

love. serve. hope.

Report from the Long-range Planning Team submitted by Cliff Greaves, Chair

After several months in development and with broad base input from the congregation, a comprehensive Long-Range Plan has been developed. On November 12, 2017, the final draft of the Long-Range Plan was presented to, and approved by, the Board for ratification by the congregation at the December congregational meeting. Our sincere thanks for all who participated in the development of this important work which will serve to give direction to our ministry going forward.

The mission of First Christian Church is “To know and love God, nurture each other, reach out and welcome all people in the name of Jesus Christ.” Because FCC strives to be relevant, the Long Range Planning Team has, over several months, worked diligently to discern a five-point vision aimed at more fully living out our stated mission. That vision was introduced to the congregation at a church-wide luncheon on October 1, 2017. In an effort to initiate a dialogue regarding the viability of the five-point vision, breakout sessions were set up throughout the building to make sure that all voices and ideas could be heard and recorded.

To enable an open dialogue, feedback forms were provided for everyone attending a breakout session. During the breakout sessions, notes were taken of the points raised in the discussions. At the close of each feedback session, to ensure the opportunity for further feedback, we provided each breakout session attendee a feedback form along with a copy of the five vision points, and the possible ways we could live out each of the vision points. Now, the LRT has met to consider all of the feedback and discussion points resulting from the breakout sessions. At the close of our last meeting, after much discussion and review of the information gleaned to date, we concluded that the five-point vision is, indeed, viable and consistent with the needs and desires of the congregation as a whole. We recommend that the congregation adopt these five points as articulated and attached herein.

The vision:

- 1. We envision First Christian Church to be a place that welcomes all people, cultivates relationships and community across identities, and creates space for sacred conversations.**
- 2. We envision using our church family’s love to reach out and serve others in the community and provide hope to all of God’s children.**
- 3. We envision a church in which our congregational life overflows into meaningful, energized and sacred worship which reflects the diversity of our church.**
- 4. We envision a church that nurtures the faith formation of all members by engaging our hearts and minds in the spiritual practice of prayer, the study of scripture, and respectful and thoughtful conversations.**
- 5. We envision a church that makes good use of its resources by being good stewards of our building, managing financial assets well, and developing efficient organizational structures that fully support our mission.**

The team also considered how we might live out those five vision points over the next few years, and has suggested some action items that the congregation can take, both immediately, and over the next 12-24 months. We recommend that the congregation adopt these steps as a way to move forward together.

Two significant actions items need to be implemented immediately in order for us to work toward this vision:

- Begin a process of evaluating and re-imagining our organizational structure (committees, ministry teams, leadership, etc.) so that we are better equipped to work toward this vision.
- Commission the long-range planning team to continue their work as shepherds of this vision, committing to meeting quarterly to review the vision and report to the board on progress made and recommended revisions.

In addition, several smaller action items which can be implemented quickly rose to the forefront, some of which are already in the works:

- Encourage increased participation in the Sunday morning small group
- Invite new choir members to participate for the Christmas season
- Have youth invite the congregation to share their spare change as a fundraiser

The team also identified actions items that will take some time to implement but could realistically be achieved in the next 12-24 months (some of these items can be implemented within existing leadership structures; others will depend on a re-imagined structure):

In order to become a “place that welcomes all people...”

- Continue intergenerational educational opportunities in which different age groups can learn from one another.
- Become officially “open and affirming.”
- Consider geographic/neighborhood areas for small groups.
- Develop a small group discussion called “Sacred Conversations” for a conversation around faith and politics.
- Learn from the diversity already in our congregation; cultivate community with our Montagnard members.

In order to “reach out and serve others...”

- Partner with local churches, specifically Mt. Pleasant, to provide resources to the community in need. One possibility: partner with Mt. Pleasant to host a block party in their neighborhood at back-to-school time.
- Explore and implement some of the following intergenerational outreach ideas: making reusable bags out of T-shirts to use for blessing bags; Green for Greens at the Corner Market; teaming up with Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts; a Simple Gesture food collection program.

In order to offer “meaningful, energized, and sacred worship...”

- Continue to strengthen choir by holding a recruitment events and explore alternate practice times.
- Include a variety of familiar and new music and instruments.
- Continue and expand on prayer stations, including children and youth, as a creative worship expression.
- Build multigenerational involvement in worship by inviting youth to act out scripture or sing with the choir.
- Continue and build on use of multimedia equipment in worship

In order to “nurture the faith formation of all members...”

- Build on our existing small group ministries by equipping existing groups well and intentionally inviting people to join in.
- Create a team to evaluate and implement our education needs and develop a comprehensive plan for adult and youth faith formation.

In order to “make good use of our resources and be good stewards...”

- Continue and increase the use of our building by outside community groups whose work supports our overall mission.
- Begin discussions/planning within appropriate groups to consider a capital fund drive to address deferred maintenance on our building, and provide for a property reserve fund for future needs.
- Evaluate staffing needs to ensure our ability to move toward this vision.

In addition to the above action items, the team identified some other important questions, which we offer for discussion and reflection:

When we say “all are welcome” what do we mean? It’s impossible for any congregation to meet the needs of every person, so what specific communities do we want to be intentional about including? What do we want to be known for?

What is the disconnect between what people say they want (especially in terms of small groups and educational opportunities) and what they actually show up for?

How can we nurture relationships with other churches and interfaith communities?

Would a financial literacy education program for families be helpful?

Should we evaluate our weekly worship time and consider moving it later in the morning?

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The long range planning team has compiled notes from various conversations, including team meetings as well as the October 1 breakout sessions, and these notes are available in the office for further insight into the visioning process.