

**First Presbyterian Church of Hickory, NC  
Mission Study Report  
September 22, 2021**



**Mission Study Task Force**

*Dennis Stamper  
Leila Doughton  
Cynthia Honeycutt  
Melvin Meares  
Katherine Mull  
Shannon Pleasant  
Sarah Shumate  
Shirley Thomason  
Tony Watson*

**First Presbyterian Mission Statement**

We, the First Presbyterian Church of Hickory, NC, affirm that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, sinners saved by the grace of God. We seek to glorify God and grow in faith through our worship, study, service, and witness. Led by the Spirit, we strive to be obedient to God's Word as we reach out to each other, our community, and the world.

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## Executive Summary

As is true with most Presbyterian churches, First Presbyterian Church of Hickory (FPC) has traditionally begun a pastoral search process only after a pastor has left. This can be a difficult period for a church in the best of times, but even more so in a time of unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, when our current senior pastor announced that he would be retiring, the session voted, and the Presbytery of Western North Carolina approved, the church immediately proceed with the mission study and pastoral search process. This would hopefully avoid or reduce the need for an interim pastor and would provide for a smoother transition of leadership.

The Mission Study Task Force was formed and began working in March of 2021. We contracted with Pinnacle Leadership Associates to guide and support us through the process. The team determined that our two major tasks were to look both “in the mirror” to assess and acknowledge who we are including our strengths and challenges and “out the window” to better understand the community around us including future trends that might impact the work and call of First Presbyterian Church of Hickory in the future. The findings of our Mission Study will not only guide and inform our pastoral search process but will also help the session and staff to understand our gifts and challenges more clearly.

We began our task of looking “in the mirror” with a congregational survey. We utilized the services of Holy Cow Consulting for this process. We had strong participation in the survey and we feel that the results and analysis shared in this report are both valid and informative. We also reviewed our internal demographics and financial health. Finally, we held individual interviews with each of our program staff to seek their assessment of the current health and future needs of our church.

Our second task of looking “out the window” involved a close look at the community around us including current demographic data as well as projections of future growth and trends. We also held interviews with key individuals in various roles and agencies to assess the perception of First Presbyterian Church of Hickory in our community and to further assess current and emerging community needs.

The overall results of the mission study show a church that is strong and thriving even in times such as these. The congregational survey found a high level of both satisfaction and energy among our members including satisfaction with current worship services. We do recognize that changes may be required in the future to respond to today’s changing culture and our new senior pastor will need to be attuned to this. Although there will certainly be challenges ahead, we are strong financially and well positioned for continued ministry. First Presbyterian Church is a vital part of the Hickory community and will no-doubt continue to be a beacon of compassion and generosity well into the future.

## **A Brief History of First Presbyterian Church**

Hickory's First Presbyterian Church was founded in 1873 by a group of interested Presbyterians as a small mission in the newly incorporated town of Hickory. The Hickory church was the second Presbyterian church in the county, and was Hickory's only Presbyterian church until the mid-1900s. The church's growth has paralleled that of Hickory, and FPC is now one of Catawba County's largest and most influential churches.

In March 1873 a mission, called Gibbs' Mission, was established with a membership of fifteen. The Reverend G.M. Gibbs became the first shared minister. Gibbs remained in that capacity until 1878. In that same year the church became known as the Hickory Presbyterian Church and construction of the first church building was completed. The church continued to grow under the leadership of ministers Thomas Thurston (1879-1884) and Colin Munroe (1885-1891). In 1891, with a membership of approximately one hundred, the church secured its first full-time pastor, J. Alston Ramsay. The creation of the local Woman's Missionary Society and the purchase of the first manse occurred that same year.

C.W. Trawick (1904-1907) was pastor when the current church building was completed and dedicated on December 2, 1906. John G. Garth took over the pastorate of the church from 1907 to 1918. During his tenure a new manse was constructed and the church obtained its first pipe organ. Edward Marshall Craig was pastor of the church from 1919 until 1925. Enrollment increased greatly during his pastorate, reaching a total membership of 335 in 1923.

FPC was without a regular pastor from December 1925 until February 1927, when John Richards Hay, D.D., began the longest tenure in the church's history. He served for over twenty-five years until September 1952. During this period the church underwent considerable expansion. In 1928 a three-story education building was erected just west of the sanctuary. In 1946 Sweetwater and Belk Memorial Presbyterian churches were organized, largely under the efforts of Dr. Hay and taking most of their membership from First Presbyterian. Despite the loss of members to the two new churches, membership at First Presbyterian continued to increase, from 372 in 1927 to 541 in 1952. In 1949 the sanctuary was remodeled and refurnished.

Thirteen installed pastors have served since 1953 – Fred R. Stair (1953-1959), William W. Williamson (1960-1964), J. Whitner Kennedy (1964-1976), Day Carper (1972-1977), David W. McKee (1977-1988), Robert W. Ratchford (1979-1987), G. Wallace Johnson (1989-2009), Lucy E. Turner (1991-2000), Deborah McEachran (2002-2011), Hayes Noble (2002-2003), Heather Wood Davis (2009-present), and J. Whittington Malone (2011- present).

Remaining downtown, FPC has shared its facilities and resources with many groups and has played a leading role in the establishment and support of many of Hickory's helping agencies including the Hickory Soup Kitchen, Carolina Caring Hospice, and Cooperative Christian Ministries. All three of these organizations' starting location was on the FPC's campus.

A new fellowship hall and other renovations were completed in 1998. In 2007 the sanctuary was renovated and a new organ was installed. In 2013, our church celebrated its 140 anniversary. In 2018 the church underwent a \$2.7 million capital campaign to include both interior and exterior renovations and additions with a focus on making the campus more accessible and up-to-date.

## Congregational Survey

The Congregational Survey conducted by Holy Cow Consulting showed that there is a high level of satisfaction in the church. Key drivers of that satisfaction are quality of worship, leadership/pastor and spirit of the congregation makes people want to get involved.

The church fell within the “High Energy/High Satisfaction” quadrant which is described as the “transformation” quadrant. Churches in this quadrant are sources of new meaning and purpose for their members. They also serve as mentors to other churches.

The top four goals identified by the survey:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
- Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships.
- Make necessary changes to attract families with children and youth.
- Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation for all ages.

It should be noted that the first 3 goals above came up over and over across all demographics. There seems to be a hunger for relationships and bringing in more people, especially families.

There was also a high interest in the church working “as an advocate for social and institutional change”, particularly among younger adults.

The church lacks significant racial, ethnic and economic diversity; however, we do have significant theological diversity. The congregation appears to welcome diversity of thought.

The survey indicated that our church, though sometimes reluctant to change, is willing to do so if given understandable reasoning behind the need for the change.

Although the church is perceived as a caring congregation, we could use help in stepping out of our comfort zone to actively welcome others, particularly those who may seem different from us.

*For the Congregational Survey Executive Summary see Appendix A.  
The full Congregational Survey report is available in the church office.*

## Financials

For the last nine years (2012 through 2020) FPC has had annual pledge receipts and small miscellaneous receipts that have been more than enough to cover the average annual expenditure of \$1,274,001. The staff and the committees have been diligent in managing the funds of the church and FPC consistently ends the year under budget and in the black. The congregation stepped up and did not miss a beat through the challenges of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 annual budget is \$1,343,224.

**Expenditures:** The following are reflections on the largest components of the expenditures based on the 2012 through 2020 actuals.

- **Staff 45.8%:** FPC values a strong staff (professional and administrative) that not only provides pastoral care and preaches well but focuses outside the walls of FPC; that takes a leadership role in community ministries and encourages the congregation to engage in the local community (i.e. get outside the walls). The staff is also engaged at the highest levels of and recognized as leaders in the Presbytery of Western North Carolina.
- **Benevolence 30.2%:** The mission and ministry of FPC has a long history of strong support from its congregation. Between “in budget” benevolences (22.2%) and “out of budget” benevolences (sacrificial giving of 8.0%) FPC has averaged more than the equivalent of 30% of the budget in giving to local, national and international missions and ministries (an outward focus of sharing the Gospel through service and support).
- **Maintenance & Utilities 11.0%:** FPC was founded in 1873, and has been at its current location since 1906. In that time the facilities have been expanded multiple times to be the beautiful campus that exists today. The facilities of FPC are not only for internal use, they are and have been widely utilized by the community; examples include Cooperative Christian Ministry, Family Care Center, Habitat for Humanity, Adult Life Programs, Hickory Area Ministers, Exodus, Networkx, Community Masters Bridge Group, and more.
- **Preschool 8.1%:** An important part of community engagement is the FPC Preschool. Even though the Preschool is part of the budget, it brings in nearly enough receipts through tuitions to have a neutral effect on the budget (the director’s salary is included as part of the staff). The preschool’s greater impact has been on the lives of the children that have been exposed to the love of God. It has also brought numerous young families into the life of FPC.

**Stewardship:** Like many churches, our congregation has been blessed by the stewardship of long-time members whose giving is often exemplary. We celebrate the contributions of all our members but also recognize the need to continue to teach the practice of stewardship as a crucial discipline for disciples of all ages.

- 56% of pledge receipts came from 14.3% of giving units (i.e. families) for 2020.
- 44% of pledge receipts came from 85.7% of giving units (i.e. families) for 2020.

**Endowment:** FPC has received generous bequests over its nearly 150 years. In the last nine years those resources have been used to fund special internal projects such as youth, adult and medial mission trips; upgraded audio/visual systems and energy efficient lighting upgrades. More importantly than internal

uses, these resources have supported College scholarships that are awarded annually, Habitat for Humanity, the Hickory Soup Kitchen, Union Seminary, Montreat Conference Center, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina's Building HOPE campaign and much more. With new bequests and market growth over the last nine years, the endowment has grown by 67%.

**Capital Campaign:** In 2017 the congregation was presented with a capital campaign; a “call to *connect, grow & serve*”. The total project was completed at \$2,700,000 in 2019. The pledge payment period was 2018 through 2023. As of this writing over 94% of pledges have been received.

- **Connect:** Improvements to make the facilities more welcoming and provide access to all parts of the church (new Porte Cochere, expanded welcome center, covered Cloister Walk, expanded parking and more).
- **Grow:** Improvements to support the growth of our congregation across generations (improved Children Education building, new playground, renovated Junior & Senior High spaces and more).
- **Serve:** Improvements to enable FPC to continue to be a meeting place for the community and host ministries and agencies events. The campaign included pledging \$100,000 to ministries outside the walls of the church.

**2021 Budget:** vs average of the last 9 years

<u>BUDGET CATEGORY</u>	<u>2021</u> <u>Budget</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Budget</u>	<u>Average Last 9</u> <u>Years Actual</u>	<u>% of</u> <u>Average</u>
BENEVOLENCES	\$271,575	20.2%	\$282,949	22.2%
PMO\PRESCHOOL PROGRAM	\$103,667	7.7%	\$103,236	8.1%
CONGREGATIONAL CARE	\$6,800	0.5%	\$4,825	0.4%
MAINTENANCE & UTILITIES	\$155,360	11.6%	\$140,725	11.0%
STEWARDSHIP	\$7,500	0.6%	\$5,681	0.4%
PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN	\$3,940	0.3%	\$3,186	0.3%
STAFF SALARY & BENEFITS	\$621,784	46.3%	\$583,927	45.8%
FAMILY MINISTRY COMMITTEE	\$36,800	2.7%	\$24,486	1.9%
CHRISTIAN ED	\$13,800	1.0%	\$14,143	1.1%
YOUTH MINISTRY	\$25,648	1.9%	\$29,456	2.3%
MUSIC MINISTRY/WORSHIP	\$37,350	2.8%	\$22,940	1.8%
ADMINISTRATION	\$54,800	4.1%	\$55,855	4.4%
<u>NEW MEMBER COMMITTEE (59A)</u>	<u>\$4,200</u>	<u>0.3%</u>	<u>\$2,594</u>	<u>0.2%</u>
TOTAL	\$1,343,224	100.0%	\$1,274,001	100.0%

## Demographics

### **Who are we, First Presbyterian Church of Hickory, North Carolina?**

Based on our annual reporting to the Presbytery, we're a community of faith with 842 members on our rolls, with an average weekly worship attendance of 241 (<29%). Our congregation is almost entirely white and non-Hispanic (>99%). We are 53% female and 47% male. We are relatively well balanced into five age groups with 63% over the age of 41. The smallest age group is the 26-40 age group (>16%). The two largest age groups are 41-55 and 56-70 (both >23%).

There were 212 participants in the congregational survey. This included our Confirmed Youth, typically 8<sup>th</sup> grade and above. Most of the participants were over age 55 (76%). Female participation was 57% and male participation was 43%. This group is both highly educated (>81% with a college degree or above) and are in the higher income brackets (88% over \$50,000 a year).

### **Who is our neighbor?**

How do we define our neighbor? We looked at those who live within a 6 mile radius of FPC. We looked at those living in Hickory, Catawba County, North Carolina and the United States. In general, there is a consistency in all these demographic communities.

Focusing on Hickory, the community is 71% white and 87% non-Hispanic. The next largest racial group is Black or African American at 13%. The largest age groups are the under 20 (>25%) and the over 65 (>29%) population. Over the next 20 years there is a 13% predicted population growth rate, with a significant shift and increase to an older population.

Educationally, 44% of Hickory's population has a college degree or above. Economically the majority (>52%) of Hickory's working population makes less than \$50,000 a year.

*For supporting charts see Appendix B.*



## Professional Staff Member Interviews

Professional staff interviews were conducted and staff was asked to consider the most pressing issue(s) facing FPC, challenges and opportunities, and emerging and/or unmet needs. Staff members were also given an opportunity to provide any additional feedback to the task force.

**Most Pressing Issues:** Staff overwhelmingly responded that one of the most pressing issues is the decline of in-person attendance due to COVID-19 and what that may mean long-term for FPC. Staff believes adaptation will be necessary and that there will be a shift from ministry and programming within our walls to a need to extend beyond our walls in order to engage with our members and the community. Another pressing issue centers around FPC's two worship services (Kairos and sanctuary worship) and the continued consideration of how to structure Sunday morning.

**Challenges and Opportunities:** Responses on challenges and opportunities varied from one staff member to the next and across our ministries. Many of the challenges and opportunities go hand-in-hand and are listed below:

- Financial giving & congregational care in an aging congregation
- Best use of our facilities & technology
- Spiritual formation
- Need for connection amongst our members
- Staff turnover
- Maintaining our worship services
- Building on attractional ministries already in place
- Programs for children (music, transitional kindergarten)

**Emerging & Unmet Needs:** Staff responses to this question largely centered on the qualities we should seek in a new pastor. That person should be able to meet and respond to the needs across all generations in our congregation. We should seek someone who will embrace both traditional and contemporary styles of worship. Our new pastor should be open to change. In preparing for the search process we should discern the key qualities of pastors who have been successful at FPC in the past to shed light on the qualities we are seeking for our future pastor.

*For additional details on staff interview responses see Appendix C.*

## Community Leader Interviews

The task force identified and interviewed local community leaders and asked questions to better understand their familiarity with FPC, their perceived most pressing issues in the community, challenges and opportunities, unmet or emerging needs that FPC might help address, as well as an opportunity for feedback on the future of FPC's involvement in the community.

**Familiarity with FPC:** All those interviewed were familiar with FPC and had positive impressions of the church. FPC is seen as a valued, respected partner and influential leader within the community. The church has a long-standing reputation of being a welcoming congregation who is invested in caring for the needs of people in our community. The church is seen as a community leader that stands out as a large, visible presence in downtown Hickory, recognized for hosting many community events.

**Most Pressing Issues:** As in other communities across the nation, the community leaders here see many pressing issues. These include:

- physical & mental health
- education
- economic disparity & stability
- the need for safe and affordable housing
- reliable transportation
- homelessness
- substance abuse
- racial equity
- reducing the impact of adverse childhood experiences on our county's children

**Challenges & Opportunities:** Community leaders identified challenges and opportunities that face our community, many of which relate to the pressing issues included above. These include:

- Toxic charity and the need for a constructive response
- Race relations and a continuous effort to build trust between various racial groups
- Economic opportunities are available but we need to ensure people from all walks of life have the opportunity to participate and work to remove any obstacles.

**Emerging & Unmet Needs:** Community leaders encouraged the church to stay open and sensitive to the changing times. FPC members need to continue to be involved with government and other helping agencies to stay abreast of issues in our community. Our church must continue to discern how FPC can be a part of solutions and innovative efforts.

**Additional Feedback:** The community leaders see our church as a place that wears many hats and provides room and space for everyone. Being a highly respected voice in our community, the church can address the need for our community to listen, care for, and look after our neighbors.

*For additional details on community leader interview responses see Appendix D.*

## **Appendix**

**First Presbyterian Church of Hickory, NC  
Mission Study Report**

## Appendix A: Congregational Survey Executive Summary

The Congregation Assessment Tool was recently administered in your church. 594 persons were invited to participate; of these, 212 persons responded. A response from every member is not required to provide valid results. For a complete readout, please review the Vital Signs report that was sent to your church. A summary of that report is provided below.

Overall, approximately 65% of your members are clearly satisfied with things in the church. This, along with other information, indicates that the church has options which include growth, expansion, replication, and external impact. Whether any of these will be realized depends on the choices made.

Not every question is of equal importance to members. When asked how satisfied they are, members tend to focus on the issues addressed in the questions below. When they feel more positive in these areas, they tend to feel more positive overall.

- The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content.
- Persons who serve as leaders in our church are representative of the membership.
- The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible.
- Our Pastor makes things happen.
- The leaders of our church show a genuine concern to know what people are thinking when decisions need to be made.

Conversely, when your members feel less positive about the areas above, they tend to feel less satisfied with their experience in the church overall.

Every church exhibits patterns in its life that contain strengths and potential weaknesses. Your church has potential strengths related to inclusiveness and advocacy. Potential weaknesses include a tendency to intellectualize every issue and difficulty in establishing identity and vision.

As members look to the future, their top four goals are:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
- Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc).
- Make necessary changes to attract families with children and youth to our church.
- Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.

In comparison to other churches, three goals that are unusually strong for your church are:

- Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc).
- Adapt the opportunities provided by the church making them more accessible given the pace and schedule of my life. (i.e. online education, early morning classes, lunch discussions)

- Work as an advocate for social and institutional change so that society might better reflect the values of the kingdom of God.

These may warrant attention from the leadership even if they are mid-level priorities.

All the information in this report should be explored and validated in further conversation. Survey data is not the end of a conversation but the beginning.

*The full Congregational Survey report is available in the church office.*

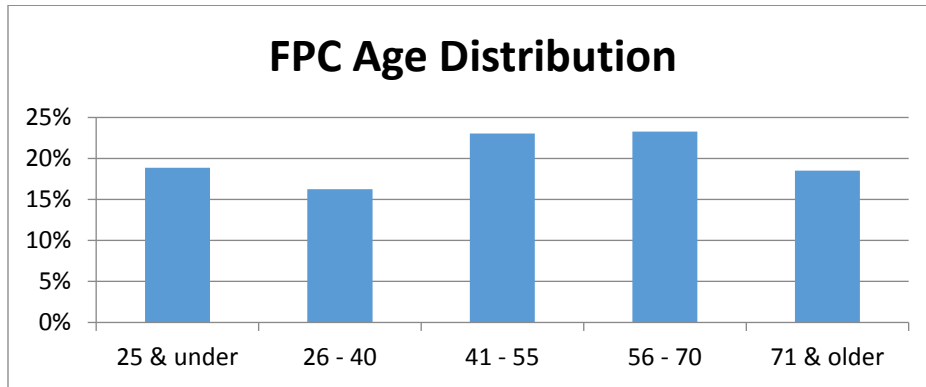
## Appendix B: Demographics Charts

Three sources of demographic data are presented in this report.

- The 2020 First Presbyterian Church Statistical Report that is reported to the Presbytery.
- The FPC Congregational Survey.
- The Western Piedmont Council on Governments (WPCOG) and is current as of 2019. This data is expressed as “6 mile radius around FPC”, “Hickory”, “Catawba”, “NC” and “USA”.

### Demographics: Age

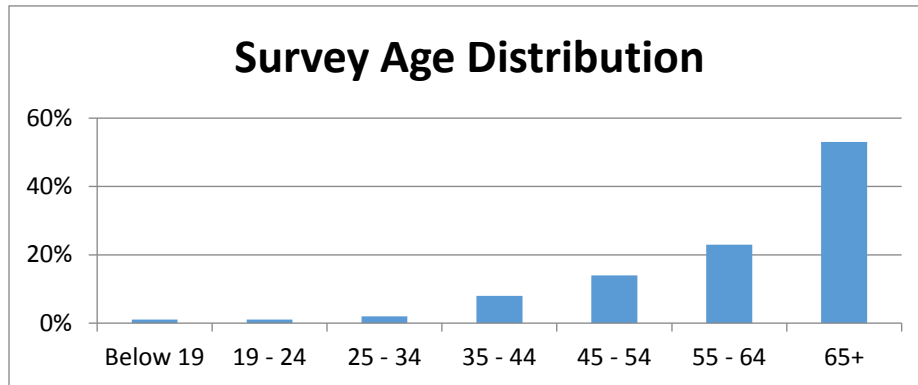
FPC 2020 Statistical Report



#### Relevant Points:

- This represents all the people on the church rolls
- Relatively balanced membership
- Almost 2/3 (63%) of our members are over the age of 41
- Actual average worship attendance is less than 29% of the rolls
- Gender distribution: Female = 53%, Male = 47%

FPC Congregational Survey

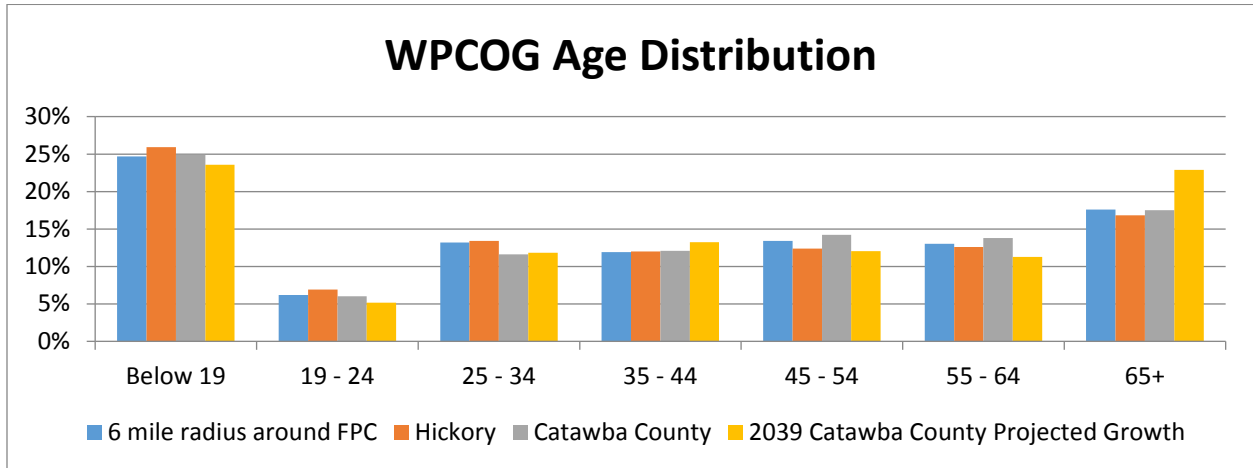


#### Relevant Points:

- 212 members completed the survey

- 76% of the participants were over the age of 55
- Participants include Confirmed Youth (typically 8<sup>th</sup> grade and above)
- Gender distribution: Female = 57%, Male = 43%

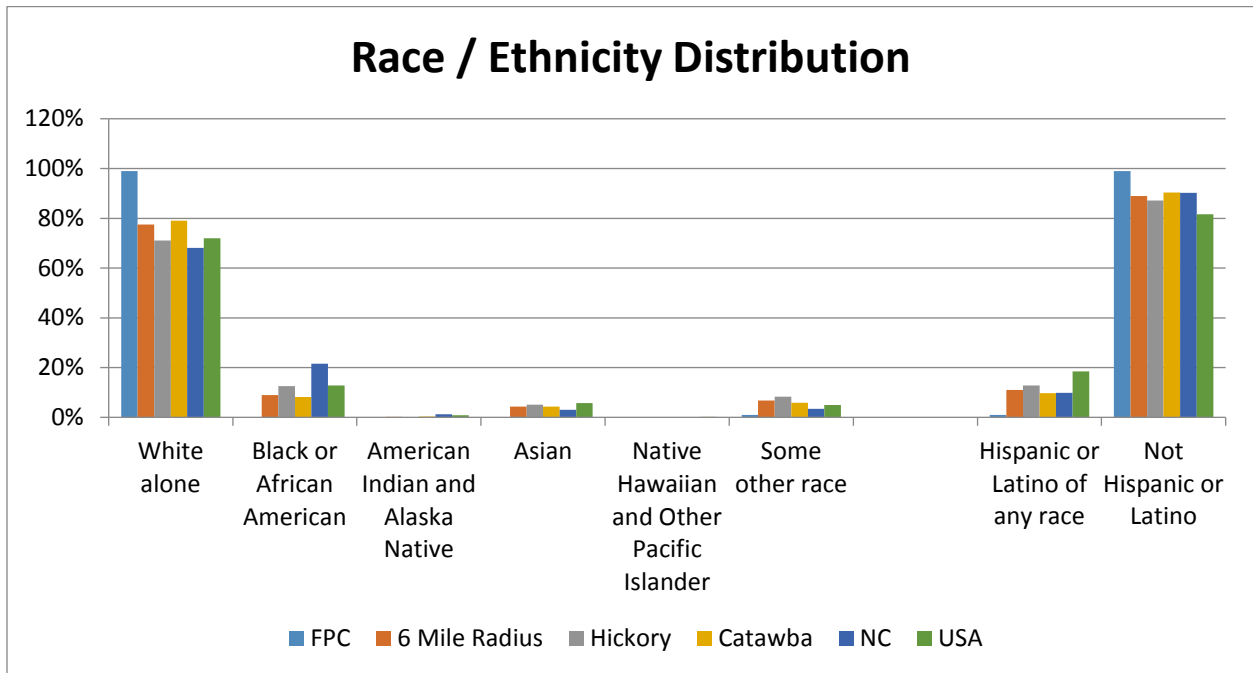
**Western Piedmont Council on Governments (WPCOG)**



**Relevant Points:**

- Significant youth and retired population
- 20 year growth rate of 13%
- 20 year growth shows significant shifting to an older population (>47%)

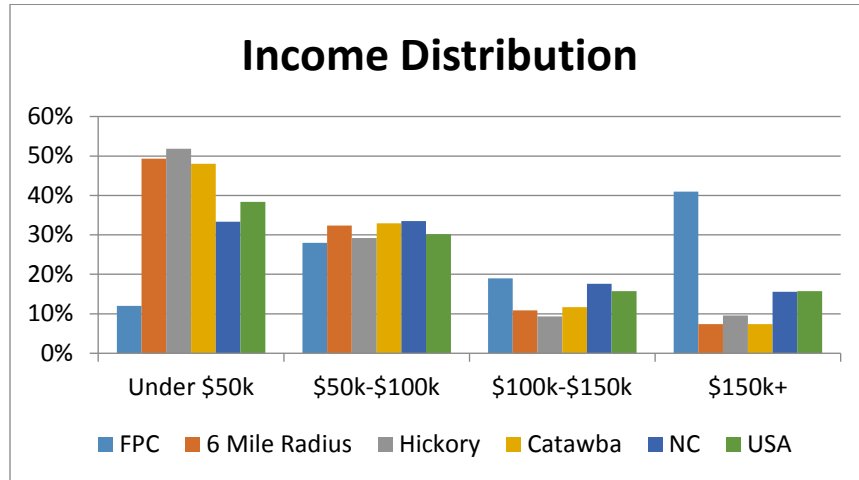
**Demographics: Race**



Relevant points:

- FPC congregational survey is >99% white whereas Hickory is ~71%
- FPC congregational survey is >99% non-Hispanic or Latino where Hickory is ~87%

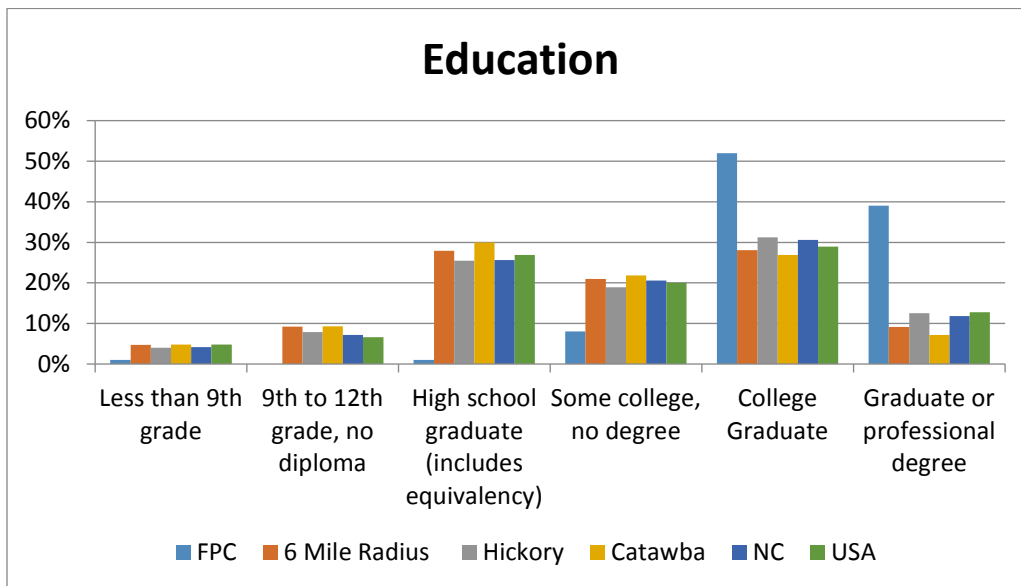
### Demographics: Income



Relevant points:

- FPC congregational survey participants are heavily weighted in the higher income brackets

### Demographics: Education



Relevant points:

- FPC congregational survey participants are highly educated
- Remember that FPC congregational survey includes Confirmed Youth (typically 8<sup>th</sup> grade and above)



## **Appendix C: Professional Staff Member Interviews**

Staff members interviewed include the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Communications Director, Previous Youth Director\*, Organist, Children & Family Ministry Director, & Kairos Worship Leader.

\*The previous youth director left at the end of June 2021.

### **Questions Asked:**

- Thinking about right now, what do you see as the most pressing issue for First Presbyterian Church of Hickory?
- In the next five years, what challenges and opportunities do you anticipate for the First Presbyterian Church of Hickory?
- Can you identify any unmet or emerging needs that First Presbyterian Church of Hickory could address?
- Is there anything else you think that the Pastor Nominating Committee needs to know as they look ahead?

### **Most Pressing Issue(s):**

- There are fewer people coming to church and how do we get them back in the building. People used to attend church out of a sense of loyalty and “obligation”. How does the church stay relevant to people especially post COVID-19. It is important to adapt to a rapidly changing cultural environment. Keeping members connected, cared for, and spiritually nourished is also a need. The shift from a congregation “attractional ministry” (drawing people into the church for the Gospel) to more “liquid church.” (taking the Gospel out of the church to the people).
- How to reach today’s young people (the digital generations). How to continue to deliver meaningful content and promote spiritual growth/nurture with all ages as we continue to navigate church in the COVID-19 world.
- The challenge will remain because so many are now used to not attending in-person. Everyone is used to doing work and school from home so why not continue to “do church” from home? Being creative and continuing to find ways to reach our members is an ongoing challenge even in a non-COVID world. COVID-19 and its impact on church has made this challenge more pronounced and more difficult. Strike the right balance with worship services and spiritual formation. No one wants to give/change their current schedule. Continue to fight kids’ busy schedules -travel sports, school, extra-curricular activities. Wednesday nights produced better attendance than Sunday mornings for kids. Spiritual formation is not happening at home SO how will these kids learn the Lord’s Prayer, the Doxology, etc.
- Engaging our whole congregation of all ages in a nurtured and active Christian experience. Reaching people — getting people to worship (either in person or virtually). How we will structure our Sunday mornings moving forward to reach as many folks as possible. The idea of not running our two worship services at the same time has benefits but also makes it very difficult to maintain a dedicated Sunday School hour. Sunday morning is a limited chunk of time and the answer of how to use that time most efficiently and for the good of the most people

possible is difficult to determine. Again, this opens an opportunity for our staff to find other windows of time to reach folks, but change is often hard.

- A “silver lining” to having been forced into a different church landscape for the past 18 months could mean that our members are not as committed to the way things used to be and are more open to change. Our church members may now be more willing to “bend” in areas where they were once very rigid just so we can get back to some sense of normalcy in our church life.

### **Challenges & Opportunities:**

- Financial challenges with our aging population – will the younger people give in the same way as previous generations.
- The Preschool attracts families, Youth group attracts kids and the Wednesday night drive through attracted people to our church. The knitting group and other groups create communities through the activities that the church offers. How do we build on these communities for the overall church?
- Congregational care – transporting and meeting the needs of older people to medical appointments or to other things – getting people to church and church activities. Helping people with technology to access to things for church and other personal things. Helping folks who don’t have other family near here. “Church” may need to take place out of the building.
- How do we put our ample facilities and campus to best use? How to use our building and grounds for mission (tutoring, more groups like Networx, Exodus, Bridge Club, etc...)
- How do we help people’s faith move from something they learn about in church to being the “air they breathe”.
- Respond to the felt need for connection among members (ex. In person or digital small groups)  
Respond to the call to be a stronger voice/actor for social justice
- In a culture that is less Sunday-centric and less building-centric– how to continue to use technology to reach people and connect members;
- Staff turnover
- Some opportunities for mission include outreach and support for single parent families;
- Educational achievement gap between children, and the growing number of retirees moving in to Hickory.
- We are missing music with our little kids! New music director Kiki is interested in adding children’s music program back into our church programs! Good chance this will happen soon.
- Transitional kindergarten! Not many good programs in Hickory. We don’t have the physical space limitation.
- Maintaining traditional worship and avoiding any kind of “blended” worship.
- The church in the past has been fearful of new things and how can we remain flexible and creative in the future.
- How to address the groups of people who don't really have a place for one reason or another. It's easy for them to drop off. We need to be looking for ways to make folks feel more connected.
- Encouraging folks to really "getting our hands dirty" with mission work or do we just make our tithes and wash our hands of it.

- Shifting in those rough waters to be able to change the way we minister to and attract people while continuing to minister to its members, AND still staying true to the Word. That in itself is a huge opportunity for growth.

**Future leadership needs:**

- The Church is older and big group of younger people- someone who can manage all of those ages.
- Someone who is able to manage and address the climate and respect the opposite beliefs in our congregation.
- Someone who would be able to help develop intergenerational small groups for connections.
- Our new pastor needs to be able to have an understanding and support for both traditional and other forms of worship and see the worth in both.
- A pastor needs to be open to and inviting of change.
- A leader who is tech aware.
- When thinking about finding a good “fit” in our next pastor, we should look at the pastors over the past 30-40 years and discern the qualities in them that made for a good fit (and which ones were not a good fit). We’re not looking for a clone of Whit or Wallace, Debra or Lucy. Only to learn from history about the culture of our congregation... and what kind of preaching and pastoral care and leadership style fits well here.
- Praying for the work of the Holy Spirit and the future PNC!

## Appendix D: Community Leader Interviews

Community leaders interviewed include a local pastor, Hickory City Manager, Catawba County Public Health Director, Hickory City Police Lieutenant\*, Local Hospice Director of Community Relations, and Local Soup Kitchen Executive Director.

*\*All interviewees are unaffiliated with First Presbyterian Church with the exception of Hickory Police Lieutenant.*

### Questions Asked:

- Are you familiar with First Presbyterian Church of Hickory located on the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW in Downtown Hickory? What do you think is the general impression in the community about First Presbyterian Church of Hickory?
- Thinking about right now, what do you see as the most pressing issue in the community and how might First Presbyterian Church of Hickory respond?
- In the next five years, what challenges and opportunities do you anticipate for the Hickory/Catawba County area? Is there a role for First Presbyterian Church of Hickory in meeting those challenges and opportunities?
- Can you identify any unmet or emerging needs in Hickory/Catawba County that First Presbyterian Church of Hickory could address?
- Is there anything else you think First Presbyterian Hickory should consider as we discern our future role in the Hickory/Catawba County area?

### Interview Responses:

- First Presbyterian has been a valued partner for Catawba County Public Health for many years, and we are proud to have collaborated with the church during our Community Health Assessment process, through outreach efforts with vulnerable individuals and families in our community, and through the church's support of Public Health initiatives.
- Our 2019 Community Health Assessment process identified three major health priorities – chronic disease, behavioral health, and healthy foods/healthy weight, with housing and education as two areas of concern (CHA, page 7). The church has many opportunities to help address these areas through active participation in the LiveWell Catawba Coalition and its workgroups, and through initiatives that improve the health and wellness of our community's most vulnerable members with a focus on racial equity and reducing the impact of adverse childhood experiences on our county's children.
- Throughout the Community Health Assessment, we see disparities in health outcomes for people from historically-marginalized populations, and the effects of ongoing childhood adverse experiences on the long-term health of many individuals in our county (CHA, page 13). Addressing those will be an important part of our work for many years. To this end, First Presbyterian is an important part of our community, with an influential membership that has eagerly participated in initiatives. We hope the church will continue its involvement in LiveWell Catawba and other Public Health projects for many years to come. We also know that opioid addiction and the many layered effects stemming from addiction is a continued concern –

homelessness, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis C, etc are areas of concern with many community partners working together to find resources to address these issues.

- As in other communities across the nation, we have families that need community support – with healthy foods, behavioral healthcare, education, safe and affordable housing, reliable transportation, and economic stability (CHA, page 11). Helping families with some of these social determinants of health is an important way the church can make a lasting impact on the health of our community.
- We would love to see the church continue its partnership with Public Health. We believe this is a fruitful relationship and we are eager to see what new ways we can partner together for better community health.
- I am familiar with the church. I believe it is seen as a classic old structure at a good location in downtown, and I believe those that think of the church see it as a good part of the community.
- From my standpoint, I see drugs and homelessness as a major problem. Those two issues often go together. I believe anyone that wants to respond to the problem need to support agencies that assist in recovery. Anyone who gives money to a homeless person is not helping them, they are only extending homelessness.
- As to challenges, Hickory is a microcosm of the nation. Whatever major issues might arise in the nation; economic downturn, international terrorism, etc., it will soon filter down to this city. As to opportunities, Hickory will continue to grow, so that means the church may find new congregates and grow.
- Political turmoil goes beyond the ballot box, it too often filters into churches. I believe whatever social/political issues may cause strife within a congregation, should be addressed biblically.
- Very positive. First Presbyterian has a long-standing reputation of being a welcoming congregation who is invested in caring for the needs of folks in our community.
- We have several needs in our community including educational and economic disparity, homelessness, and substance abuse. In context, the landscape of churches, regardless of denomination, is also changing. No longer is it presumed that most people are a part of a faith community. In addition, the way folks choose to “belong” to a faith community looks different and is evolving every day. If they do wish to belong to a church, folks may wish to engage virtually, through missional projects only, or through small groups. For others, their idea of church may just be writing an annual check to CCM or the Hickory Soup Kitchen and participating in any form or organized worship.
- As faith leaders, we must be prepared to plan for and “vision” all possibilities ...and respond accordingly. Some churches are having a hard time adapting to the shift. First Pres is unique in many ways. It is a leader among churches, so it has earned a great deal of respect over the years. As a result, it can help other churches with this cultural shift. This might include pastor training with sister churches in the area or organizing ecumenical mission endeavors to meet our community’s needs.
- Our population is aging and so are our church members. These are also our major church and community givers and doers. How do we help this next generation behind take notice of and become invested in the life of the community and caring for one another? How do we prepare them for leadership in our churches?
- You all are doing such a fantastic job in so many areas. I recently have felt a need to learn more about mental health needs in our area and how we as clergy might respond and educate our

parishioners. In addition, I applaud you all for taking the initiative to try to help with educational needs in our children, many of whom fell behind during COVID-19. We have some folks in our congregation who I am sure would like to help. I see First Pres as taking the lead on this.

- Keep doing what you are doing. Whit has done an outstanding job representing you all in the community. He is a team player, positive, engaging, wise, and a visionary. It is a joy to work with him.
- Yes. It has very positive impression and reputation in Hickory.
- Toxic charity provided to the homeless in our community is a major issue. The faith based community needs to find ways to provide constructive charity. The City could be involved in that effort as well to shed light on the negative impact toxic charity is having regarding homelessness. Enabling someone to live one more day in the woods or on the street is not helping the person in need or the community.
- Race relations are also a major issue. It is not that they are bad, but there has to be a continuous effort to build trust between the various racial groups in Hickory. Churches can and do play a large roll in that.
- Tremendous economic opportunities are emerging in Hickory after years of stagnation. We need to make sure people from all walks of life have the opportunity to participate those opportunities. Much of that will be making sure our youth are properly educated and have the skill sets that will be needed in the economy of tomorrow. Those from disadvantaged communities will need extra help in getting prepared. The Church can help with that.
- Yes, knows FPC through Whit and participation in Hickory Area Ministerial group, has experienced Lenten services and other events there.
- A pillar of the community, a community leader, stands out as a large visible presence in downtown Hickory, recognized for hosting many community events.
- 3 things: 1) need to stay relevant (or be left behind), need to reach out to the baby boomers, millennials, gen X'rs, unchurched, etc.; hold a forum, feed them, then ask: what do you like, not like about church; don't preach, just listen, understand and apologize for not serving their needs; then work on what was heard. 2) Figure out how to deal with the multi-gender generation. 3) Work on racism, it's at an all-time high.
- Charlotte is expanding fast and the overflow is coming to Hickory: people, growth, expansion, adversity; we need to expand our minds, attitudes and perspectives on what coming; how are we going to handle this growth. We need to become new wineskins (Mat 9:14-17), i.e. stay pliable, adaptive and changeable.
- Stay open minded and sensitive to the changing times. Encourage congregation members to be involved with the city government: attend city council meetings, attend the city's Neighborhood College, Citizen's Police Academy, Citizen's Fire Academy, Catawba County University, etc; so that FPC can be aware of the changes happening in Hickory and Catawba County.
- Stay involved with the Hickory Area Ministerial group, host social events, be involved with city government, be involved and learning what's happening locally, stay prayerful (1st Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.), stay in unity. Some additional thoughts as we prepare to seek a new pastor: • Find a leader/pastor – someone who motivates and influences you to move forward, not a supervisor that tells you what to do. • Don't just go through challenging times, but grow

through them. If you just go through, you come out bitter, but if you grow through them, you come out better.

- Read John Maxwell's book, "Leadershift: The 11 Essential Changes Every Leader Must Embrace"
- Very familiar. It is a landmark I use often.
- It is a place that wears many hats and provides room and space for everyone. Not afraid to try new things. Place that brings many walks of life together. When needs arise in our community I always see 1st Presbyterian stepping up to find out where they fit into the solution.
- Because of our work at the Soup Kitchen I see housing in our area as the next big hurdle for not only those we serve, but in our community as a whole. There is a huge lack of affordable housing and we hear this daily from our guests. I must confess though I don't know where 1st Pres would fit in the solution of this problem. Sorry I can't be more help in this area.
- I feel hopeful that the generations of families living at or below the poverty line in our county will be able to break out of poverty and not be forgotten or pushed aside as our community continues to grow and expand. There are many jobs available in this area, but just as many obstacles for many living among us that make it very difficult to consistently sustain an upward trajectory. I would encourage the church to seek out and support new and innovative efforts to help with these obstacles where they can be found.
- With the pandemic still the major issue it is hard to know what exactly will be the most damaging result from it. I think, being a highly respected voice in our community the church can address the need for our community to listen, care for, and look after our neighbors.