



FIRST IN THE FUTURE: 2014-2017

First United Methodist Church's strategic directions

Strategic Plan: Fall 2014-Summer 2017

First in the Future steering committee
August 2014

THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Appointed in June 2013, the First in the Future strategic planning steering committee was developed to represent a cross-section of First United Methodist Church, in order to provide diverse skills, expertise and perspectives to a year-long project of strategic planning for First Church.

First in the Future steering committee membership:

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Aileen Ball | Laura Irick | John Tacha |
| Paula Biggar | Sharon Howell | Mitch Todd |
| Tom Brady | Tracy Kihm | Sara Wentz |
| Craig Grant | Sarah Khan | Kathy Williams |
| Lee Hedrick | Carolyn Phillips, chair | Matt Woodward |
| | Phil Struble | |

The First in the Future team was charged with the development of a three year plan of strategic priorities for the mission and ministry of First Church, engaging three fundamental questions: ***Who has God called us to be? What has God called us to do? Who is our neighbor?***

DATA GATHERING

Between July 2013 and January 2014, the First in the Future team focused its efforts on gathering and interpreting data—both qualitative and quantitative, both internal and external—to inform its process.

Holy Conversations

Holy Conversations refers to a series of events held between September 16 and October 4, 2013 at First Church, based on the positive, strengths-based model of Appreciative Inquiry. The purpose of Holy Conversations was to gather data from congregants to inform the strategic planning efforts conducted by the First in the Future committee.

Participation was solicited in advance of the events, with pledges to participate being nearly equal from both of First Church's sites. Ultimately, 207 people participated in Holy Conversations, representing over 40% of the actively participating congregants of First Church.

Each Holy Conversation was a facilitator-led, small group gathering in which participants paired off to discuss and document their experiences with First Church and ideas for First Church's future. 20 total events were held.

Lawrence development: residential, commercial, recreational

The First in the Future team called upon the expertise of one its members, Phil Struble, PE, President and CEO of Landplan Engineering, P.A., to provide a snapshot of the future of development in Lawrence, Kansas as it relates to First Church. Phil cited the significance of the recent creation of the Cultural District in downtown Lawrence, as well as the major development near First Church's West Campus.

Percept demographic data review

The First in the Future committee acquired Ministry Area Profiles from Percept Demographics for each of its two sites, in order to gain an overview of the demographics and worship preferences of Lawrence residents, and engaged Ted Kihm to evaluate and interpret the data received from the profiles.

Peer Church review

The First in the Future team engaged in a Peer Church review, performing site visits or phone conversations with other dual-site churches with a historical downtown presence.

Visits

- Urban Abbey: First UMC, Omaha, Nebraska
- Center of Grace: Grace UMC, Olathe, Kansas
- Mead's Corner: First UMC, Wichita, Kansas
- Wesley House: First UMC, Pittsburg, Kansas

Conversations

- Soundside campus: Gulf Breeze UMC, Gulf Breeze, Florida
- Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, Kansas

DISCERNING AREAS OF STRATEGIC FOCUS

Following a review of the information received from Holy Conversations, Lawrence development projections, Percept demographical data, and the best practices observed in the Peer Church review, members of the First in the Future team were able to discern five major areas for strategic focus. These strategic priorities were ***Mission, Connections, Recreation, Worship, Music & the Arts*** and ***Evangelism***.

In order to later weigh the feasibility of potential strategies, the First in the Future team developed a list of "strategic enablers." Strategic enablers are those activities and resources that must be effectively aligned and/or enhanced in order to provide sufficient support for the pursuit of our strategic directions. These strategic enablers were ***Facilities, Finances, Personnel, Technology, Communication, and Lay Involvement***.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

In February 2014, Strategic Priority teams were developed to formulate potential action plans in each of the five strategic areas. These teams were appointed to ensure a representation of expertise and diverse perspectives in developing strategies, actions, outcomes and metrics for each of the five priority areas.

| Connections | Evangelism | Mission | Recreation | Worship, Music & Arts |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Heather Clinger | Tom Brady | Jane Aldrich | Tami Clark | Lee Hedrick |
| Craig Grant | Dana Goble | Paula Biggar | Fred DeVictor* | Stan Hernly |
| Amy Finkeldei * | Bennett Griffin | Jerry Feese | Karen DeVictor* | Ann Johnson* |
| Marty Dubois | John Tacha | Tracy Kihm | Laura Irick | Isidro Rivera |
| Twyla Dubois | Mitch Todd | Gary Schmidt | Sarah Khan | Dave Smerchek |
| Carolyn Phillips | Bryce Visser | Rose Schmidt* | Mike Parmley | Ruth Smerchek |
| Candice Ranney | Julie Ward | Susan Sloop | Bob Rhoton | Marcie Walzel |
| Laura Stephenson | Jim Witthaus* | Jan Vaughn* | Ruby Shade | Sara Wentz |
| Dennis Tate* | Matt Woodward | | | |

*indicates team coordinator or co-coordinator

Between March and June 2014, these priority teams reviewed the data compiled by the First in the Future steering committee, dialogued with program staff and administrative committees within First Church, and reached out to various agencies and groups within the community. Each team recommended a suite of strategies, as well as data-driven rationales for the strategies, recommendations regarding the staging and timing of activities, anticipated necessary support from strategic enablers, and anticipated key players in implementation. Each priority team submitted a final report of recommendations to the First in the Future team at the end of June 2014.

FINALIZING THE STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

In July and August 2014, the First in the Future team reconvened to perform a number of activities critical to finalizing the strategic directions of First Church. These activities included:

- review of the recommendations from the Strategic Priority teams
- evaluation of the resources required to accomplish recommended strategies
- consolidation of similar recommended strategies
- evaluation of recommended timelines for implementation
- selection of the strategies to be pursued by First Church
- selection of groups to be charged with implementation of strategies

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the First in the Future strategic plan will kick off in Fall 2014 and implementation scheduling will be based upon the staging of implementation outlined in the plan. While not all work within this plan will be completed by Summer 2017, the intention is that all work will be initiated by that time.

Oversight for the implementation of the plan will be provided by the First in the Future Oversight Team, under the leadership of Craig Grant and composed of 5-6 members.

The committees and groups charged with implementing particular strategies will be responsible for tracking their progress in implementation and reporting on it quarterly to the First in the Future Oversight Team. These quarterly reports will be made available to the congregation of First Church and an annual assessment of progress will be conducted by the First in the Future Oversight Team.

A COLLECTIVE VOICE

The First in the Future strategic planning process took 14 months to complete and in that time the First in the Future team sought diligently to hear the collective voice of First Church. This process has included a steering committee of 16 people, five priority teams composed of more 40 people, and the individual contributions of hundreds of First Church congregants in the form of Holy Conversations, survey feedback, communication with priority teams, and more. Composed by so many voices, this is truly a plan that has been crafted and shaped by the collective hopes and dreams of the First Church family.

In conducting their work, the steering committee and strategic priority teams carefully weighed the ideas, thoughts and opinions voiced by the congregation—each idea was considered valuable and was highly valued. However, building a strategic plan necessarily means the intentional selection of key areas in which to focus energy and resources for maximum value. The First in the Future steering committee has attempted to carefully and faithfully identified those strategies and actions that will provide optimal benefit for the future of First Church and the future of our community.

GOAL ONE: Build a vibrant and passionate spiritual community through robust worship, music, and arts-based experiences for both the First Church congregation and our neighbors.

Summary: Enriching the worship experience at First Church means having a blend of people, voices and instruments to lead services at both campuses, and offering diverse opportunities in music and arts programs that deepen the experience of worship for the First Church congregation, neighbors and entire Lawrence community. The worship experience need not be limited to the church buildings or the “typical” Sunday service.

Worship may no longer be the primary contact point for those seeking a church home; providing music and art programming and opportunities within and outside the church walls can be an effective conduit to the worship service. Ministry Area Profiles from Percept Demographics indicate that the Lawrence community seeks church program offerings that are recreational in nature--music and arts programming outside of the established worship service may satisfy that desire. The following strategies are devised to enrich and diversify the First Church worship experience, while also exploring new ways to integrate First Church within the greater Lawrence community.

STRATEGIES

- 1. Establish a program and process for in-depth assessment of the efficacy of personnel, equipment, instruments, and other aspects of production and implementation associated with worship.**
 - Timeline: Year 1
 - Primary responsibility: Worship, Music & Arts committee*
- 2. Increase youth and young adult involvement in worship services, including as acolytes, ushers, communion stewards and scripture readers.**
 - Timeline: Year 1
 - Primary responsibility: Director of Worship & Music
- 3. Explore and pursue opportunities for First Church Downtown campus to serve as a venue for a Final Friday art display.**
 - Timeline: Year 1
 - Primary responsibility: Community Connections; Worship, Music & Arts committee
- 4. Coordinate an annual concert series, including community Christmas caroling, Brown Bag concerts, summer concerts at West Campus, and downtown concerts in sanctuary.**
 - Timeline: Year 1-2
 - Primary responsibility: Worship, Music & Arts committee

5. **Establish a Prairie Worship service in the spring at First Church West Campus, with an all-church meal following the service.**
 - Timeline: Year 1-2
 - Primary responsibility: Director of Worship & Music; Worship, Music & Arts committee; Fellowship committee
6. **Feature instrumental or vocal ensembles composed of both adults and youth as a part of worship.**
 - Timeline: Year 2
 - Primary responsibility: Director of Worship & Music
7. **Establish a First Church mini music camp, targeting days in the year without school, for community K-6th graders, featuring vocal and instrumental music, drama, and arts and crafts.**
 - Timeline: Year 3
 - Primary responsibility: Director of Worship & Music; Worship, Music & Arts committee; Children's ministry

****Note: First in the Future recommends the establishment of a Worship, Music & Arts Committee dedicated to implementing specific strategic priorities***

Desired outcomes of this goal:

- Enhanced diversity and vitality in the worship experience.
- A regular suite of music and arts program events hosted or sponsored by First Church.
- Enhanced production quality in First Church worship services.
- Children actively engaged in strategically-timed First Church music and arts events.

Key metrics by which progress will be gauged:

- Number of people involved in worship and the diversity of the worship experience at each campus.
- Number of events offered and the number of members and neighbors attending each event.
- Number of equipment and instrument errors or failures; degree of polish and professionalism in production values
- Number of music camp events; number of children involved in music camp events.

GOAL TWO: Develop new mission and social justice outreach programming that addresses critical needs of the marginalized members of the Lawrence community while continuing to build on the strength of ministries at First Church.

Summary: Holy Conversations identified mission outreach as a core strength of First Church and an area in which First Church should continue to grow. Moreover, Holy Conversations called for relationship-building with those whom we seek to serve, expanding community outreach, and inviting people into a relationship with God.

First Church's mission and justice outreach is, and always should be, grounded in genuine love, concern, and listening. Seeking to identify fundamental justice issues in Lawrence and Douglas County, conversations were initiated with community agencies, groups, and churches, including the Boys and Girls Club, Just Food, Lawrence Community Shelter, Family Promise, Central Junior High School, Bert Nash CMHC Homeless Outreach Team, Central United Methodist Church, and Centenary United Methodist Church. The critical needs identified in these visits include childcare, after-school care, mentoring, transportation, access to healthy food, and affordable housing. Unable to meet every community need, First Church has identified those areas where our particular strengths and resources can make the greatest strategic impact.

STRATEGIES

- 8. Develop a "Munch and Mission" meal and forum to connect members of the community and agencies seeking volunteers in order to allow participants to learn about the agencies' work and the expectations of the volunteers in that setting.**
 - Timeline: Year 1-2
 - Primary responsibility: Community Outreach team within Mission*
- 9. Partner with health professional students at KU (e.g., pharmacy students) to perform health screenings in strategically selected venues, such as Jubilee Cafe.**
 - Timeline: Year 1-2
 - Primary responsibility: New Group within Mission
- 10. Examine the challenges of securing affordable childcare that is aligned with the work schedule of the parent, and explore the feasibility of establishing a childcare co-operative in Lawrence.**
 - Timeline: Year 2-3
 - Primary responsibility: New Group within Justice
- 11. Establish a Wednesday after-school activity option for middle school children in Lawrence, with an emphasis on Central Middle School.**
 - Timeline: Year 2-3
 - Primary responsibility: New Group within Justice

****Note: First in the Future recommends dividing the current Mission & Justice team into two separate entities***

Desired outcomes of this goal:

- A community, including First Church members, well-educated about mission opportunities in Lawrence and Douglas County.
- Populations with a greater awareness of their health and health needs.
- Viable recommendations and preliminary planning to address critical childcare needs in Lawrence and Douglas County.
- Youth engaged in a safe and supportive Wednesday after-school program under the auspices of First Church.

Key metrics by which progress will be gauged:

- Number of “Munch and Mission” forums offered; number of participants at each forum; percentage increase in First Church volunteerism, as measured through annual surveys.
- Number of health screenings events offered; number of participants in health screenings.
- Number of agencies and groups consulted and committed to cooperative solutions to childcare challenges in the Lawrence and Douglas County.
- Number of participants in Wednesday after-school program and percentage of increase in participation over time.

GOAL THREE: Develop a Recreation Ministry with a robust program of intergenerational recreation activities that connects people across both First Church and the community in a warm, welcoming Christian environment.

Summary: Recreation activities offer a first connection point for potential members and new members. They offer a safe, nurturing environment for children. They offer families an opportunity to share time together in a hectic world. They offer everyone a way to build friendships with other churches and community groups in Lawrence, and to expand the influence of the Gospel.

The Ministry Area Profiles from Percept Demographics indicate that the Lawrence community seeks church program offerings that are recreational in nature. Holy Conversations indicated that Church members are interested in increased social interaction among members. While First Church already provides some recreation activities (exercise classes, pickleball, dinner and a movie, etc.) that have met with great success, there is significant room for growth. The following strategies are devised to grow the First Church recreational ministry in ambitious and exciting ways.

STRATEGIES

12. Enhance the membership of the recreation committee and charge that committee to develop, coordinate, and schedule regular recreational events and activities.

- Timeline: Year 1
- Primary responsibility: Lay Leadership; Recreation Committee

13. Inventory the space downtown to identify spaces that may be re-purposed, in whole or in part, for recreational uses, such as an adult lounge area for coffee and tea, card and board games, and other activities

- Timeline: Year 1
- Primary responsibility: Board of Trustees; Recreation Committee

14. Organize an annual fundraising 5K First Church family event.

- Timeline: Year 1-2
- Primary responsibility: Recreation Committee; professional event planner

15. Hire a part-time (eventually full-time) recreation coordinator to schedule, plan and promote programs and events, and to recruit volunteers to implement programs and events.

- Timeline: Year 2-3
- Primary responsibility: Staff Parish

Desired outcomes of this strategic direction:

- A greater sense of connection between First Church members as well as with the community by means of the recreational ministry.
- A suite of recreational opportunities that is well-aligned with the needs and desires of First Church members.
- Sufficient resources to sustain and further grow a robust recreational ministry.

Key metrics by which progress will be gauged:

- Percentage of people feeling a greater sense of connection with each other due to the recreation ministry, as measured through annual surveys.
- Number of recreational opportunities offered; number of participants in each recreational opportunity; on-going Evaluation of recreational needs (beginning with summer 2014 Recreation Survey)
- Amount of resources, both fiscal and human, devoted to the recreation ministry.

GOAL FOUR: Strengthen and increase opportunities for connection between members of the First Church family, the university student community, and the greater Lawrence community.

Summary: In terms of “connection,” Holy Conversations revealed much about the needs and desires of the First Church congregation. Many expressed a desire for more small-group opportunities through volunteering, learning, studying, and fellowship. Many expressed a desire for additional support groups, around such topics as divorce or parenting, as well as supportive social groups for young adults and families. Many expressed a desire to see First Church forge a stronger relationship with the university student community. Many expressed a desire to improve the quality and functionality of the First Church website, both to improve and streamline “internal” communication between congregants, and to provide an inviting, and informative portal for those seeking to learn more about First Church.

The following strategies are devised to begin to respond to the myriad dimensions of connection within First Church, in strategic, scalable and sustainable ways.

STRATEGIES

16. Publish an approved process document that provides a guide for creating, facilitating, and maintaining new small groups within the church community.

- Timeline: Year 1
- Primary responsibility: Small group/Adult Education within Discipleship

17. Host a thank-you meal for Jubilee Café student volunteers each semester.

- Timeline: Year 1
- Primary responsibility: Mission

18. Establish a mechanism for building connections between university students and church members, such as an “adopt-a-student” Sunday meals and conversations program.

- Timeline: Year 1-2
- Primary responsibility: University Student Connections* within Connections

19. Develop an internship program for college students for the purpose of outreach and development in the university student community.

- Timeline: Year 1-2
- Primary responsibility: University Student Connections within Connections

20. Develop an interactive website featuring dynamic calendaring, room reservation capability, volunteer sign-up/registration, featuring key content from strategic areas, including recreation, mission, and worship, music and the arts.

- Timeline: Year 1-3
- Primary responsibility: Staff Parish (staffing to develop and support the initiative)

21. Leverage social media to enhance outreach to current and potential members, as well as highlight worship and other events in the life of the church.

- Timeline: Year 2-3
- Primary responsibility: Staff Parish (staffing to develop and support the initiative)

22. Develop a mobile application for First Church, featuring mission and beliefs, directions to campuses, schedule of events, electronic bulletin with links to scripture readings, sermon topic schedule, live-streaming and archived audio/video of sermons, and note-taking capability.

- Timeline: Year 3
- Primary responsibility: Staff Parish (staffing to develop and support the initiative)

****Note: First in the Future recommends developing a new group devoted specifically to university student outreach***

Desired outcomes of this strategic direction:

- Congregants who are empowered to develop and lead small groups on diverse and innovative topics.
- A greater sense of connection with and outreach to the university students
- Enhanced connectivity through an interactive First Church website used effectively by both staff and laity
- Greater outreach and connection to the Lawrence community and beyond through effective use of social media and the repackaging/distribution of information through a mobile application.

Key metrics by which progress will be gauged:

- Number of new small groups developed, led, and maintained by laity; the number of participants in those small groups.
- Number of university students affiliated with First Church; number of non-university congregants engaged in outreach to university students.
- Increased traffic on the First Church website; degree to which website is used interactively
- Number of followers on social media; number of posts made on social media that actively promote First Church and its offerings; number of downloads of a mobile app

GOAL FIVE: Create a culture that encourages and empowers people to share their faith and the value of the First Church experience with the people of Lawrence and Douglas County, in order to begin nurturing relationships with those seeking a church home.

Summary: Among Holy Conversations responses, the single most frequently articulated dream for the future of First Church was to increase the number of people in the First Church family. The Ministry Area Profiles from Percept Demographics indicate significant population growth near the West Campus and while local trends indicate the development of a cultural arts district and increased single-family housing near the Downtown location. With two locations strategically placed in areas poised for growth, it is critical that First Church develop marketing and promotion strategies that effectively invite those seeking a church home.

However, while marketing and promotion is necessary for church growth, it is alone not sufficient to accomplish that growth. When guests enter First Church, at either location, they must be greeted warmly and connected appropriately, so they feel welcomed and invited to return. Moreover, a congregation that is comfortable sharing its beliefs and the gospel story increases the opportunities for meaningful one-on-one conversations with those seeking a church home.

The following strategies are devised to begin growing the church through intentional invitation and abundant welcoming.

STRATEGIES

23. Develop a systematic, strategic and intentional program of marketing and promotion of First Church throughout Lawrence and Douglas County.

- Timeline: Year 1
- Primary responsibility: Marketing team*

24. Enhance First Church's greeting practices and culture through evaluation of entrance points and common areas for visual appeal, increased and stable volunteer presence at welcoming and information points, and encouragement and support for outreach to guests and visitors.

- Timeline: Year 1
- Primary responsibility: Connections area

25. Enhance First Church's evangelism practices through preaching and small groups, workshops on the practice of faith-sharing, and the development of a "Philip Ministry" based on Acts 8: 26-39.

- Timeline: Year 2
- Primary responsibility: First Church pastors

****Note: First in the Future recommends appointing a new team devoting specifically to externally-facing marketing and promotion***

Desired outcomes of this strategic direction:

- A community that is attuned and drawn to the unique opportunities and experiences offered by First Church
- A culture of welcoming and hospitality for all those who enter our doors, with a particular emphasis on guests and visitors
- A culture of evangelism in which faith-sharing feels natural and encouraged

Key metrics by which progress will be gauged:

- Number of visitors and guests at First Church, in worship or otherwise, in response to the First Church marketing program
- Number of visitors and guests who report feeling welcomed, based upon follow-up with those guests
- Number of participants in evangelism workshops and ministries