

## Introduction: high level summary

### Holy Cow!

Holy Cow, indeed. It has been a while, hasn't it since our church completed the Holy Cow survey?

Yes, it has, that was last year. Remind me again why we did this?

Well, of course we all know that Whit will be retiring this year, which means we have a wonderful opportunity as a congregation not only to heed God's calling for a new pastor, but to look in the mirror, to see who we are.

Look in the mirror? Tell me more....

Yes! This transition provides a time for self-evaluation, an opportunity to see who we are, the body of Christ here at First Presbyterian. To do this self-evaluation, we utilized a survey tool from Holy Cow, a professional consultant. We had great participation. About 88% of our regular attendees completed the survey.

The survey results enable us, this family of Christ, to look in the mirror, to better understand our strengths, our passions, our theology, and our weaknesses while identifying ways to grow and heed God's call.

The primary benefit in knowing who we are will enable the Pastor Nominating Committee to search for and call the pastor that God is preparing that matches up with our mission and ministry. How cool is it that we can trust that God is already preparing this new pastor? Holy Cow compares our results to over 3,000 other churches and like organizations. We can better understand who we are in a larger context.

By the way, all this data is accessible to all of us via our FPC website. Look on our homepage, under the Pastoral Nominating Committee banner. You'll also find the Mission Study Report in the same spot.

So, what have we learned about ourselves?

Let's start with the big picture: We are a high satisfaction, high energy church. And when compared to the 3,000+ other churches, that defines us a Transformational Church.

So, what's a transformational church?

It's a church with a sense of meaning and purpose, a church that can be a model for other churches.

Our members contend we don't just *attend* church: we believe we are on a lifelong spiritual journey and FPC is providing ministries that support our growth along the way.

That's wonderful. I can certainly agree with that.

It is impressive, but we can't rest on our laurels and think we've got it all figured out and become complacent and stagnate. We must continue to pursue our ministries and mission with energy and passion.

Tell me more. What are our priorities?

## Priorities

Here are the top 3 priorities for growth and development that came out of our survey:

1. Reaching new people and incorporating them into the life of the church
2. Create more opportunities within our church family for meaningful relationships
3. Making changes to attract young families into the life of the church.

### **Priorities: new people**

I like those priorities. I think they reveal our hearts. Two out of the three priorities are a challenge for us, because it has shown us areas where we need to make improvements in welcoming and inviting others to join in our fellowship.

Can I make a confession? Sometimes I realize I don't know someone, but I am too embarrassed to approach him or her. Or I do introduce myself to an unfamiliar face only to learn they have been a member for two years. That's awkward.

You are not alone. I know that by the time I say hi to all my FPC buddies, the newcomer is already out the door. I need to be more intentional about that. I know how hard it is to be the stranger in the room. I need to step out of my own comfort zone and break the ice with others. We have an exciting opportunity for personal and congregational warmth and friendships to blossom. It's an opportunity for growth. We can do better at welcoming guests and visitors. Our data showed we don't do enough to make those folks feel welcomed.

You know, it's one thing to focus on being more welcoming to people that come in our doors on their own to visit FPC. But that's not the whole picture, we also must learn how to *invite* people to come and visit FPC. We've got to become more intentional about sharing the mission and ministry of FPC and inviting people to come and be a part of what we are doing to share God's love with the world.

Do you think we could be more intentional about that?

Yes! Absolutely! And I feel empowered to do so now that we know the survey revealed this desire! So, I pray that we can all summon up the nerve to start conversations: make new friends and welcome visitors!

What else have we learned about ourselves?

### **Priorities: meaningful relationships**

These priorities show we have a deep sense of caring for our own members.

I know I have a prayer shawl given to my family during a time when we were experiencing something tough. I still feel the love and prayers that shawl represents.

What are some other ways that we care for and support one another?

We have so many deeply meaningful ways to connect art classes, lady's and men's Bible studies, retreats, senior high and junior high events, Knitwits and Happy Hookers (yep, that is a church group!), Sabbath Soup teams, Presbyterian Women's groups, Wednesday night suppers, and more.

Yet our survey results indicate that we want more: more small group studies, more spiritual growth opportunities, and even deeper connections with one another.

I bet there are ways we can connect that we have not even thought of yet; don't you?

Yes! Maybe someone listening to this already has a great idea!

You know, this pandemic has created challenges to gathering and we long to return to cherished events without limitations. Yet data from the survey results indicates a high level of member satisfaction and recognition that even during this pandemic, our staff has worked hard to keep us engaged and connected.

We really have been blessed with a wonderful staff, who've increased their efforts to keep us connected with the meaningful worship, musical programs, and adaptive outreach.

In our worship experiences, we feel the presence of God and we take that with us out into the world. Though it needs to be said that while we value these things and treasure our worship experiences, we also recognize that life outside of church tugs on us hard and vies for our attention and priorities.

### **Priorities: young families**

#### **What about that third priority: reaching young families?**

The Mission Study Report reveals that our smallest age group is 26–40-year-olds and almost two thirds of our members are over 40. It's easy to see why reaching out to young families is a priority, right?

**Yes.**

Something else from the Mission Study Report, we aren't a very ethnically and economically diverse congregation. We're 99% white. We're ranked middle to upper middle class socioeconomically. This is not reflective of Hickory demographics. We won't go into that today; but you'll hear more about that next week.

#### **Besides these three priorities, let me tell you about some other things the survey tells us about ourselves.**

### **Other survey points: theology**

**We have a variety of theological thoughts and opinions. But on the whole, we're in the middle of the road, perhaps a bit left of center (i.e., more progressive), within the church and as compared to thousands of other churches. Also, we are a highly educated.**

### **Other survey points: leadership**

One point which seems interestingly contradictory. We're happy with our lay leadership and feel they're representative of our church body. And yet...we also feel that the same small group is making all the decisions.

#### **Interesting, what can we do about that?**

I imagine there're numerous ways we can address that. Speak up. Let someone know you're interested in being on a committee, taking an active role in a ministry, or simply by getting more involved. Please don't be shy! We need everyone's fresh ideas and energy.

### **Other survey points: change**

#### **Anything else from the survey?**

Well not surprisingly we don't like change.

Change can be uncomfortable, even frightening. But we all know change is inevitable. The world is changing.

The other side of the coin is, we acknowledge that we can change... when we know why it is necessary. Just look at all the adjustments that we've had to make as a result of the pandemic. We may not have liked them, but we recognized their value. We are flexible and adapted.

**That's a positive! You know that's exactly what we will need to continue to do... to adapt... to change. Remember, God is present with us through all these evolutions. And He always will be. That's a great comfort to me. He is never caught off guard!**

And you know change can also be exciting and can bring about wonderful new opportunities to serve God's people and grow in our faith. Are there ways we can worship and fellowship we have not yet imagined, deepening our sense of satisfaction?

What else should we share? We don't have enough time to cover it all.

### **Other survey points: money**

Well, let's talk about money. This is a generous congregation. No doubt about it. We've already heard that we're on the high end of the economic scale compared to our Hickory neighbors.

The mission and ministries of this church require dollars. Even though the survey reflects that we are generous, when it comes to funding, we are dependent on a small minority of families to carry the majority of the financial support. This is not a sustainable pattern.

We're standing here on the contributions of the generations that came before us. We'll be celebrating 150 years of ministry in 2023. I know that I pray that FPC will continue to thrive, grow, and be there to support the mission and ministries of Christ for many generations to come. This is an opportunity for individual prayer and reflection. How is God calling each of us to respond to the financial support of FPC?

### **Mission outside our walls**

You know this all sounds great, but it also sounds like we're only thinking about ourselves inside the walls of this church.

Well, that's not the case. This is not a stagnant self-focused church. Our members are cognizant of societal issues and challenges, and we're engaged in many ways.

Some facts that aren't in the survey: we are a mission focused congregation, it's part of our identity. Did you know that we have averaged the equivalent of 30% of our budget to support mission and ministries over the last ten years? That 30% is a combination of budgeted giving and sacrificial giving above and beyond tithing.

We're heavily engaged in many local ministries with our dollars, our time, our talents, and our facilities. Examples include NETworX, Exodus, Habitat for Humanity, the Hickory Soup Kitchen, Safe Harbor, Women's Resource Center, and PORCH. Within our walls we have Good Samaritan, Preschool, Presbyterian Women, Sabbath Soup and more. This is not an exhaustive list. There are 29 ministries that FPC engages in.

And did you know that FPC actually originated or helped start many of the local Hickory ministries: The Hickory Soup Kitchen and CCM just to name a couple?

If that's not enough to convince you that we get outside our walls and serve others, listen to these numbers (I'm a math guy, I like numbers). This church is also a mission trip focused congregation. Key phrase "mission trip." Over the last 31 Years FPC has sent individuals out into the world to serve and share God's love. Those trips have been local, statewide, nationwide, and international. We've sent out people on 159 mission trips, involving 2,578 participants, serving for more than 16,600 days. These trips have included Junior and Senior High youth, college students, families (including small kids), adults, medical professionals and people that weren't even members of FPC. All these people serving our neighbors because: we are to Love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength. And love our neighbor as our self.

“Wow” is not a big enough word to express our appreciation for this congregation and its commitment to mission and ministry. The members of FPC enthusiastically support the mission of Christ through engagement within the church and outside of the church.

### Closing

My goodness, we’ve covered a lot from the Holy Cow Survey and parts of the Mission Study Report. But we haven’t been able to cover everything in those reports. If you want a deeper dive, please go read them for yourself. If you have any questions, you can reach out to any member of the Mission Study Task Force, we’re listed on the front page of the Mission Study Report. Remember both can be found under the Pastoral Nominating Committee banner on the FPC home page.

In summary:

- We are a healthy congregation that’s energetic and vibrant.
- We are interested in being together on our faith journey. We want to learn together, grow together and fellowship together.
- We want our nearly 150-year-old church to last for many more generations, so we want to bring new families in, which means, we’ve got to invite them! And that’s an area for us to improve in.
- We have a strong staff that we’re grateful for, but we’re about to experience a significant change. Let’s continue to pray for the Pastor Nominating Committee and their work finding the person that God is preparing to join us at FPC.
- We have a generous congregation. But we’re depending on too few. Please pray for how God is leading you to support the mission and ministries of this church.
- We believe we’re called by God to engage in the world outside these walls; to be the hands and feet of Jesus and serve his people in all walks of life and situations.

Thank you for listening, we’ve tried to give you a quick “look in the mirror.” Stay tuned for next week’s “look outside the window.”

In Jesus’ name.

Amen