

“Faith, Hope and Mojo: Transforming the Future at FPC”

Report from the October Leadership Retreat

Where is First Presbyterian Church headed in a rapidly changing culture? In October, 44 church officers, leaders and staff examined where we have been and where we are going during an overnight retreat at Richmond Hill. It has been six years since our last strategic planning, and we wanted to begin to think creatively about our future. We focused on Jesus’ call to every disciple found in Matthew 28:16-20.

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go** therefore and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’*

GOOD NEWS – BAD NEWS

On Friday evening, we briefly looked over the last ten years as a congregation.

The good news is that we have

- Become a more welcoming and open congregation.
- Greatly improved our pastoral care for the elderly, for people who are ill or in crisis. Our Care and Concern Ministry Team and our PW Circles play a major role in helping to watch over the congregation.
- Initiated new mission projects both here in the city and in other lands.
- A growing young adult ministry and a thriving youth group.
- Grown from an annual budget of \$1.2 million to almost \$1.9 million.
- Improved our communication thanks to email, e-newsletter, and now a Facebook page.

But the bad news, that really got our attention, is

- Our membership and attendance continue to decline. We have had a 27% decrease in membership since 2000.
- Our average worship attendance is down to 370, even though we added a third service (the *Open Door*) four years ago.
- Out of the 90 new members we have received in the last three years, 1/3 are already inactive, 1/3 come occasionally, and only 1/3 are active in the life of the church.

VITAL CHURCHES

What are the key factors that help a church be vital and alive? Our congregation joined a three-year program through the Presbytery of the James called “Vital Churches Institute, the Acts 16:5 Initiative.” We are halfway through that program, which teaches key components to flourishing congregations. Through prayerful study of this material, and of scripture like Matthew 28:16-20, we have set three goals to help us move forward as a vital and faithful Christian congregation.

GO

We must find ways to go out to meet people. We have been a passive fellowship when it comes to new member outreach. That is, we wait for people to find us. In this increasingly secular community, with so much competition for people’s time and attention, we need to find ways to go out and to meet them where they live, work, and play. Then we can invite them back to “our place” and into a relationship with Jesus Christ and with us.

TEACH

We need to challenge our new members with the essentials of growing in Christian faith. From the moment we begin to talk with people about joining, we need to help them understand that this is a commitment, a challenge, a call from God in Jesus Christ.

MAKE DISCIPLES

Members belong, disciples grow. For us to do the two steps above, we, as current members of the congregation, need to grow in our own commitment to Christ. Discipleship is about growing in faith, hope, and love. This happens through regular attendance in worship, studying the Bible with each other, taking part in small-group fellowship and prayer, finding ways to serve in our community, giving at a sacrificial level. If this ministry is truly important to God and us, then we must commit ourselves to be people who want to grow up into Christ.

The status quo at First Presbyterian Church is pleasant, but it is not moving us forward. The promise of Christ found at the end of Matthew is that he is with us as he sends us to do his ministry. We are called to GO, to TEACH, and to MAKE DISCIPLES.