

## **2019 Vision Team Summary Report of Churchwide Conversations**

This document is meant to serve as a summary report of the churchwide conversations that took place the week of September 22<sup>nd</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup>. There were over 80 participants across three meetings, each of which lasted approximately two hours. Based on an average weekly worship attendance of 220 (including children), that is a 36% participation rate, which provides a strong representative sample of our congregation. The age range of participants was from 11 to 75+.

As part of the conversations, participants were asked to provide feedback on the following questions:

1. What was your reaction to Brian's comments about the path the church has been on the past five years? (This was asked after a state of the church address by Senior Minister Brian Gerard)
2. What is the church's unique role in your life?
3. What do you do to meet your spiritual needs when not present at church on Sunday?
4. How can our church meet your needs in ways that are relevant to your lifestyle?
5. Out of all the things we have talked about today, what is most important for the future of our church?

Gathered at tables of five, participants were instructed to share their initial responses to the above with each other and write down summary statements of what was shared (with the exception of question 5). For questions 2, 3, and 4, participants were then asked to write down two or three things from their initial conversation that they wanted to pass on as having special emphasis. The instructions for question 5 was to write down two or three things from the entire evening that they felt were most important.

To collect the data, every summary statement that was written down was entered into a spreadsheet for analysis. That initial list of over 450 statements was then sorted by topic and frequency. The top two or three things that were written for each question were then sorted by topic and frequency as well.

The Vision Team met on Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup> to interpret the data. This document is meant to summarize their findings. The Vision Team include the following people: Larry Olliges (Congregational President), Melissa Swan (Congregational Vice President), Katie Cook, Carolyn Embry, Dave Neumann, and Brian Gerard.

**What was your reaction to Brian's comments about the path the church has been on the past five years?**

Responses to the above question suggest that the members of First Christian are very supportive of the mission and ministry of the church over the past five years. Expressions of pride, gratitude, and amazement of what we have done as a community of faith were among the many positive comments made about our progress and direction.

In addition to the overall affirmations, there were three areas of specific emphasis that are worth note: wholeness grants, the open table, and property improvements.

Our wholeness grant ministry was the most commonly mentioned topic among responses to this question. There is strong, broad based support for this ministry and a clear desire that it should continue to be a part of our ministry focus. Of the wholeness grants that received specific mention, Build-a-Bed was at the top of that list. This indicates both strong support of that ministry as well as the format of bringing together church members for a specific cause.

Our practice of being a welcoming and inclusive community as expressed in our Open Table theology also remains a priority. Participants expressed appreciation for what has been done in this area of ministry and support for it continuing to be a core value of the church.

Our efforts at enhancing the property received multiple comments of appreciation as well as the hope there will be more such improvements.

While the previous three items received the most comments, appreciation was also expressed for the church's faithful and wise approach to finances, our children and youth ministries, our staff, our elders, and the overall sense of community support that can be found at First Christian Church.

From the responses to this question, it is evident that the state of First Christian Church and its ministries is strong. Thanks be to God and to each member of our congregation for making it so.

## **What is the church's unique role in your life?**

In a society and culture where many of our church member's needs are being met by other organizations, groups, and resources, the Vision Team felt it was important to hear what the church's unique role is in people's lives.

It is not surprising that the most common answer given to this question was the role the church plays in a person's faith/spiritual life. The following expressions of the church's role in this area are listed below in the order of mentions they received:

1. Personal Faith - Increasing individual practice of faith
2. Rest and Renewal - Providing a place for recharging, healing, peace, and hope
3. Study - Guiding people toward greater understanding of scripture and faith
4. Direction - Helping to guide people toward a more Christ centered life

Not far behind the church's role in spiritual life was the unique role our church plays in providing a place of welcome for all. Specifically in the following three areas:

1. First Christian is a Safe Place: The responses make it clear that people feel safe at First Christian and can freely express their beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and personhood without fear of judgment or exclusion.
2. First Christian is a Diverse Place: Participants repeatedly pointed to the inclusivity and diversity that can be found at FCC. They both believe and appreciate the fact that all really does mean all in our community and that everyone is not only welcome but invited to fully participate.
3. First Christian is Extending Grace: As part of our inclusivity, participants expressed appreciation for our ongoing interfaith efforts.

In an increasingly polarized culture where true diversity and inclusion can be hard to find, First Christian's approach to welcome, inclusivity, and sanctuary for all play a uniquely important role in people's lives.

In addition to the primary issues mentioned above, other expressions of the church's unique role in people's lives included the following, again in order of mention:

1. Community - Fellowship and the importance of being part of a larger family of faith that supports and cares for you.
2. Worship - Weekly worship, special services, sermons, music, child dedications, baptisms, and a place to celebrate faith regularly.
3. Missions - The opportunity connect and serve the world beyond our doors
4. Pastoral Care - Elders, prayer team, staff, and Stephen Ministry are all valued care givers.

## **What do you do to meet your spiritual needs when not present at church on Sundays?**

Please note that “on Sundays” was added after the first meeting for clarification.

With regular church attendance on the decline across our country, the Vision Team was interested in finding out what our members do when not in church on Sunday. The hope of the question was to try and determine how we might help meet their needs when they are not present for Sunday worship.

The most common spiritual activity for church members who are not present at church on Sunday is some form of personal devotion. While this included many forms of devotion from listening to music to reading books, devotionals, or the bible, the most common practice of personal devotion included some kind of online/media format.

At the top of that list was viewing online sermons. That practice has been confirmed through the stats found on our church app. Since 2017, there have been over 3,700 views of our sermons. We are averaging around 25 views per week which is the equivalent of just over 10% of our worshipping congregation. This affirms the importance of that media tool and suggests a potential need to continue developing and enhancing it.

When not practicing forms of personal devotion, members were spending their time with family, resting, exercising, serving others, doing chores/work, or doing nothing. All of which are valuable ways to spend time.

The responses to this question indicate that while there is still value in the on-site practices of faith and worship, that there is a need for the church to explore ways of meeting our members’ needs when they are not at church. This could include development of a series of curated resources that could be made available through our website or some other form of media. Regardless of the method, there are many indications that our members would appreciate and be well-served by efforts to enhance a more mobile practice of faith.

## **How can our church meet your needs in ways that are more relevant to your lifestyle?**

Responses to this question were more broad in scope than the others. That said, they help provide helpful insights for how First Christian might be able to respond to the needs of our members in more relevant and helpful ways.

In order of mentions received, here are the primary categories of responses:

1. **Small Groups/Study:** While there are some ongoing small groups for fellowship and study, there is a desire for more of them in both categories. Further study and exploration about needs and methods should be done by our Training and Nurture Team.
2. **Worship:** There were several mentions of a desire for alternative worship services to the three offered on Sunday morning. Specific suggestions included Saturday or another evening. While there were affirmations about our current music, there were suggestions about improving and expanding it. Other worship suggestions included occasionally bringing all services together and having youth/children Sundays.
3. **Use of Media:** This ties into many of the things listed in the previous question. There is a clear desire for an enhanced media footprint from the church.
4. **Cultural Relevance:** While there was one group out of the 13 that expressed the need to handle controversial/current issues more gently, there were multiple groups that expressed the need to do this more often and with greater intention both through sermons and discussion groups.
5. **Fellowship:** While the trend toward turning to church as a primary source of fellowship is diminishing, there is still a need for it. Particularly through special events throughout the year.
6. **Volunteer Commitment:** A concern was expressed about the need for more volunteers so that we can ease the burden on those serving the church.

Other categories that received responses include:

1. Engagement in community, including presence at marches, festivals, and partnerships
2. Enhanced pastoral care
3. Physical activities
4. Becoming more green/environmentally conscious
5. More intergenerational opportunities/focus

**Out of all the things we have talked about today,  
what is the most important for the future of our Church?**

While it is important to keep the results of the entire conversation in mind, the Vision Team believes it to be helpful to know what were the most important issues to keep in mind as we plan the future of our church.

The following results are listed in order of frequency:

1. Enhance Open Table, diversity and inclusion
2. Increase fellowship and community within the church
3. Continue wholeness grants, community service
4. More culturally relevant sermons, discussions
5. Greater youth focus, cross generational interaction