

Mission Study Report -- First-Meridian Heights Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, Indiana

Introduction

The Mission Study Coordinating Team of First-Meridian Heights Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, was called together by the Session in February, 2011. This action followed the retirement of Dr. Rev. Curtis M. Page in October, 2010, and the subsequent calling by the Session of Dr. Rev. Robert Agnew as Interim Pastor in December, 2010. The committee's mandate has been the research, analysis and writing of this study, which will be used by the Pastor Nominating Committee as it begins its search for a new permanent pastor for FMHPC. The Mission Study Team has worked diligently to 1) identify the mission of FMHPC as a congregation today, 2) determine FMHPC's strengths and opportunities for growth, and 3) discern God's vision for FMHPC for the future.

The Mission Study Team used a number of different resources in carrying out its work:

- A history of FMHPC, in order to understand how the congregation has evolved.
- Presbyterian Church (USA) statistical data about FMHPC, Presbyterian churches in the Indianapolis area, and Presbyterian churches as a whole.
- MissionInsite demographic data concerning trends in the church's immediate neighborhood, as well as areas within a 5-mile radius of FMHPC.
- Congregational Life Survey conducted during worship on March 20, 2011 with 110 respondents.
- Focus Group discussions conducted on June 20, June 26, July 6, and July 10. Thirteen group discussions were held; groups included officers, people who had been members less than 5 years, people with children aged 0-18, people without children, people with adult children, single people, youth aged 11-18, and general groups. 108 people participated in the focus groups.

The Mission Study Team divided into subgroups for the purpose of collection and analysis of data. The Team then discussed each subgroup's findings to develop a shared understanding of FMHPC today and a vision for its future.

The Mission Study Team shared its findings and recommendations with the Session and Deacons at an officer retreat held August 27, 2011. This written report, to be submitted to the Session for approval, constitutes a formal presentation of the materials, highlighting the strengths and opportunities identified by the Mission Study Team, as well as the Team's recommendations for a Mission Statement and Vision Statements.

The Mission Study Team thanks Dr. Bob Agnew, Interim Pastor, and Linda Rinker, liaison to the Whitewater Presbytery's Committee on Ministry, for their valuable guidance throughout this project.

Respectfully submitted in faith,

Katie Abernathy	Katie Marlowe
Tom Craig	Jennie Moy
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Findings

As with any congregation, First-Meridian Heights Presbyterian Church has its strengths, as well as opportunities for growth. The Congregational Life Survey breaks down its results into 10 strengths of effective congregations. They are:

- Growing Spiritually
- Meaningful Worship
- Participating in the Congregation
- Having a Sense of Belonging
- Caring for Young People
- Focusing on the Community
- Sharing Faith
- Welcoming New Worshippers
- Empowering Leadership
- Looking to the Future

We will use these characteristics to frame our discussion of FMHPC's strengths and opportunities for growth as revealed in the Congregational Life Survey and the focus groups, while appreciating FMHPC's history, demographics, and neighborhood. This discussion is not intended to be exhaustive of all of the Mission Study Team's findings, but will highlight the major issues and themes that arose frequently in our study. Complete minutes, data gathered, survey results, and focus group input can be found in the appendices to this report.

1. Growing Spiritually

Positive Findings: 78% of the survey respondents feel that their spiritual needs are being met in this congregation. 90% report that the activities of FMHPC help them to some extent with everyday living. Focus group participants identified the following as ways in which their spiritual journey is supported at FMHPC:

- Sense of connection and community within the congregation; sense of family
- Joys and concerns; sense that people care
- Music
- Genuine, celebratory worship
- Opportunities to serve the broader community; mission outreach
- Support for youth; youth groups
- Parents appreciate watching their children grow in their faith journey
- Acceptance to be yourself; inclusive and welcoming atmosphere

Concerns: Only 20% of survey respondents reported that they were growing in their faith through participation in the activities of the congregation. The overall Growing Spiritually score was 33%, less than the 43% average for Presbyterian Churches. There was a real sense of need for programming for

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adults, including education, fellowship, and service activities. Those without children at home are feeling left out. There is no programming aimed at men.

Opportunities: There is a need and a hunger for Bible study, prayer, and deeper faith-based discussions. Develop small group opportunities for people at various stages in their lives. Allocate resources to adult education and fellowship. There is a desire for sermons that are challenging and Bible-based, while relating the message to daily living.

2. Meaningful Worship

Positive Findings: The vast majority of the congregation reported being satisfied with the worship service they attend. About ¾ of the survey respondents experience joy and/or inspiration during worship, and 2/3 experience God's presence. Congregants rarely experience boredom or frustration during worship. Music is cited as an important element of worship.

Concerns: The viability of continuing to offer two services is a concern. Attendance at both AliveTime and the Classic Service has declined steadily, decreasing 36% in the period 1999-2009. Average attendance is now around 130. Focus group participants varied in their opinions of the right direction in which to take the worship services. Thoughts included:

- Only one worship service
- Two strong services with no combined services
- Develop a new worship service to appeal to 20-30 year olds
- Change the worship service times, i.e. Saturday or Sunday evening services
- Leaving worship as it is now

Less than ½ of survey respondents reported that worship services and other congregational activities help them greatly with everyday life.

Opportunities: The Mission Study Team recommends developing a Worship Study Task Force to address the issue of what worship at FMHPC should look like.

3. Participating in the Congregation

Positive Findings: Two-thirds of survey respondents attend worship services weekly. Over half have some sort of leadership role at FMHPC, including officers, committee members, worship leaders/greeters, teachers, and group leaders.

Concerns: FMHPC's percentage of people participating in small groups of any kind (52%) is lower than the average for Presbyterian churches nationwide (66%). Weekly worship attendance is also lower (66% vs. 78%). Only 38% of the congregation give 5% or more of their net income to the church. FMHPC's overall Participating in the Congregation score is 47%, compared to a 58% average for Presbyterian churches nationwide.

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Opportunities: Provide more opportunities for small group interactions, including education, fellowship, and service. Encourage members to discover their personal ministries and give them the resources to carry them out. Give members the opportunity to participate in decision-making. A renewed emphasis on stewardship and giving is necessary in order to support the mission of FMHPC.

4. Having a Sense of Belonging

Positive Findings: Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents reported a strong sense of belonging to our congregation; 37% said that sense was growing. A large majority (76%) report being satisfied with the level of care among the congregation. Focus group participants echoed the sentiment that they feel that others in the congregation really care about them; Joys and Concerns was cited as one reason for this.

Concerns: There are not enough opportunities for adults in the congregation to get to know one another and develop friendships. A few minutes of “greeting time” during worship are not sufficient to develop bonds between people. People are looking to connect socially/personally, but the demands on people's time pose a challenge to achieving this. Eleven percent of those surveyed say that most of their closest friends are part of the congregation. Focus group participants noted a need for better communication within the congregation.

Opportunities: After leading worship and promoting the spiritual development of members, the most desired pastoral task was developing a strong sense of community among members. Again, small group opportunities are essential to allow people to get to know one another, which will strengthen the bonds they feel within the congregation, giving them a sense of ownership and belonging. Improve communication with members, including keeping the website up-to-date, meaningful newsletters, and e-blasts.

5. Caring for Young People

Positive Findings: Caring for young people is a success story at FMHPC. There is a high degree of satisfaction with our offering for children and youth, including children's Christian education, child care, and youth fellowship programs. FMHPC scored higher than 86% of congregations nationwide in Caring for Young People. Some focus group participants reported that seeing their children grow in their faith was what keeps them coming to church.

Opportunities: Continue to offer strong programming for children and youth. Some expressed a desire for a children's choir and a youth choir. Use the strength of the Christian education program as a marketing tool to bring other families with children to FMHPC.

6. Focusing on the Community

Positive Findings: Community service is a strength of FMHPC. Our members are involved in community service and charitable work both within and outside of the church. Seventy-one percent of survey respondents are satisfied with the opportunities at FMHPC to participate in community outreach and

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mission work. Our congregation values openness to social diversity and inclusiveness, as well as an emphasis on community care and social awareness. FMHPC scored higher than 90% of churches nationwide in Focusing on the Community.

Concerns: Focus group participants voiced a desire for more hands-on service opportunities. We value diversity and inclusiveness, but have a long way to go before achieving these in our congregation.

Opportunities: The Mission Study Team repeatedly heard that members of the congregation wish to continue and increase FMHPC's service to the surrounding community. Promote multigenerational direct service opportunities. There is interest in a mission trip for adults; this could range anywhere from a day of service to a week-long mission trip similar to the youth's mission trip. The congregation desires a pastor who will take an active role in the community. Sermons are an opportunity to address social issues in a Biblical context.

7. Sharing Faith

Positive Findings: Thirty-nine percent of survey respondents have invited a friend or relative who does not have a home church to worship in the past year.

Concerns: Very few of the survey respondents reported feeling comfortable talking about their faith and reaching out to those who do not attend. FMHPC's lowest score was in Sharing Faith; FMHPC scored higher than 8% of congregations nationwide.

Opportunities: Congregants come from a wide variety of faith backgrounds; some have no church background at all. People need to be trained in how to share their faith and invite others to church. FMHPC needs to be more visible to the neighborhood.

8. Welcoming New Worshipers

Positive Findings: About ¼ of survey respondents began attending FMHPC in the past five years. There is an air of inclusiveness and acceptance. People do not feel judged at FMHPC.

Concerns: FMHPC has no organized strategies in place to follow up with and welcome guests. There is a perception that bringing in new members is the job of the pastor, but a congregation grows best when members reach out to guests, neighbors, and friends. We have virtually no marketing efforts. Our membership and attendance are declining. Other than FMHPC's website and encouraging members to invite guests, there is little effort to proactively seek new visitors. The demographics of the area surrounding FMHPC vary widely, making it difficult to craft an invitation that will appeal to all of our neighbors.

Opportunities: Form a Welcome Committee to reach out with specific strategies to follow up with guests. Embrace diversity in the congregation, including age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Develop and implement a marketing plan. Use technology to spread the word about FMHPC – website, e-blasts, Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, etc. Hold activities such as lectures, concerts, and fairs to which the public is invited. Reach out to FMHPC's neighbors.

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9. Empowering Leadership

Positive Findings: Seventy-five percent of survey respondents want members to be involved in planning, participating in, and leading congregational activities.

Concerns: People have been encouraged to find and use their gifts, but have not been given the resources to carry out their ministries. Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents are satisfied with FMHPC's stewardship program, but pledge income continues to decline and does not meet the financial needs of the church.

Opportunities: Support members desiring to take on a leadership role. Seek ways to involve more members in active roles in the church. Involve more members in an organized stewardship campaign effort.

10. Looking to the Future

Positive Findings: Over half of survey respondents feel the congregation at FMHPC is always ready to try something new. FMHPC is not afraid of being a "different" church.

Concerns: Less than ¼ of congregants felt at the time of the survey that FMHPC had a clear vision, goals or direction for its ministry and mission. Few could articulate the mission of the church. Few felt the congregation was moving in new directions and were excited about FMHPC's future. It should be noted that the survey was conducted at a time when the interim pastor was relatively new and there was a lot of uncertainty about the process the church would go through in order to find a new permanent pastor.

Opportunities: Focus the mission of the church in a few main areas. Through education, ensure that members understand the new mission statement and visions for the future and can articulate what makes FMHPC unique and special.

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Leadership Issues

What leadership qualities do we want in our new pastor? In both the Congregational Life Survey and the focus group discussions, congregants were asked what attributes they would like to see in the new permanent pastor. With the understanding that no one can fulfill every desired trait, here are some thoughts on what the members felt were most important.

Tasks of the Pastor

The pastoral tasks that the survey respondents gave the highest priority are:

- Planning and leading worship sensitive to the needs of the worshipping community (91%)
- Attending to the spiritual development of members (86%)
- Developing a strong sense of community among members (84%)

The lowest priorities are:

- Seeking continuing education opportunities and investing time in developing Biblical and theological expertise (38%)
- Supporting the world mission of the church (34%)

Style of Ministry

The characteristics that survey respondents would most like to see in the pastor are:

- A warm outgoing personality (92%)
- Is a strong preacher (85%)
- Works hard to accomplish tasks (80%)
- Tends to be thought-provoking and challenging (80%)

Characteristics with the least priority are:

- In good standing with denominational officials (48%)
- Places feeling of others ahead of achieving goals (44%)
- Advises people what to do (22%)

So who are we looking for?

Themes that the Mission Study Team heard over and over in the focus groups include:

- Biblically-based sermons related to today's events and issues
- Grounded in faith; someone who will walk the journey with us
- Embrace where we are and move us forward, not tell us we are doing everything wrong
- Able to connect with different generations
- Compassionate and caring; able to provide concern and comfort; warm & outgoing
- Has gifts that complement those of staff members
- Bold/risk-taking; willing to experiment
- Good at delegating; not a micro-manager; able to give leadership away

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- Charismatic; dynamic; energetic
- Ability to build bridges; issues invitations to be involved
- Active in the community
- Youthful outlook, but experienced
- Administrative skills
- Good communicator

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Proposed Mission Statement and Vision Statements

After prayerful consideration of what the committee learned from the Congregational Life Survey, the focus group discussions, the statistical information from PCUSA and MissionInsite, and an understanding of the history of FMHPC, the Mission Study Team proposes the following Mission Statement and Vision Statements. While the Mission Statement expresses who FMHPC is today, the Vision Statements reflect where FMHPC should be headed in the future.

Mission Statement

First-Meridian Heights Presbyterian Church is a spiritually growing family of faith in the heart of our neighborhood. We strive to be open to all, to respond to the needs within our family and to those around us, reflecting the love of God in Jesus Christ through nurture, social awareness, and service.

Vision Statements

1. Worship at FMHPC will engage, inspire, challenge and enlighten in ways that will be meaningful, relevant, welcoming and accessible to people of all ages, backgrounds, and at a variety of places in their faith journeys.
2. FMHPC will foster spiritual growth and connectivity through numerous small group activities, including opportunities for education and fellowship, for people of all age levels and in various life circumstances.
3. People at FMHPC will be generous givers, supporting and sustaining the mission and operations of FMHPC with their financial resources.
4. FMHPC will provide a variety of ongoing and one-time mission/service opportunities that expand social awareness, connect with the needs of the neighborhood and wider community, and allow members to demonstrate care and concern for one another.
5. FMHPC will reach out to its neighbors in an inviting and inclusive way. The church will be known as a place where all people are welcome and accepted as they continue on their faith journey.
6. People at FMHPC will be encouraged and equipped to bring their leadership gifts to FMHPC decision-making and mission, as each responds to God's call to personal ministry.
7. FMHPC will be known for its strong youth programs that ensure our children grow in their faith.

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Practical Steps

When the leaders of the church met to review the findings of the Mission Study Team on August 27, 2011, they brainstormed ideas about how to work toward achieving the first six proposed Vision Statements, as well as potential leaders for those tasks. These ideas are not exhaustive, but are presented here as a starting point as FMHPC moves forward with its new pastor. The Vision Statements are presented in priority order (highest priority to lowest) as determined by the participants at the leadership retreat.

Vision Statement 1: Worship at FMHPC will engage, inspire, challenge and enlighten in ways that will be meaningful, relevant, welcoming and accessible to people of all ages, backgrounds, and at a variety of places in their faith journeys.

Ideas:

Music - ALIVETIME

- Start a new band – for today's contemporary / at a different time, like Sunday night
- Add hymns– upbeat and traditional – especially around the holidays
- Offer different, more youthful, contemporary music
- More musical variety / variation of music / more age appropriate music for those younger
- Offer one song during service to which anyone is invited to come up and sing along

Music – CLASSIC

- More musical variety
- Add choir back to service

Music – OTHER

- Create a children's choir

Style and Format of Worship

- Re-vamp AliveTime – it's now become the Classic Service
- Make service more participatory
- Add LAY-led service – maybe quarterly / similar to Youth-led service = strengthens faith
- Provide GREAT sermons – Minister plays a big role in achieving vision statement
- Bring Bible into what's happening today – take Bible messages and make them relevant
- Rotate in some cultural/artistic elements – i.e. plays, poems, Liturgical drama, harpist & conga
- Youth Sunday – GREAT! Kids reflect they really get it!!
- I skip Stewardship Sunday ... I don't want to preached at about giving
- Stewardship needs to be mentioned more often – in service and sermon
- Create the NEXT, NEW worship service!
- Joys & Concerns are great / emphasizes prayer / actually helps people in their lives
- Frame the scripture / give context – so we can better understand what was happening at that time and in that situation
- More emphasis on spirituality

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- Make people feel part of the service
- Add Children's Sermon
- The way we currently serve Communion is good / inclusive

Logistics of Worship

- Offer a Sunday or Saturday night service
- Don't like Combined services! (it's Alivetime with a hymn or organ)
- Do like Combined services! Appeals to the 'tweeners' – who like both styles of worship
- Use screens in Classic service
- Might be good to bring in guest preacher or set up "trades" with sister/other churches
- Please limit the total number of services to 2 (we can't support Alivetime, Classic and a NEW service)
- The band/worship leaders should be more diverse and reflective of the neighborhood

Potential Leaders

- Worship Team
- Youth – i.e. Alex Mohr

Other

- Charley Koehler has a possible guest preacher

Vision Statement 2: FMHPC will foster spiritual growth and connectivity through numerous small group activities, including opportunities for education and fellowship, for people of all age levels and in various life circumstances.

Ideas:

- Conduct an interest and skills survey to find out what expertise members have and what programming they want
- Need a point person or coordinator to ensure groups are thriving (staff? lay?)
- Educational programming about life issues and challenges at various age levels
- Small groups meeting at various days and times
- Adult Christian education during both worship services
- Bible/book study
- Empty Nesters group
- Singles group
- Adult mission trip/hands-on service projects
- Discussions grounded in faith
- Topics of depth and consequence
- We are a church, not a service organization or a country club
- Varied days and times for groups
- Variety of educational and social activities
- Men's group/men's retreat/men's prayer breakfast – including child care

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- Grounds/landscape committee
- Progressive dinner
- Film group
- Wine & cheese
- Better communication about opportunities within the church

Possible leaders

Susie Cox

Liz James

Tom Hacker

Katie Marlowe

Cynn timer Halsmer

Rebecca Zirnheld

Mary Ostrander

Vision Statement 3: People at FMHPC will be generous givers, supporting and sustaining the mission and operations of FMHPC with their financial resources.

Ideas:

Revenue Generation

- Year round inclusion in sermons and services stewardship messages
- Change giving message – stronger request for offertory –pass plate, walk plate down the aisle, etc.
- Use materials and knowledge of those who attended stewardship conference and invoke more strategies. Efforts to increase attendance, increase small group activities, including prayer and bible study groups. Invite Bill Enright to leadership meeting.
- Minister send thank you for pledges, donations etc.
- Non pledging and related info with regards to membership have church leadership contact and follow up
- Separate giving and fund drives for specific budget or capital items and projects
- Planned giving – transfers in to endowment
- Present to congregation financial update
- Simplify financial statements – easy to read and understand
- Be very specific and indicate gifts of any size are welcome
- Grant requests, train grant writer, seek grants
- Request gifts in kind
- Rent out facilities, primarily the gallery
- Donation request on website
- Improve appearance of facilities
- Stress that stewardship includes time and talent as well as treasure

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Expense control and fiscal responsibility

- Co-op with separate Presbyterian churches various services, camps, ministerial support, etc.
- Fiscal responsibility and decision making with regards to personnel budget. Should staff have increase last 3 years with economy and with church members not receiving increases, losing jobs, losing their business, etc.
- New Senior pastor salary and benefit package needs to be managed, church cannot afford current senior package.
- Combine Presbyterian churches – merge
- Per Capita management – increase ask to congregation and / or reduce membership rolls
- Manage capital budget outside of operating budget, with separate fund raising efforts, respectively.

Volunteers

Carol Kirkpatrick

Brad Fravel

Tom Craig

Vision Statement 4: FMHPC will provide a variety of ongoing and one-time mission/service opportunities that expand social awareness, connect with the needs of the neighborhood and wider community, and allow members to demonstrate care and concern for one another.

Ideas:

Organizations to partner with

Interfaith

Meridian Kessler Neighborhood Association

Fairview

Northside Partners for Youth

Programs to continue supporting or new ones to develop

- JOY
- Deaf / Blind
- Hispanic
- Retiree mentoring

Outreach

- Chili drive thru
- Outside movie nights
- Community garden
- Outdoor open house/concert
- Exodus House
- Update signage (especially on Park side of building)
- Vacation Bible School to include the neighborhood

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- Job Training/Career fair
- Survey neighborhood to invite and solicit needs & wants

Service

- Adult mission trip
- Habitat for Humanity
- Adopt-a-mile
- Tutoring
- Care & Concern - members of congregation and others in need (housework, painting, yard work & minor repair)
- Food drive to support Northwood
- Clothing drive
- Neighborhood cleanup team

Miscellaneous

- See if congregation member has market research expertise that can effectively target programming
- Design & sell shirt(s) to promote FMHPC during service/outreach events

Possible leaders

Liz James

Ivan Holder

Zhonda Shaw

Vision Statement 5: FMHPC will reach out to its neighbors in an inviting and inclusive way. The church will be known as a place where all people are welcome and accepted as they continue on their faith journey.

Ideas:

- Remind our members to be welcoming
- Give personal invites
- Be a good host
- We need to reenergize coffee hour
- New name?
- New location?
- Don't put out food until after Alive Time...there is never any left!
- Visitor cards
- Something for greeters to give to visitors
- How we answer the phone, church customer service
- Yard signs to promote events
- Ad in BR Gazette
- Community Garden sign

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- Wine/Cheese event and invite community
- Clean Park Ave. sign
- Contact list of people to give new members
- New Member welcome bag
- Loaf of bread to new visitors
- Directory
- Magnet
- Giving envelopes
- Visitor Liaisons
- New member mentors
- Lunch w/new members after they join
- Clean the church
- Clean the bathrooms
- Declutter the church
- Internet & Social Media
- Susie Stillwell would be good to help on an Outreach Committee

Vision Statement 6: People at FMHPC will be encouraged and equipped to bring their leadership gifts to FMHPC decision-making and mission, as each responds to God's call to personal ministry.

Ideas:

- Enhancing accountability
- Invite to dinner or lunch for new members
- Communication
- Mentors for new members
- keep lack of leadership in forefront
- Short committee commitment
- Ad-hoc committees
- More people involvement
- Active church
- Make opportunities visible
- Explain opportunities (i.e. what is a deacon?)
- Sign-up sheets for committees/time hours available
- Personalize more
- Put ideas outside of session
- Determine constituencies
- Assess resources of congregation
- Invite people to take leadership role (primarily by minister)
- Suggestion Box
- People of congregation giving examples of what they are doing in the church
- Find out the obstacles

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- Invite people to take action on their own suggestion
- Occasional “town hall” meeting discussing session’s ideas
- Co-leadership
- Identify a person to hold members responsible who take on a commitment