theology that is relevant to the church today.
- ✦ Revisit the Statement of the Spiritual Formation Vision Team, circa 2016. It's still relevant today.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This is a new idea generated today. No one on our team knows what the Spiritual Formation Vision Team Statement is.

- ✦ Identify an overarching/umbrella DNA (identity) that provides scriptural basis for our theology, mission, etc.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

None of the statements explicitly state needing a scriptural basis for theology, but the implication of a focus on the Gospel can back up the proposal. Not sure if the writer would include “deeper theology” in what they wrote.

Falls under:

- A need to recognize the church needs to find its DNA.
- ✦ Our Mission is what we believe God wants us to do. If the congregation does not agree or does not understand it, our destination is unpredictable.
So, we (FPCA) need to be sure our mission is clear, understood, agreed with and clearly connected to programs, activities and directions need to be actively communicated and promoted.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits under:

- A need for clear goals.
- A need for good communication for new things to be birthed.
- ✦ The mission statement should focus on spiritual learning and growth. Services/sermons should explicitly support spiritual growth.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This proposal indicates a need for a new mission statement. Although none of the statements say this, they imply the current mission statement is not adequate.

- ✦ I would like if the ministers would give us the background of the Scripture. What is happening at the time politically, socially + religiously?

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits under:

- A need for clear theological teaching on how to relate to the world around us.
- A need for a deeper theology that is relevant to the church today.
- A need to allow pastors to do theological work.
- ✦ Raise the quality of the religious life of members and the larger community.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This seems to be a new idea generated today. One of the statements mentions maintaining quality, while this statement implies quality is lacking. Also, none of the statements mention religious life.

✦ Create a "self aware" Mission Statement from a Mission Study.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This also asks for a new mission statement.

✦ Propose we work to develop an "action" oriented mission statement. What does FPCA want to do

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits under:

- A need for a mission statement beyond an identity statement.
- A need to recognize that the current mission statement is not an action statement.

✦ Preach biblical principles. The people will decide how to put them into practice. Keep politics out of it. You will alienate half the congregation when you do.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Some of this fits the statements, like preaching biblical principles. The portion about keeping politics out of "it" is new today. The statement reflecting on why keeping "it" out of politics is a threat. This team is not sure what to do with this statement, so we didn't address it.

✦ Family/Intergenerational mission opportunities in the community – where families see need and are able to impact community and "walk side by side" with neighbors – examples may include holding an Easter Egg Hunt in the community, different focus on VBS – more family oriented/ in community, partner with agency such as Nature Conservancy or community pocket parks.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:

- A need to recognize the church has been very inward focused.
- A need to redefine ourselves in the community.
- A need to recognize that there is potential to engage the urban community.
- A need to understand how mission helps people connect with each other.
- A need to listen to younger people.

✦ I propose we change the name of the church. "First Presbyterian Church" doesn't sound inviting. All the other growing churches have simple names. (The FPCA name is rooted in the past.) It can detract from new people coming to visit us.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:


- A need to consider if we are directionally challenged.
- A need to find a new way of being.
- A need to be open to change.
- A need to recognize we need to rediscover who we are.
- A need to recognize current potential opportunities for change.
- A need to recognize that we will need to create something new.

✦ Become an active congregation in the local community.
• identify and coordinate activities w/ local organizations

- motivate our members to participate, get involved in community events & initiatives
- promote FPCA's involvement and contributions via social media outlets popular w/ young people.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?


Fits with several of the outreach statements already mentioned and with the need to listen to young people.

 We must find what brings us together because we can't afford to do everything we did before. We must focus on what is doable today and tomorrow.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:

- In the past people have seen FPCA as a large congregation with lots of money. That has changed.
- A need to be innovative with the church such as outreach charter schools to get money for the building concerns for membership and finances.
- A need to understand how mission helps people connect with each other.
- A need to recognize that an outreach and mission program will help unite the church.


 Look at the Wednesday and Tuesday Men's Disciple Group Projects, and how they get started. Do more like this.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

No one could identify what the Wednesday and Tuesday Men's group projects are.

Fits with:

- A need to recognize that the church has done well in representing Christ in the past.
- A need for good communication for new things to be birthed.


 I propose we survey the congregation as to what are the most important aspects of bring a church of Christ. Then we form a faith formation class (all invited) to look at our present mission statement and update it.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Aspects of being a church of Christ is not directly mentioned in the statements but is implied by statements about Biblical principles and focusing on the Gospel.

Fits with:

- A need to allow pastors to do theological work.
- A need to listen deeply and responsively to various voices within the congregation.
- A need for a mission statement beyond an identity statement.

 Have vibrant worship that energizes the congregation to connect with neighbors as people Jesus would see as neighbors.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:

- A need to recognize the church has been very inward focused.
- A need to understand how mission helps people connect with each other.
- A need to invest in sound systems.
- A need to allow God to work on our lives outside of our preferences.
- A need to find a new way of being.

- A need for the congregation to be vibrant if it wants to move forward.
- A need to be open to change.
- A need to explore and innovate how technology can be effectively used moving forward.
- A need for worship to be vibrant and thriving for things to move forward.
- A need to recognize that we will need to create something new.
- A need for an openness to be innovative and thought as we move forward.
- A need to focus on the basics.
- A need to focus on the gospel.
- A need for clear theological teaching on how to relate to the world around us.
- A need to ask what the fundamental beliefs and teachings of FPCA entail.
- A need for a deeper theology that is relevant to the church today.
- A need to allow pastors to do theological work.

✚ **At least 1/2 of the year starting in Jan. sermons would be on the lectionary with the intention of discovering who God/Christ/Spirit is and what new things are expected of us.**

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:

- A need to find a new way of being.
- A need to recognize that we will need to create something new.
- A need to focus on the basics.
- A need to focus on the gospel.
- A need for clear theological teaching on how to relate to the world around us.
- A need for a deeper theology that is relevant to the church today.
- A need to allow pastors to do theological work.

✚ **I propose we support our pastors as they preach scriptural sermons and worship services. We need to nurture our own members as well as challenging them to participation in greater mission outside the church.**

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:

- A need to focus on the basics.
- A need to focus on the gospel.
- A need to allow pastors to do theological work.

✚ **Develop clear focus for mission – deeper rather than broad**

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:

- A need for clear goals.
- A need to continue the mission programs.

✚ **Session considers/obtains congregational input before major decisions.**

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Fits with:

- A need to listen deeply and responsively to various voices within the congregation.

- ✚ I propose we forget the past and start anew, with a clean sheet, as if we were starting a new church. Ask-what is Jesus calling us to do? Start with the basics e.g. What was Jesus and the apostle's mission when they started? Let's begin there.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

falls under:

- A need to recognize the pandemic has caused the church to drift.
- A need to recognize the church needs to find its DNA.
- A need to recognize we need to rediscover who we are.
- A need to recognize who the congregation is in order to meet their needs.
- A need for the church to get grounded and find a new direction.
- A need to be willing to change while also keeping what is important.
- A need to recognize that we will need to create something new.
- A need to focus on the basics.
- A need to focus on the gospel.
- A need to ask what the fundamental beliefs and teachings of FPCA entail.

- ✚ Use this "self aware" Mission Statement as "guiding Light" for all decisions and communicate all decisions in relation to this Mission Statement.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

Although none of the statements actually say, "Generate a new mission statement," the calls to "clearly define" and others like it imply a new mission statement is needed. The writer does not say a new mission statement is needed, either, but we don't currently have a "self aware" mission statement, either.

- ✚ How many people here today are less than 60 years old? How do we "listen to the younger people" if we aren't getting them to meetings like this?

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This is not a "concrete statement." However the query falls under:

- A need to listen to younger people.
- ✚ Revisit the Statement of the Spiritual Formation Vision Team, circa 2016. It's still relevant today. Prioritize this area. Everything else proceeds from Mission/theology/ DNA.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

No one on our team knows what the Statement of the Spiritual Formation Vision Team is from 2016. However, this, too, seems to ask that a new Mission Statement for the church be created.

- ✚ The church communicates how it is governed by the national church + how our leadership works + makes decisions within this structure.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This seems to be a new idea about making sure FPCA is connected with the national church. This idea can be implied from several statements that mention being grounded, getting back to basics, lamentations that our

church is inwardly-focused and self-centered, and the need to recognize that mission helps connect people with one another.

- ✚ The church communicates its primary theological tenets + provides opportunity to ask questions & discuss.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

falls under:

- A need to ask what the fundamental beliefs and teachings of FPCA entail.
- A need for clear theological teaching on how to relate to the world around us.
- A need for a deeper theology that is relevant to the church today.
- A need to allow pastors to do theological work.
- A need to be open to change.

- ✚ Create the expectation that growth and transformation are rooted in challenge and discomfort and provide opportunities to discuss/process the challenges that change the way we behave 24/7

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This is a new idea, but it is grounded in several statements regarding change.

- ✚ Is it biblical or political? Ensure that the congregation understands PC(USA) beliefs and how the way we behave in the political arena is rooted in biblical teachings.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

This is a new idea, but the substance is about fundamental beliefs, which are in several statements.

- ✚ See this period of time as a challenge to trust God more deeply as a congregation. I'd like to see all we do flow from our faith – every church team/organization would explore the scriptures to determine how their work comes from who God is, God's way. This would be fluid, changing w/ each new group.

Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

There are several statements that refer to COVID and one that refers to Lombard, so we can infer the writer is referring to either or both of those as “this period.” There are no statements that ask for all our committees to determine how their work is from God or that it be fluid, so this is a new idea, unless you consider:

- A need to allow God to work on our lives outside of our preferences.

✚ FPCA/Session could consider empowering people to know where PC(USA) stands, on the topic of progress. This is not a "new topic" since Bill Barker did an adult Sunday School class on the “Mythology of Genesis” & since Harry Emerson Fosdick famously preached on “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” - - Saying that we’d like to be more “Bible-based” or more “Gospel-based” often opens the door to harmful literalism, and thwarts progress (as it also willingly disregards good scholarship).


Does this fit the above statements or is it a new idea generated today?

As in previous comments, the idea that the church should be grounded in PC(USA) theology is a new idea from today’s session, but can be interpreted as relating to sound theological teaching.

Assignment II: In a group focused on the Mission/Identity/Theology proposals, combine like ideas and make concrete proposals to Session.

Strategy: Our group broke the proposals generated during Assignment I into 3 categories.

1. Objectives of the church
2. Tactics to achieve the objectives
3. Communicating and justifying why the tactics are being implemented.

 We concluded that the proposals called for a new mission statement. The new mission statement should discern:

Who we are

What we're called to be

What do we do?

Why are we doing it?

We suggest the following resources:


- The scriptures.

In looking at the scriptures, we suggest asking the following questions:

- o What did that scripture mean when Jesus said it?
- o What did it mean when the books of the Bible were being written?
- o What does it mean for us today?
- The Spiritual Formation Vision Team Statement from 2016
- The Tuesday and Wednesday Men's Disciple Group Projects

When developing the new mission statement, we ask Session to consider the proposals

- ⚡ Ask whether we are bending Bible truths to adjust to social change or whether we are acting on Bible truths as society changes.
- ⚡ How does our church align with the PC(USA) regarding e.g. social justice and sexuality?
- ⚡ Recognize that the PC(USA) does not consider a literal interpretation of the Bible.
- ⚡ We are called to praise and worship God, grow in faith, and serve our community.
- ⚡ We need to assess honestly who we are.
- ⚡ We need to raise the quality of religious life.
- ⚡ The mission statement should be action oriented
- ⚡ We need to consider the greater community, and focus on raising the quality of religious life for them, too.

 We concluded that the proposals called for using the Bible more in worship, based on the following proposals:

- ⚡ The Pastors give the background of the Scripture. What is happening at the time politically, socially + religiously?
- ⚡ Preach the Biblical principles and let the people decide how to put them into practice, keeping politics out of the sermons.

✚ We concluded that several proposals called for using the Bible during meetings where church members were present. Our proposal is:

✚ Use scripture during meetings to discern what the work of the team is.

✚ We concluded that the congregation be asked to do the following:

✚ Support the pastors as they preach scriptural sermons that both nurture and challenge.

✚ Recognize that PC(USA) beliefs are scriptural and help us know how to act in the political arena

The following tactics are should be considered by Session:

- Outreach
- Vibrant worship
- Intergenerational mission
- Change the name of the church
- Walk side by side with our neighbors
- Have an egg hunt for the community
- Have family-oriented VBS
- Partner with the Nature Conservancy or other Lehigh Valley agencies
- Encourage FPCA to attend community events
- Promote FPCA on social media that young people use
- Survey the congregation before making major decisions
- Work with the congregation to develop the mission statement
- Narrow the focus and identify priorities
- Provide opportunities to ask questions and discuss
- Create the expectation that growth and transformation are rooted in challenge and discomfort and provide opportunities to discuss/process the challenges – challenges that change the way we behave 24/7
- See this period of time as a challenge to trust God more deeply as a congregation to see all we do flow from our faith. This changes with each group.

2. Membership/Belonging/Community

Everyone who enters our church should feel valued, welcomed, and safe. Our community should indicate a clear and noticeable communication of belonging and a common belief in Jesus Christ.

1 Census: We propose the leadership conduct an immediate census to determine the number of active members First Presbyterian really has, with particular attention to the following:

- Define the definition of “active” and share how this is being determined
- Is active determined only by attendance, giving, or pledging?
- Consider online viewership
- Ask if members are attending another church and why
- Send to members who have left and ask why
- Check with other churches who have recently done this to gather good survey material

- Phrasing of questions is imperative to not offend when possible

#2 Fellowship: We propose leadership, active committees and small groups provide a variety of scheduled fellowship opportunities monthly

- Variety to include, but not limited to:
 - Cross generational
 - By age group
 - Sponsored by a combination of focus/committee groups (as explore in summit meeting this past summer)

#3 Flow Chart of Church Leadership & Responsibility: We propose that a visual flow chart of leadership with the church including pastors, office staff, elders, deacons, and committee leaders (with contact information) be communicated to congregants repeatedly/regularly, as well as posted throughout the church, so that members more easily know with whom to connect for concerns or involvement.

#4 Organizational Framework for Small Groups: We propose creating a method or structure for providing congregants opportunities to connect **with** other members in smaller, supportive, structured ways other than committee or service offerings:

- Mini-congregations
- Neighborhood / parish groups
- Dinner groups
- Dessert groups meeting in homes
- Age related groups
- Multi generational groups
- Interest focused groups

#5 Communication Structure: We propose expanding means of communication beyond worship and email to include texting, individual phone calls, revised/robust directories, one on one discussions, website, worship announcements, postings throughout the church, etc. (as we come back from pandemic restrictions.)

#6 Follow Ups: We propose a means of accountability and expectation to follow up individually with members who express in surveys and/or new member interest responses a desire to become involved or volunteer as well as with those not attending church.

#7 Connection Cards: We propose that connection cards (perhaps virtual or QR code) be reinstated; these could serve as both new visitor and member communication “cards”, not singling out visitors.

#8 Greeting Response Time: bring back greeting time during worship

#9 Matthew 25 Congregation: Proposed the session explore becoming a Matthew 25 congregation

#10 Presbyterian Church USA: Propose congregation receives consistent message of how we fit into the wider church denomination; use of church statements and policies to support mission related decisions

3. Worship/Education/Spiritual Formation

Summary of Proposals by Topic:

Schedule:

Propose one early service in Chapel

Propose Traditional & Alternative Services at same time, rotate pastors; with Sunday School before service and Fellowship after service

Propose Children & Adult Classes between Services

Propose Contemporary service at 8:30 and Traditional at 10:45

Propose Sunday School before Service

Propose 10-11am Adult Classes, 11-12pm one combined service with band and choir

Propose schedule to accommodate parents with children

Place:

Propose multiple worship styles at different times in Sanctuary

Propose capital campaign for upgrade of sound system in Fellowship Hall

Sunday School/Spiritual Formation:

Propose Adult Education with guest speakers, seminary faculty, neighboring pastors, etc

Propose including music in Faith Formation

Propose Adult Classes on social issues plus time for dialogue

Propose Adult Classes on Presbyterian governance, elements of membership, and practical matters such as access to communication resources

Propose gatherings/groups for parents of young children for instruction and support

Preaching:

Propose inspirational preaching in a non-political and non-polarizing way

Propose inviting pastors who grew up at FPCA back as a guest pastor

Propose adding time for pastors to research/prepare sermons to reach across generations (requires taking administrative type tasks off their responsibilities)

Propose returning to basics of the Gospel and reading from Old and New Testaments

Music:

Propose to return music budgets

Propose more uplifting contemporary music

Propose hiring two part-time, hands-on musical leaders, one for traditional and one for contemporary services

Propose children singing in services

Style:

Propose two styles: Traditional and Contemporary (6 comments)

Propose Blended Service with various styles of music (2 comments)

Propose keeping/improving online services for members and new people's first experience with FPCA

Propose returning to page 106 for Doxology

Children/Youth:

Propose combined service focusing on & by children and youth with youth helping plan services once a month or so

Propose contemporary service that welcomes families and young children

Misc:

Propose restoring Flower Ministry

Propose removing netting/decorations from communion table

Propose slowing down the scrolling of announcements on screen, and reposition flag away from screen

4. Children/Youth/Families

Worship

Restore Nursery – 0 to 3 years from 8:45am to 12 noon

Offer tech and other activities for children during the entire worship service in designated areas in the sanctuary.

Incorporate more activities for children and adults during the worship service

Alternative service in fellowship hall

Offer Saturday evening service

Brainstorm/study how to design meaningful worship for children which is also theologically challenging for youth and adults

Sunday School

Dedicated hour for church school for children and youth with fellowship hour at same time for parents

Children ages 0 to PreK

Mentor expectant families

Extend child care for weekday preschool program

Parents Morning Out

Middle School and High School Youth Ministry

Youth Group

Youth Choir

Communicants Class

Intergeneration Fellowship Events

Website

Emphasize welcoming families with children on the home page

Summer Programs

Vacation Bible School

Family fellowship activities with purpose of letting participants know what is planned for Sunday School and Youth for the coming school year

5. Transition/Leadership/Communication

1: Verbatim List from Proposal Sheets – Grouped into 4 categories (groupings and category description determined by table group discussion and consensus)

Communications (Category 1)

- Communication has been too focused on conflict & is confusing; Ask an expert on communications (church member ?) to vet all eblasts & info.
- “E-Blast” communications are ineffective. Send out info in smaller pieces, and thru multiple channels – including sending multiple e-mails with the same info.
- Encourage members to take advantage of all the communications they’re receiving.
- Propose we ask members what specific forms of FPCA communications they will routine read – online, paper, other?
- Give congregation a greater voice in decisions by announcing t services what session is going to consider & then offering time for input before Session’s votes. Re: Pew changes, etc.,

PNC/Engaging a pastor (Category 2)

- Secure a new minister
- Set a target date to form a PNC no later than _____. (1 Dec.?)
- Recommend that Presbytery have a training program or PNC to help come up with how to interview candidates.

- Set accomplishment objectives for the interim lead pastor & include any structural realignments.
- Ensure that new interim & lead pastors have multi-pastor church leadership experience.
- Seek help for interim lead pastor candidates from wide variety of sources & avoid support from Lehigh Presbytery.
- Consider retaining search firms to support the search of interim & lead pastors (e.g., Vanderbloemen)
- Obtain 3rd party help in writing a Mission Study so it has lasting value to the church vs the handful of lead pastor candidates who will read it.
- Consider a younger energetic head minister that younger members can relate to but can adapt to older member.
- More open communications, more congregational involvement, more speedier decision making, more flexible salary offerings.
- Streamline the PNC process. Transition periods usually lead to loss of members. Three years of work to secure a new pastor is too long. Presbytery and higher bodies need to streamline this process. Learn from our brothers and sisters in other denominations.

Politics (Category 3)

- Stop ignoring the differing opinions of the congregation.
- We need a purple church pastor and sermons (followed by a “I echo this!” notation)
- The interim minister must relate to all types of worship.
- Need for a PNC ASAP! Session followed what was directed. I personally have never been asked my opinion in a major decision being considered.
- Social issues need to be addressed so that the middle 80% of the political spectrum is onboard, not just the left.
- It has been stated that we shouldn’t wish to “feel good” when leaving worship. You can be challenged and realize the need to grow and also feel good. Too much derogatory condemnation of the congregation.
- Propose more educ. Opportunities to show that some of our experienced changes over time are societal/global & not personal.
- Place inviting signs on our lawn. Current ones are “cold” :& uninviting. More Christ Love focus & not politically driven!!

Leadership/Governance (Category 4)

- Session exhausted – expand Session temporarily with a wider committee to assist based on specific skills
- Transitional Ministry must change from being a “shake things up” process to a “build up” process and accentuate the positives of the church.
- Guest preachers to supplement staff sermons until we get a new lead pastor.
- Continue to address social issues, always in a biblical context.
- Care of leaders is critical right now – pastors and session.
- I propose that Session move toward having 50% of the elder be under the age of 45. We really need a younger generation leading the congregation.

6. Finances/Stewardship/Campus/Physical Plant

Proposals:

1. Restore the Board of Trustees
2. Repurpose the church assets and/or the building to generate income
 - rent space
 - utilize unused land (office building, sports field, etc.)
 Use the money for ongoing building maintenance. Think outside the box to generate other ideas.
3. Renovate and update the sanctuary
 - move pews 6" apart to accommodate handicapped
 - face the balcony for alternative service
 - build a stage in the back of the sanctuary; remove central back entrance
 - put tech support in the balcony
4. Fundraise for special projects and/or have a capital campaign for:
 - sound systems in FH and Sanctuary - nursery
 - classrooms - screens - upgraded security system
 - restrooms - general appearance
 People like to give to specific projects. Use the United Way example.
5. Build a new church and sell our present one; use out-of-the-box thinking to put mission first, then ourselves.
6. Find out why people are not pledging (get them to share their concerns)
 - lack of convenience and/or ease of technology?
 - educate on digital (on-line) pledging and special gifts, etc. (i.e., crop walk, special concerns)
 - inspiring sermons = better pledging
 - what can we learn from evangelical churches regarding pledge campaigns? Innovate!
7. Strengthen in-house finances before focusing on external mission
8. Share a report on costs to put our campus back in "good working order"/ improvements anticipated over the next 5 years (tech, HVAC, etc.)
 - communicate our financial situation to the congregation on a regular basis
9. Should NOT use balance sheet funds to fund operations
10. Recapture an emphasis on Christian Stewardship at FPCA
 - stewardship should = faith formation
 - stewardship should be a primary spiritual discipline
 - everything belongs to God, we are stewards
 - 3 Ts of stewardship = Thanksgiving, Trust, Transformation
 - needs support from the pulpit, but "should" be a member/Session-led effort
 - create a staff position for Member Ministries in support of a focus on Stewardship
 - staff should orient towards connecting/inviting and supporting members/friends in their ministries, not in providing programs
 - staff should support and help members/friends find their talents entrusted to them by God

A primary church metric is how many members/friends can identify one or more ministries they participate in and are passionate about inside and outside of FPCA. Getting this metric to some target % is a critical success factor.

7. History/Reputation

Raw Comments

1. Propose we stop trying to be all things to all people and focus on only trying to be a few things - maybe more local mission.
2. I propose we forget the past – we’re not going back there (our reputation is only important to us – internally). Instead, focus on creating a new future from which a new (possibly better) reputation will begin to grow.
3. FPCA needs to find new ways to move forward without losing its rich historic past. Continuity is important.
4. It is important not to focus on past glory. We are what we are now, not what we were in the past. We need to pave a positive path into the future.
5. Recognize the grief associated with change/loss by holding a “service where we celebrate the past “life” of some of our “no longer programs.” THEN – look at/discuss how we move forward.
6. Overtly ask members who talk about the Church’s past glories to transition their love of the Church to productive actions that will adjust the Church to be successful given current times.
7. Propose opportunities for small group spiritual direction (not bible study).
8. Propose an expectation that every member be involved in some aspect of the church community other than just attending worship); it could be praying for others, greeting others, small groups, music, etc.; individual need their own spirituality.
9. The “Historic Name” of “First Presbyterian Church”, may be the very thing that is deterring new families to come and visit us. I propose we change the name of the church to a more simple and inviting name, like so many of the growing churches have done. Don’t let the “historic” name of FPCA hold us back.
10. Hopefully the “volume” of those focusing on the past is overestimated. I believe the majority wishes to move on.
11. I propose that we find a way to honor our past in a visible way. The need to hire a new pastor who can respect our history while guiding us to a new vision for our church. We need a visionary healer!
12. Our church has a history of being very missional and generous to our community and abroad. I propose we continue to keep this missional aspect of our church.
13. Gain an understanding of what “church” means to the next, younger generation that will be our future.
 - a. What does the church physically look like to them; what will attract them?
 - b. What does it “do”? What do they want it to do?

Standalone Comments

1. Gain an understanding of what “church” means to the next, younger generation that will be our future.
 - a. What does the church physically look like to them; what will attract them?
 - b. What does it “do”? What do they want it to do?
2. Propose opportunities for small group spiritual direction (not bible study).
3. Propose an expectation that every member be involved in some aspect of the church community (other than just attending worship); it could be praying for others, greeting others, small groups, music, etc.; individuals need their own spirituality.
4. The “Historic Name” of “First Presbyterian Church”, may be the very thing that is deterring new families from exploring us as a potential church home. I propose we change the name of the church to a simpler,

more inviting name, like so many of the growing churches have done. Don't let the "historic" name of FPCA hold us back.

Themed Comments

Move Forward

a. Grieve the past

- We're not going back to the past, so don't focus on past glory.
- Our reputation is only important to us – internally. However, now our focus should be on creating a new future from which a new (possibly better) reputation will begin to grow
- Recognize the grief associated with change/loss by finding a way to honor our past in a visible way such as holding a "service where we celebrate the past "life" of some of our "no longer programs."
- Overtly ask members who talk about the Church's past glories to transition their love of the Church to productive actions that will adjust the Church to be successful given current times.

b. Reinvent Missional Approach

- Our church has a history of being very missional and generous to our community and abroad.
- We should continue to keep this missional aspect of our church.

c. Embrace change and encourage experimentation

- We are what we are now, not what we were in the past.
- Stop trying to be all things to all people and focus on only trying to be a few things.
- Find new, positive ways to move forward (without losing our rich historic past). Continuity is important.
- Hopefully the "volume" of those focusing on the past is overestimated. I believe the majority wishes to move on.
- We need a new lead pastor that respects our history and is a visionary healer who can guide us to a new vision for our church.
- We need to know how big we really are today to enable us to prioritize planning and projects.

8. Conflict/Change/Disruption/Discomfort/COVID

Raw Input

1. Due to the variants of COVID, ascertain distancing by keeping the balcony pews as well as all pews.
2. I propose that we organize a "reaction team" that will be available to support and mediate conflict and bullying of the pastors by congregational members and vice versa.
3. Develop and implement a workable understanding of the conflict cycle as a way to improve communication for staff. Pastors. Leaders. and congregation.
4. Develop a change management plan/team that will focus on preparing the congregation for upcoming changes and developing a communication plan of the changes.
5. Above ideas are workable and quite necessary to alleviate conflict, bullying in the church – pastors and congregation.
6. Propose that we accept that we have to adapt to an everchanging society/world. This means we need to find ways to embrace change which means find ways to properly work through conflicts that will arise.

7. Emphasis on any particular gender identity in frequent sermons is uncomfortable. Sermon messages need to be inclusive of all gender identities.
8. A workable practice of forgiveness when we feel let down, hurt. Work to forgive as opposed to nursing hurts.
9. Adopt standards for conduct (similar/same as ones read at Feb Town Hall) to be read at beginning – after prayer – of each church functional/committee meeting/etc. to remind all of appropriate interactions
10. Standards of conduct are insulting.
11. Presbyterian governing bodies need to become more flexible and open to allowing change within congregations, even when the “written rules” disallow. Change needs to happen at the upper levels as well. (example – Not allowing Stephen to become lead pastor, when everyone wanted him, because he didn’t have a doctorate degree!!) I agree
12. Make an effort to explain the “why” when changes are implemented.
13. Institute a rumor fact checking mechanism where members that hear rumors can send them for fact checking. Weekly rumor and fact check response would be published in each Thursday’s eblast – might actually increase eblast readership.

Group Summary

Standalone Comments

- Emphasis on any particular gender identity in frequent sermons is uncomfortable. Sermon messages need to be inclusive of all gender identities.
- Standards of conduct are insulting.
- Due to the variants of COVID, ascertain distancing by keeping the balcony pews as well as all pews.

Themed Comments

Conflict

- Develop a workable practice of forgiveness when we feel let down or hurt. Work to forgive as opposed to nursing hurts when we feel let down.
- Develop an understanding of the our conflict cycle and find ways to improve communication among staff. Pastors. Leaders. and congregation as a way to try and break it.
- Make sure the congregation is aware of the standards for conduct in times of disagreement adopted by Session after the February annual meeting and consider briefly reviewing them (after prayer) of each church functional/committee meeting/etc. to remind all participants of appropriate interactions

Change Management

- Organize a “reaction team” that will be available to support and mediate conflict as needed in the case of bullying of the pastors by congregational members and vice versa.
- Develop a change management plan/team that will focus on preparing the congregation for upcoming changes and developing a communication plan of the coming changes which includes an explanation of why the change is being implemented.
- Find ways to help the congregation accept that we have to adapt to an everchanging society/world (including an evolving COVID situation or some new disease). This means we need to find ways to embrace change by finding constructive ways to work through conflicts that will arise.
- Presbyterian governing bodies (like Presbytery) need to become more flexible and open to allowing change within congregations, even when the “written rules” might disallow or simply not address it.

- Institute a rumor fact checking mechanism where members that hear rumors can send them for fact checking. Weekly rumor and fact check response would be published in each Thursday's eblast – might actually increase eblast readership. For example, one participant comment was that Stephen was not allowed to become lead pastor, when everyone wanted him, because he didn't have a doctorate degree

9. Diversity/Friendliness/Welcoming

Greeting at and during worship:

Have greeters at all entrances. Perhaps members of session cover the doors as well. Return to the former greeter schedule. Greeters were mentored and had a schedule to follow.

Acknowledge first time visitors and offer them a chance to meet a contact person in lobby after the service if they have an interest in a follow-up contact. OR bring back a written way for people to request follow-up (i.e. friendship registers at traditional worship/contact cards at contemporary service).

Establish a system to welcome new members (all members) and integrate them into established programs and groups where they have expressed an interest.

Bring back "passing of the peace" during worship: Each member should make a conscious effort to greet someone they don't know at ever service or group they attend.

Having more fellowship events outside of worship:

If or when the equipment issues are resolved in fellowship hall... consider having a monthly "coffee house" night with live music in fellowship hall and a separate room for board games. Hopefully open it up to invite in the community.

Revisit the intergenerational activities that were just getting started before covid.

Our website is the first point of contact to welcome many people. This can be the 1 chance to inspire them to come or discourage them.

Develop a plan for FPCA to aggressively reach out to other cultural groups and residents in the city of Allentown, especially the younger folks. Perhaps create a satellite worship center in town or a team of personnel to speak to audiences downtown to attract "new" membership.

Worship style/format:

Contemporary music is more welcoming to families and younger members.

Propose that we need to be more welcoming to older adults who represent a majority of Presbyterians today.

Miscellaneous ideas that might belong in other categories:

Look at the soul of people, not what society says. Have a problem with someone? Talk to them and get to know them.

Have a common understanding of what having a "Lead Pastor" means in terms of role, ministry, administration, , accountability especially with preaching, ministry duties. How does other staff fit with this picture?

A Need for a successful transition in a timely manner. (Less than 2 years).

Stop "one-sided" politics from the pulpit. Respect view of all members.

10. Staffing/Volunteers

Many of the suggestions relate to both groups within the church. However, it might be preferable to start with paid staff and then extend the ideas where appropriate to Volunteers. Volunteers can and should make up the bulk of the work being done in and by the church.

Paid Staff Members include ministers, teachers, office staff, musicians, and other categories as needed by the church to improve functioning. Anyone hired needs clear written guidance, brief but direct to their areas of responsibilities. Many of these guidelines probably do exist but where are they? Who keeps track of them and updates them as necessary? Who is responsibly for hiring staff and who can fire staff? It is not easy to suggest solutions if most of the members don't even know there is a problem until after someone leaves and then nobody can talk about it. If these policies exist how can we access and read them?

#1 If we keep a "staffing committee" what is their function? They should exist primarily to help hired staff with problems as they arise. The staffing Committee should consist of 7 to 9 active members who are involved every week in helping with solutions. Vacant positions need to be filled immediately. If someone is thinking about leaving and cannot be helped the problem should be referred immediately to the deacons and elders to seek a solution to the problem if possible.

#2 If or when a brand new "Head Minister" is hired; He or She should not spend the first year taking over and managing staff problems. They need time to get acquainted and learn how things have traditional been done and why they are the way they are. If after an agreed upon amount of time passes, any where from six months to a year, and the person wants to stay allow the entire congregation to vote on it. In voting they agree to help and support the new Head minister in their role.

Volunteers can and do make up the bulk of the work being done in and through the church. They need to be supported by a paid staff member in a leadership role.

#1 Whenever a volunteer group is formed it needs to be supported by a paid staff member who helps them solve problems and recruit members. Any designated leader of a volunteer group needs to know who they report to and have a written description of their area of Volunteering.

#2 We need a digital bulletin board that lists all the opportunities for volunteering. Who runs the group? How can they be contacted? What staff member do they report to? This obviously needs to be updated frequently maybe monthly at first. This is where office staff is critical. It could be on the web site or posted in a hallway somewhere or several places.

#3 Sermons can and should be focused at times on describing some of these groups and how they further the mission of the church. Recognition from the pulpit can be very powerful.

#4 It would be effective to specify time limits for the existence of a group or a group leader or a Volunteer. They could sign a written agreement to serve for 6 months or a year or to renew for a specific length of time.

#5 If they are going to have regular meetings, weekly, monthly or quarterly this needs to be described when they join. Everyone who shows up should have a say in what is discussed and be listened to. Meetings in which one person does all the discussing and makes all the decisions are a real drain on anyone attending.

#6 When a new member joins the church someone should interview them and find out what they are interested in doing and what skill sets they have that they might be willing to share and help with. Are they computer savvy? Can they run PA systems? Are they a musician or some sort? Even if they do not volunteer at first, a list of their interest and or abilities could be saved and looked at later after they have been around for some time.

Item 3:

- Need to understand that with the smaller congregation and resulting smaller staff we will need to scale down in scope and costs
- Desire to go back to multiple services in both alternative and traditional. Use other pastors that are connected to our church [emeritus, etc.] to preach at simultaneous times.
- We need to rediscover what worship is and there should be teaching and discussion on that understanding. Are we solid in what it means to worship? Explain Biblical concept of purpose of worship. We have become focused on what we do rather than who we are, our identity in Christ. We are more focused on what we need to get out of worship, what's in it for me, than understanding that we need to be at worship for the exclusive reason of worshipping God.
- "Communal worship where we hear the word of God, hear a message that interprets the word of God by a minister, and a challenge for each of us to become different in some way going forward." It's not supposed to be a cafeteria plan. I want someone who knows more than me to guide me.
- Consider new ways to worship, thinking out of the box, for instance, use the sanctuary in different ways: face forward for regular worship with regular decor; face backward for alternative and 'redecorate' what is needed for their purposes. This would eliminate a double expenditure for upgrade and continual improvements for electronics. Yes it would mean eliminating the uncomfortable pews and purchasing comfortable chairs that can be turned around. BUT it allows for Fellowship Hall to be free for fellowship opportunities etc.
- It's important that spiritual formation is kept at a different hour than worship. Children need to be in worship.
- Spiritual formation needs to be focused on Biblical understanding.
- We need to be concerned and focused on that what we do, has the goal of unifying our congregation.

Item 1:

- This should be in part an identity statement so we can tell others what we are about. More concise statement would be best. Keeping it simple.
- We are disciples of Jesus Christ, therefore we...
- Remember each committee has there on mission statement and there fore additional information can be found out there.
- Has to be direct, unique, not a duh statement that would be descriptive of any church... also not a restatement of what might be in another mission's statement.
- We would suggest that we focus on identity, rather than mission or vision.
- Old statement that we loved: **Great Expectations**

We come with the expectation of encountering God in worship and through each other.

We remain with the expectation that Jesus Christ will continue to nurture us through Biblical instruction and caring for each other.

We go out with the expectation that the Holy Spirit will guide us in our service to those we encounter in our lives.

We expect that our encounters with others will make a difference in their lives because God dwells within us and works through us.

We have these expectations because God has great expectations of us.

The roll of a PNC is to facilitate potential pastors to discern the calls of their ministry. The mission statement is part of that process.

Our concern is that if it takes too long to call a new pastor it could exacerbate the difficult situation that we are currently experiencing in our congregation.

Item 3 On Adult Education and/or Preaching:

- Loss of dedicated education hour and loss of Fellowship hall significantly reduced participation in Adult classes.
- We have lost good hermeneutical preaching: beginning with scripture and then applying it to our lives. We need to also have this in adult ed classes. We need to be focused on the Word first, rather than social justice issues first. Starting with scripture is a good foundation and will also provide for building unity.

Item #2 Membership/Belonging/Community

- Younger families in worship are missed, particularly in the traditional worship. We recognize that there is a national trend toward decreasing attendance by young people.
- Comments should be made in pulpit that indicate when a special effort is made by groups helping in worship such as Girl Scouts, etc.
- When Simmons/ book is released, it would be great that this is announced to the congregation.

Item #9 Diversity/Friendliness/Welcoming:

- Some how the comments made in the Lombard document seem to indicate that the solution for diversity is to become homogeneous!
- Clearly there are issues within our society with issues of diversity and people are hearing that as a political statement.
- This issues is how we understand ourselves. We are a diverse people in reality. Diversity is not only about skin color.

Appendix B

Problem Solving Session #2
Initial Proposals for Problem Solving
First Presbyterian Church of Allentown
September 17, 2022

1. Mission/Identity/Theology

Statement: Develop a plan to communicate and implement a Mission Study.

Educate the congregation about PC USA theology (what does it look like and sound like?)

Develop standards for communications (civil discourse) abbreviated PC USA peacemaking document.

Create regular opportunities for town halls / session listening sessions.

Use some of the Lombard process—healing / identifying leadership styles.

Plans for other nine topics to map back to the Mission study.

Proposal: Create an ad hoc committee to evaluate and update as needed the current mission study leading to an identity statement to include: Who are we? What are we called to do? What do we do? Why are we doing it? What makes us different from other churches?

Characteristics of the mission statement should:

Based on the Bible

Transparent

Clear and concise

Candid and honest

Congregational alignment

Value diversity within the congregation

Resources:

Scripture

PC USA including “Christ alone is our conscience.”

Who is responsible to carry this out: Session would appoint an ad hoc committee.

What is the timeline: As soon as possible.

2. Membership/Belonging/Community

Statement: Everyone who enters our church should feel valued, welcome, and safe. Our community should indicate a clear and noticeable communication of belonging and a common belief in Jesus Christ.

Proposal #1: Session will organize a temporary membership study team to execute a census of members and attendees to determine:

A. Membership status and number.

B. How each member is engaged.

C. Interests for future engagement.

Proposal #2: Session will create a permanent team to assist forming and supporting an active and vibrant small group ministry.

– Inventory and reinvigorate current small groups.

– Start new small groups based on identified interests.

- Encourage members, particularly new members, to get involved in a small group that interests them.

Proposal #3: Regular singular worship service with an all church fellowship time following this service.

- Possibly monthly after Communion Sundays.
- This will enable us to worship as one united, diverse church family.

3. Worship/Education/Spiritual Formation

Proposal #1: Consult architect for use of worship space.

- By December 1, create a committee to define the scope of sanctuary proposal
 - Consider upgraded seating
 - Sound/electronics upgrade
 - Needs of usable space for funerals, weddings, community use (concerts, etc.)
 - Goal: to redefine sanctuary to be used for all worship styles. (Keep fellowship hall for other activities.)

Proposal #2: Worship Schedule

- Weekly—two distinct services with two distinct styles.
- Monthly—combined service with a mixture or other style (Jazz, Gospel, or seasonal, ie. Christmas service)
- Spiritual formation—dedicated hour between services for all ages

Proposal #3: Suggestions to PNC regarding preaching in guidance for interviewing candidates for new pastor:

- Preaching by starting with scripture then connect to lives, choices, social issues.
- Propose we use lectionary more so that sermon series.

Proposal #4 (Zoom Group): Two services running concurrently with each other. One in sanctuary and one in the fellowship hall.

Challenge: How to manage with single pastor.

- Traditional service: As it always has been.
- Alternative Service:
 - Non-liturgical
 - Can start smaller than 10:10 Band and be acoustic

Next steps:

- Conduct a professional assessment of the technology in the fellowship hall.
- Hire two part time worship leaders—one traditional and one alternative.
- Personnel works out hire split among hires.

4. Children/Youth/Families

Provide nursery care on Sunday mornings

Designate 8:45 service for family friendly emphasis on activities for children—casual

Support intergenerational learning hour (9:50)-10:50)-make it meaningful: possibly include a mission Sunday

Extend childcare for weekday FPCA preschool children during the weekday for continued church presence

5. Transition/Leadership/Communication

Communication: Develop and implement a communication plan that includes one person in charge with designated responsibility.

Responsibility: Session determines who is in charge.

Engaging a pastor / PNC: Streamline the PNC process, improve its effectiveness and increase the congregations understanding of the process.

- Responsibility: Session and PNC

Politics: Shift focus from political sermons to more inclusive messages that are Bible based which challenge the congregation in a positive way and sends them out into the world ready to “love one another.”

Responsibility: Session

Leadership/Governance: Leadership needs to insure good respectful utilization of resources and volunteer efforts.

- A process that constructively addresses disagreements.

Responsibility: Session

6. Finances/Stewardship/Campus/Physical Plant

Proposal #1: Stewardship Education

- Throughout the year, educate the congregation on the spiritual discipline and fiscal responsibility of stewardship.
- Timeline: Immediately
- Responsibility: Session/staff

Proposal #2: Capital Campaign / Special Project Funding

- Develop a 5-year / long term plan addressing:
 - Improvements
 - Major repairs
 - Services to support our mission goals
- Develop campaign(s) to support these needs
- Communicate to the congregation the mission goals, plan and campaign.

Timeline: January 2023

- Responsibility: Session / Congregational Committee

Proposal #3: Repurpose Church (think outside the box):

- To generate income
- To facilitate the church’s mission
- To ensure ongoing viability for future generations.

Timeline: January 2023

Responsibility: Congregational Committee

7. History/Reputation

Proposal #1: Compose a living history

- Who: Create/select a committee
- When: October

Proposal #2: Document/benchmark what we have been doing well in the past to determine what is relevant in our community today.

Who: John Dubbs leads

When: Start in October

8. Conflict/Change/Disruption/Discomfort/COVID

Proposal #1: Monthly gathering after/before worship as a listening session.

- Document questions/response.
- Develop method to include on-line community
- Who: Members of session
- When: Begin in January 2023

Proposal #2: Revisit Conflict Management training to ensure we approach in a healthy manner by re-engaging Lombard

Who: Approved by Session

When: Begin March, 2023 on a six month frequency.

Proposal #3: Open seating options (pews, balcony) to prepare for increase in COVID occurrence/possibility

Who: Ushers/Custodians

When: September 2022

9. Diversity/Friendliness/Welcoming

Proposal #1: Regular greeters and ushers.

Proposal #2: Re-establish methods of communication for volunteer opportunities.

- Job descriptions for volunteers.
- Encourage participation in fellowship
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10. Staffing/Volunteers

Proposal #1: Support new staff.

Appendix C

Devon Miller

Sermon

First Presbyterian Church of Allentown

Allentown, Pennsylvania

September 18, 2022

Title: Foxes, Wolves, and Coyotes: Demonstrating a New Quality of Life in and through the Church

Scripture Texts: Isaiah 43:1-7, 14-21 ; Revelation 21:1-7, 22-27

I have always been fascinated by canine predators: foxes, wolves, and coyotes. I spent much energy as a young teenager in Southwest Michigan pursuing the smallest of these predators, red and grey fox, through the art of trapping. My earliest encounter with the canines, though, came through my older brothers, who had fox hounds and gloried in tracking them down after a fresh snow in the winter months.

The love of fox hunting must have been passed down, because one of my uncles was an avid fox hunter and occasionally my brothers would join my uncle's gang for a winter hunt. I will never forget the day the news came that my uncle had shot and killed a coyote his hounds had chased down. It was the first coyote that anyone had ever seen in Southwest Michigan. It was such a big event that my uncle, instead of selling the pelt—which were bringing big money at the time—decided to have it made into a rug to grace my aunt and uncle's living room.

I remember visiting my uncle's home and admiring the prize pelt. One Sunday when I was probably about ten years old, my cousin and I were admiring the pelt after one of my aunt's famous Amish meals of baked chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, homemade noodles, three kinds of salad, three layer Jello, followed by a fruit bowl and three different kinds of pie for desert. As we stroked the tail of our uncles prize coyote, the tail tore off. We were terrified. We tried to replace the tail as best we could and quickly found something else to do. I am sad to say that we never confessed our deed, but that coyote, and its tail, has shaped my psyche in many ways.

I tell this story not to promote or condemn fox and coyote hunting or even hunting in general, but to make a larger point. I still live in that same community, and I still know people who hunt for fox and, now to a greater extent, coyote in the area.

Several years ago, we had a lot of snow, which makes hunting these predators much easier. I asked my neighbor, who is part of a large hunting party, how many coyote they had harvested that year. I was stunned by his response. In that one year alone, they had harvested over two hundred coyotes. Judging by the sound of their yapping in the evenings around our home, there are still plenty of coyotes left.

In forty years, a community which was electrified by the appearance of a single coyote has grown impassive to their pervasive presence. What happened? What changed? How can that be? And—most of all, this morning—what does that have to do with the responsibility of members demonstrating a new quality of life in and through the church? That, after all, is the topic we want to address this morning.

In today's ancient scripture texts read for us this morning, we are told that God is about to do a new thing. The prophet Isaiah foretells changes that God is about to bring about to the people of Israel. Their Creator is not finished with creation. Isaiah assures the people that the changes they are about to experience will bring forth the praises of God. The prophet assures them that they are loved and cherished and that they need not fear the uncertainty of the changes that are coming. Neither are they to hang on to the old things they had become familiar with. They are to let them go. I don't think that means that they forget about their past, but rather that if they hang on to the past, it will become their downfall.

Several centuries later, John the Revelator pens strikingly similar words to those of his predecessor Isaiah. He tells of a day when there will be a new heaven and a new earth that will overtake and pervade the one that is known. Again, the former things will pass away, and all things will become new. There will be no need for a temple anymore, because the Lord's presence will be undeniably ubiquitous among them.

We may be tempted to think that both Isaiah and John were outliers in scripture or in their time. But really, what they proclaim is a pattern, a theme that is pervasive, not only in scripture but in all creation. The Franciscan

priest and writer Richard Rohr calls this pattern the “wisdom pattern”¹. In his book by the that name, Rohr defines this pattern in its simplest form as order, disorder, and reorder.

Order is often rigid, emphasizes the law, and diminishes or eliminates diversity or disorder.

Disorder destroys what brought meaning before.

And reorder transforms people and systems so that they can work together again.

- In religion the wisdom pattern often shows up as birth, death, and rebirth.
- Or as quest or journey, failure, and then a return home as in the story of the prodigal son.
- In Indigenous cultures, it comes through in the cycle of seasons: Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring.
- Common people talk about it in terms of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.
- Astronomers speak of the star, the supernova explosion, followed by intense energy and light in the aftermath.
- Chemistry illustrates the pattern in solution, dissolution, and resolution.
- In anthropology we talk about it in terms of continuity, change, and adaptation.
- The Reformed theologian Walter Brueggemann sees the Psalms as being Psalms of Orientation, Psalms of Disorientation, and Psalms of New Orientation.
- The Hebrew scriptures themselves include the Law, the Prophets, and the Wisdom Literature.
- In our Christian scripture it shows up as the Garden of Eden, the Fall, and Paradise.
- And ultimately, our faith is centered around it in the Life, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ that guides our common life.

If it is so prevalent throughout the world, then why do we resist it? Or maybe a better question is, how do we best demonstrate the understanding of this wisdom in the new way that we live our lives together? Do we resist the changes that are in the air? Do we hang on to the old things, as the prophets warned against? Or do we embrace the change by imagining new ways of being together, or as Brueggemann calls it, with prophetic imagination?

¹ Richard Rohr. *The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder*. Cleveland, OH: Franciscan Media. 2020.

To help answer that question, I will follow the lead of Saint Francis of Assisi, who sought direction from the created world to help understand the spiritual world. In fact, he did not separate the two. This is in line with the prophet Isaiah, who, in the passage we heard today, recognized that the jackals of the desert honored the Lord God.

My son Geoffrey must have inherited some of the predator hunting genes in my family, though it manifests itself in a different way. Geoff is a PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota in their Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior department. His research is the interaction between humans and canine predators in urban areas. He traps, collars, and tracks fox and coyotes using GPS and GIS to understand their behavior in the Twin Cities area. He is collaborating with the BBC on a documentary on urban wildlife that features his work.

Geoff tells me that coyotes are more like jackals than any other canine. And so I think I am justified in using this analogy here. In particular, both have the ability to adapt to new circumstances better than any other canine predator.

According to Geoff, when Europeans arrived on the North American continent, coyotes were confined primarily to what is now the American Southwest. They now inhabit most of the United States, have migrated far into Canada, and are poised to cross the Panama Canal and enter South America.

Wolves, on the other hand, along with humans, were the most widely distributed species on earth. Yet, wolves have been hanging on for survival, at the brink of extinction, over the past century or so. Why? What is the difference?

Geoff credits the coyote's expansion to their ability to adapt to new circumstances that they encounter. They have been able to live alongside farms and villages and have moved into cities with apparent ease. And because of that, they have been able to thrive.

In contrast, wolves are creatures of habit. They are predictable. They visit the same places over and over again. They have no natural predator, which is why they were able to cover such an expansive territory. You might say that the only predator wolves have had are humans. And when wolves and humans were no longer able to live side by side, humans capitalized on the wolves' predictable behavior to trap, poison, and hunt them

to near extinction with incredible swiftness and ease. Wolves barely survived.

When the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center was asked to engage First Presbyterian Church of Allentown, part of our mandate was to “develop a shared vision to facilitate a flourishing future for First Presbyterian Church of Allentown.” I hear in that request a longing to not simply survive, but to thrive. What does that mean for a community like First Presbyterian Church of Allentown to thrive? What would it mean if First Presbyterian Church of Allentown were merely to survive or hang on at the brink of extinction?

Let’s talk about the latter question first. If we use the analogy of wolves and coyotes, it would mean that the church would hang on to the way we have always done things. We would be oblivious to the changes that are happening around us. We would insist that our way or the way we have always done things around here is the best way to do things. And if we are lucky, though creation would teach us that our odds are slim, we may survive for a while but slowly the infringement of the new world would crowd us out, and we would be in danger of becoming extinct. That is what the wisdom pattern teaches us.

If we are willing to adapt and move into the new world we are facing with boldness and creativity, we have the potential to resurrect, revive, and thrive. That is what the wisdom pattern and coyotes teach us.

And we are facing a new world; we heard that in the small group listening sessions this past May. Many of you said things like, “Things are not the way they used to be,” which is another way of saying we are living in a new world. We are facing new challenges and new circumstances that we are unfamiliar with.

So what does it mean for humans to thrive? What does it mean for humans to flourish? More specifically, what does it mean for First Presbyterian Church of Allentown to flourish here in this place and in this time? That is ultimately for you as a congregation to decide. However, there are clues hidden in our theme for today.

Let me read it again as it appears in the Book of Order: Membership is to “demonstrate a new quality of life in and through the church.” The church is a community. For humans to thrive or flourish, they require community. Another way of stating this is that humans need to belong.

During our listening sessions, we heard the sentiment that “belonging comes before belief.” I take that to mean that what people are looking for is not a church that believes the right things, though that may be

important, but a place where they feel they belong even if their views may differ on certain issues. Belonging is different than ownership. Belonging brings joy. When people belong, they thrive. To thrive, you will need to find new ways of being together in and through the church, in and through your mission statement, in and through your worship, in and through your stewardship, in and through your spiritual formation, because we are living in a new world whether we like it or not and we will need to adapt. How will you thrive together?

This week I re-read the parable Luke 16 wherein the master fires his servant because the servant neglected his work. The servant then goes out and bargains with his master's debtors in such a way that he will be viewed favorably by them and find favor with them. The servant hopes to find belonging. Jesus summarizes this parable in such an odd and unexpected way by saying,

His master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes. (Luke 16:8-9)

I'm not going to try and unpack that parable today, except to say that Jesus seems to be encouraging us to think outside the box and use our creativity and resourcefulness in ways we may not have considered before in building community. To me, this parable speaks of not being held by the grip of the law or the past, but finding innovative ways of creating belonging moving forward.

I'd like to close by reading one of my favorite poems by one of my favorite poets, Mary Oliver. In it I hear the wisdom pattern in despair, forgiveness, the return and coming home of the geese, and belonging.

The poem is called "Wild Geese."²

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

² Mary Oliver. "Wild Geese." In *New and Selected Poems, Vol. 1*. Boston, MA: Beacon. 2004.

for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

-Mary Oliver