

First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto



Mission Study Report

February 2023

Submitted to Session by Mission Study Committee
February 6, 2023

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Mission

Drawn together by God's inclusive love, we are a Christian community committed to seeking wisdom, practicing empathy, and disrupting injustice.

Vision

Our vision is to grow towards becoming an intergenerational, multi-ethnic, anti-racist, geographically and economically diverse Christian community gathered together and sustained by creative worship, biblically-inspired learning, empathetic ministry, nonviolently disrupting injustice in the world.

Introduction

First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto (FPC Palo Alto) has a proud history of progressive theology and activism, both in the community and within the denomination. Our congregation is committed to our progressive Christian values, and eager to engage Palo Alto and the wider Silicon Valley area in our mission.

The pandemic has brought opportunities and challenges to our church. We have innovated and adapted well to a hybrid Zoom/in-person worship experience—and we are determined to continue finding ways to bring “the Zoom community” and in-person worshippers closer together. Having welcomed the return of former members who moved away, and engaged guest preachers and associate pastors from around the country, we are unlikely to return to all-in-person services. We now seek a new head pastor who is comfortable using technology to help us share God's radically inclusive love, welcome, and hope in a very broad sense.

We value pastoral leadership that is intellectually challenging and based in progressive thought and theology, and we seek a leader who is comfortable engaging with the larger society. Our church's deep commitment to social action is rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus and informed by our long association with the late Robert McAfee Brown and his active embrace of liberation theology. Through the denomination's long debate over recognition of LGBTQ+ clergy and members, FPC Palo Alto pastoral and lay leadership were at the heart of the struggle and, indeed, the More Light movement. Our church was instrumental in bringing the Peace Church designation to PC(USA), and our Cool Planet climate action group has organized congregations around the country to support fossil fuel divestment overtures at successive General Assemblies. We are outspoken and visible with respect to LGBTQ+ advocacy, climate action, border justice, racial equity and immigration issues, and addressing the housing and homelessness crisis in our region. Nonviolently disrupting injustice to promote healing in the world while working for peace is in our DNA as a congregation and as individuals.

To live out the love and grace we receive from God, we strive to answer Micah's call to “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.” With many long-time members and friends of the church, we care deeply for one another and have strong ties as a faith community, bonded

by compassion and long-lasting friendships. Our congregation is generous in its financial stewardship of our church, both in annual pledges as well as through a well-supported Legacy Fund. Our large campus not far from downtown Palo Alto includes several buildings and types of gathering spaces, including a historic house that we rent out to local nonprofits and a thriving independent child care center. We want the campus to be better utilized to promote community connection and impact.

This report digs deeply into who we are and who we hope to become, including detailed examinations of our challenges and opportunities for growth. As is true for many congregations, our membership has gradually declined in numbers as our average age has increased. But we are convinced that our church's physical, intellectual, and spiritual location in the heart of Silicon Valley offers tremendous opportunities, both for growth and for leadership in the area.

To this end, the Mission Study Committee has repeatedly discussed the idea of our church "being a catalyst for change." A small spark or movement can stimulate large reactions. Through our community partnerships and commitment to innovation, and with careful use of our considerable resources, we believe FPC Palo Alto can be a catalyst for positive change, making an outsized positive impact on the world around us.

"Be open to being led into new visions."

"Our work is grounded and connected in the divine."

About this document

A long and winding path has led to this document. As we searched for a head pastor in 2018, the Mission Study process ended abruptly when we learned that the Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow was interested in becoming our pastor. Session quickly reconfigured the Mission Study Committee into a Pastor Nominating Committee, and we were able to call Bruce as our Designated Pastor without completing a full Mission Study Report.

Two years into Bruce's call, in the summer of 2021, he formed the Envisioning the Future Together (EFT) Task Force, charged with developing and managing a process to look deeply at ourselves and the future we want for our congregation. During that process Bruce (fully vaccinated) contracted COVID-19, which developed into Long COVID. His illness eventually took such a toll on his health and wellbeing that Bruce felt compelled to resign as pastor, in March 2022.

In January of that year Bruce and the EFT Task Force led the congregation through an interactive mission study process. The mission statement was presented to the congregation over the course of four weeks of sermons from the pulpit, each followed by small group discussions (in-person and via Zoom), which yielded extensive contemporaneous notes. While there was healthy debate and some differing opinions about the details, the congregation was overwhelmingly supportive and enthusiastic about the direction we were heading. *Direct quotes from these small groups appear throughout this document in italics.* Less than two months after the conclusion of this process, Bruce left our church.

Consequently, what started as an inclusive process for imagining a new future for the church morphed into this Mission Study, designed to explain ourselves and our hopes for the future to each other and to our next pastor. We have the benefit of the extensive feedback from our small group discussions—which were recent enough to accurately reflect who we are and who we aspire to be. Part of the Mission Study Committee’s job has been to sort out what is “us” from what was Bruce. After deep dialogue with Session and members of the congregation, and prayerful discernment, we updated the mission statement. Bruce’s leaving led us to take a long second look at our mission—a process that has been validating and healing.

The Mission Study Committee and the Session are confident that the following report is an accurate assessment of the spirit of our congregation today. We hope it serves as a beacon for the pastor we seek and as a roadmap for our journey into the future.

Elaborating on the Mission Statement

Sharing **God's inclusive love** in a world desperately seeking hope

As a congregation, we aspire to reclaim the gospel for progressive Christian faith. We embrace Jesus’ radical love for us and seek to live out the biblical imperative “as you go... make disciples,” that is to spread our faith as we live it out in the world and offer God’s love and acceptance to our neighbors.

We have resources to invest in the staffing, technology, and facilities upgrades to enable us to reach more people and a more diverse population both in person and via Zoom. This could include new worship offerings, more small groups and public educational programs, more fully utilizing our large campus, or other new initiatives. We recognize the need to explore and be open to fresh, creative ways of worshiping and gathering that will appeal to people who are not yet here or who are different from us.

We are eager to map out the web of connections that already exist between our members and our community and to explore ways to deepen and strengthen these bonds in a way that includes the church.

- *“Pay attention to those who are not here yet.”*
- *“So many people think of church as toxic. Would be wonderful for people to know that we are a safe and welcoming place.”*
- *“Partnering with other organizations (multifaith or secular) enables us to lighten the load for staff and volunteers and also to build connections.”*

Seeking wisdom in ways that are informed, liberating, and impactful

FPCPA’s congregants are intellectually curious and questioning. Our worship and educational programs are progressive, biblically-inspired, and often political. As Liberation Theology teaches us, worship/study and action for justice in the world constitute a two-way process. Our worship and study inspires our action, and our action in the world informs and re-shapes our worship/study. We strive to humbly listen and learn as we go, and be open to different perspectives and ways of being.

We have taken mission/study trips to the US-Mexican border and built lasting relationships with a partner community in El Salvador. For many years we used the church's resources to support the Robert McAfee Brown Lecture Series, which brought noted theologians from around the country to Palo Alto for stimulating weekends of lectures, preaching, and discussion.

- *“Have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.”*
- *“Mix of faith, contemplation, learning and studying, social justice—all feed off each other.”*
- *“We don't know all the answers. It's important to learn and grow in our own understanding.”*

Practicing empathy with ourselves and our neighbors near and far

Our connections, relationships, and care for each other manifest God's love and hold us together as a community. Care and compassion are strengths, and we want to involve more congregants in the practice of caring for each other during all phases of life. Small groups have been foundational for creating and strengthening bonds among ourselves and to the church. A well-resourced and supported small group ministry should permeate all aspects of our church life, including our social action in the world. Small groups nurture innovation and engagement, and make all aspects of church life more personal and meaningful.

Small groups will continue to be a source of strength, especially as we seek to create a deep bond between in-person and remote participants.

We also need to renew and strengthen relationships with economically diverse neighbors in East Palo Alto, day workers in Mountain View, and other nonprofit partners by showing up, sharing our lives, and building trust. We strive to be an anti-racist congregation and to understand anti-racism not as a destination but as an ongoing practice. Beyond cultural competence, we are learning cultural humility through listening, engaging, and working with partners and neighbors, especially those with backgrounds different from ours.

- *“Could practicing empathy first among ourselves enable us to more successfully move out?”*
- *“Good facilitation and staffing can make a big difference in sustaining small groups, making them more active and engaging.”*
- *“Advantage of having a small group within the larger group, Have the expectation that those who join the church are also part of a small group. It will create more buy-in with being a part of everything when they have those more personal connections.”*

Disrupting injustice to promote healing in the world

Our faith and understanding of Jesus's life and teachings lead us to nonviolent action for social justice. Beyond our work for justice through education, letter writing, voting,

preaching, praying, and marching in the streets, our church has gone the extra mile by directly challenging and disrupting systems of injustice, often leading to change. In defiance of the law, we have given sanctuary to conscientious objectors and Salvadoran refugees; actively participated in boycotts to support farm workers; performed same-sex marriages in contravention of federal, state, and denominational laws; ordained LGBTQ+ folks as elders in violation of PC(USA) rules and worked to change those rules; and led the nationwide denominational effort to divest from fossil fuels.

A related project is our accompaniment program. In recent years a church team has provided support for a series of people who are seeking asylum in the U.S. We have benefited both from our direct experience with the skills and initiative these people have demonstrated in harrowing circumstances and from our relationships with the experienced staff members with whom we have teamed. This, too, is an area that can be developed further.

Going forward, we recognize that young people will lead the way in countering climate change and related issues of immigration and oppression. We need to pass the baton by creating a space for worship, meditation, and action that will be both empowering and responsive to young people's urgent spiritual needs, priorities, and concerns.

At the same time, many long-time congregants are older and perhaps less willing or able to take to the streets. We must explore ways our older members and geographically far-flung community can take meaningful action for justice, including emerging virtual or hybrid actions that may also enable more intergenerational engagement.

Our work to date in co-creating a better world with God has taken many forms, but must continue to evolve as our congregation and the world around us changes.

- *"I love this pillar and have a million ideas about how to do that. It's what we do. It's what we've done. It's what we should be doing."*
- *"We need to do the work again, but do it differently."*
- *"Young people can lead. We need to open space for them that will be relevant to them and their priorities and style of communication and action. Are we willing to do this?"*

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Families and youth:** Emerging from the pandemic, our congregation currently has few young families with children. Rebuilding a youth/family ministry is a major priority for us. We have recently embarked on some promising intergenerational projects. The first used a transformation motif and had three elements: planting a Pollinator Garden, creating origami butterflies, and holding a four-part Adult Study series. In prior years, we have taken youth trips to the border and worked jointly with the Pacific Island communities in East Palo Alto.
- **Racial, ethnic, and economic diversity:** FPC Palo Alto's membership is 90 percent white and generally perceived as affluent, but we want our church family to represent the

breadth and diversity of the human family. We know that it is difficult to attract new members who don't see themselves reflected in the community we have here now. So, we will need to take extraordinary measures in a respectful way to fulfill our dreams of greater inclusivity.

- **Communications:** In order to reclaim and share the gospel, we should thoroughly examine the signals we send out that identify our church, and seek to understand how our message is being received by the communities we wish to reach and attract, and with whom we collaborate. Building our capacity for effective public relations will be important to our future. We need to use all available communication channels to inform and invite our neighbors and the surrounding community to join us in activities and events.
- **Adult Christian Education:** Our adult educational activities are in need of a reboot after a long hiatus during the pandemic. We have rich history and experience to draw on in this regard—and we are updating our practices and stretching our imaginations to take advantage of the virtual/hybrid options now available to us. This should be a great opportunity to invigorate our congregation and reach new audiences across the country.
- **Small group ministry:** To continue our long tradition of effective and supportive small groups, in the wake of the pandemic we commit to resourcing small groups with trained staff, structure, systematic outreach, and group development. A challenge that we must meet is finding meaningful ways to integrate and engage both active members and other participants, as well as newcomers from near and far who connect with the church virtually. Effective small group ministry will help us grow, thanks to the study, problem-solving, prayer, storytelling, care, and play that happen in small groups.
- **Embracing change:** We understand we will need to change and possibly endure discomfort and uncertainty to draw our circle wider, expanding our outreach to people of color and to younger populations. But we have done this before: When we became a More Light Church, there were those who worried we would “become a GAY church,” and “What if they want to kiss each other or hold hands?” and “What if they want to get married?” It turned out that there was nothing to fear, and much love and benefit to be gained.
- **Our commitment to hybrid services and programs:** FPC Palo Alto is, as far as we know, on the cutting edge with our approach to hybrid worship—but there is more that can be done to draw the community together. We are committed to the planning and technical upgrades necessary to integrate and enhance the worship experience and interpersonal connection among participants on both sides of the screens.
- **Using our resources to build the church and serve the broader community:** Thanks to generous gifts from parishioners over the years, we have a substantial Legacy Fund, income from which is used to shore up our annual operating budget. With new leadership and a creative planning process, we can strike a balance to use this resource to innovate in response to the challenges we face, while responsibly stewarding the fund for the long term.

Core Ministries at FPC Palo Alto

Like many Presbyterian churches, our work is primarily organized in committees and small working groups. These groups tend to meet monthly. Most (although not all) have a Session liaison who usually serves as chairperson. Participation in these committees does not require formal membership in the church, just strong interest and participation. Some congregants serve on multiple committees and working groups.

Care and Compassion

Several years ago, we ceased having Deacons and filled their caring role first with a paid staff member and later with a committee model. Care and Compassion provides care and related services to our church community so that every member feels loved and cared about at times when they or their loved ones might be ill, living with a recent or possible upcoming loss, under stress, lonely, or isolated. The Care Team is stable, and the congregation regularly expresses appreciation for their work.

Christian Education

Historically, this committee has focused on Sunday School and Adult Study, but there are currently not enough children for the former, and the pandemic interrupted in-person events. In the past we also hosted an annual lecture series in addition to weekly Adult Study programs on Sunday mornings. In the fall of 2022, we held an Adult Study on Being a Peace Church in the Time of War in Ukraine. And since December, an on-campus Psalms class has been meeting with steady and good attendance. We also want to do more participatory projects and studies like the Pollinator Garden, explained above.

Communications

Primary ways of communicating to the congregation include a weekly email and announcements during worship. We also actively maintain Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube accounts. We have a website with general info about FPCPA, including an event calendar and links to past sermons. We continue to evolve in response to changes in technology, while keeping in mind that levels of technological proficiency vary widely across our community.

“We need to do a better job of communicating possibilities and strengthen the ways for getting involved.”

Cool Planet

The Cool Planet Group was formed in 2006 in response to Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth*, and continues to work to raise awareness of global warming and its impacts on “the least of these” and God’s creation. Over the years we have sponsored adult education series, made recommendations about reducing our congregational and individual carbon footprints, forged partnerships with local climate action groups, and raised money for small organizations working on environmental justice issues. We have planned several Earth Day services, including hosting Bill McKibben as guest preacher in 2019. We organized many of the country’s Presbyterian churches in support of fossil fuel divestment by the PC(USA).

Facilities

The church's multi-building campus, built in the mid-1950s, includes a chapel, a large gathering space off an enclosed courtyard, and rental spaces for outside organizations. We also own a manse a few miles away. In keeping with our values and our commitment to climate action, full campus electrification including car chargers in the parking lots and solar on our roofs is an important goal that informs our list of priority maintenance and upgrade projects. We are considering ways to make the campus more useful and welcoming.

Membership and Community Building

We have recently reinstated these committees. Many of our congregants worship via Zoom, which has allowed a number of former members who had moved out of the area to reconnect and regularly attend our services. It is an ongoing challenge to understand what community building should look like in a hybrid church. Even the definition of "participant" status and the requirements and needs of a church directory are now new ground that we must re-explore.

More Light

Although it does not have a committee attached to it, our ongoing commitment to LGBTQ+ welcome and advocacy has arguably been our strongest ministry and, having started in 1989, it is our longest ongoing ministry. Even with our smaller current congregational size, we have a very diverse community across sexual orientation and gender identity. This offers a glimpse into how we may grow in our diversity in age, race, and economic representation.

Music

Music is an important part of worship for many members of our church. Our Director of Music is very skilled on the organ and piano and leads a small choir. He also brings in outside musicians, often focused on jazz. We have adapted to the hybrid world by at times including remote musical guests. We have begun to expand our musical offerings to include Taizé services, jazz vespers, recitals, and concerts. Enhancing music programs and adding non-organ services can continue to attract and grow interest in our church.

"There is wisdom and spirituality in music and poetry."

Nominating

As is typical of PC(USA) churches, we have a Nominating committee that recruits Elders and a few other leadership positions. We aspire to grow the pool of candidates to expand the variety of leadership voices and give elders sufficient time between terms.

Personnel

This committee acts on behalf of Session to onboard, support, and celebrate staff's role in fulfilling church ministries, as well as to monitor their performance.

Small Groups/Covenant Groups/Lenten Groups

At various times in our history we have convened small groups that have gathered at regular intervals. Some were formed around life stages, such as parenting or caring for aging parents; others were seasonal, i.e. during Lent, while others were based on special interests or geographic proximity. We recognize small groups as critical to forming, connecting, and

maintaining our community, and we aspire to reinstating a strong small group ministry that takes into account our new hybrid identity.

Social Justice

There are two main focuses for this group: financial support of local nonprofits and engagement of community members in projects. Through both of these, the goal is to address needs in the areas of climate change (through our Cool Planet group), hunger and homelessness, youth and young adults, environmental justice, immigration, gun control and peaceful society, gender and LGBTQ+ rights, and reproductive rights. Here are few specific programs:

- Hotel de Zink – shelter for people experiencing homelessness
- Rise Against Hunger – food packaging for distribution in areas experiencing hunger crisis around the world
- Mission trips – visits to the U.S.-Mexico border and El Salvador
- Booth and/or marching at San Jose Pride
- Hosting and accompanying refugee families (supporting with employment, medical, legal as well as housing)

“Social justice has been a core part of who we are as a church, a core value.”

“It was the activism that led me to this church.”

Stewardship

This committee leads the annual drive for financial pledges. We are striving to build a stewardship program that is an ongoing and holistic part of our community and not just something that occurs in September/October every year. More information about stewardship and finances is covered later in this report.

Worship

We currently have two services: the main Sunday service (in-person/Zoom hybrid) at 10 AM, and a small group called Early Church at 8:30 AM on Sundays (Zoom only). The main service has a fairly traditional structure and typically follows the Lectionary. Early Church has its own rotating leadership and is highly participatory due to its smaller size. For the main service, we aim to be accessible and welcoming to new people through the use of greeters, Passing of the Peace, and Zoom chat.

“Early Church is an example of a consistent and ongoing group. It’s the right size (16-20) for Bible study, which is about 85% of the content. But it is a worship service, too.”

Worship always includes stirring music and inclusive language, and sometimes includes guest speakers/preachers who reflect our commitment to Social Justice. Through worship we seek to expand our relationships with God, understand the gifts of grace, and bring our community together around our spoken prayers of thanksgiving and intercession. We strive to provide a meaningful experience whether in person or on Zoom, and we are always working to better integrate those two.

About our Church

Membership and Worship Attendance

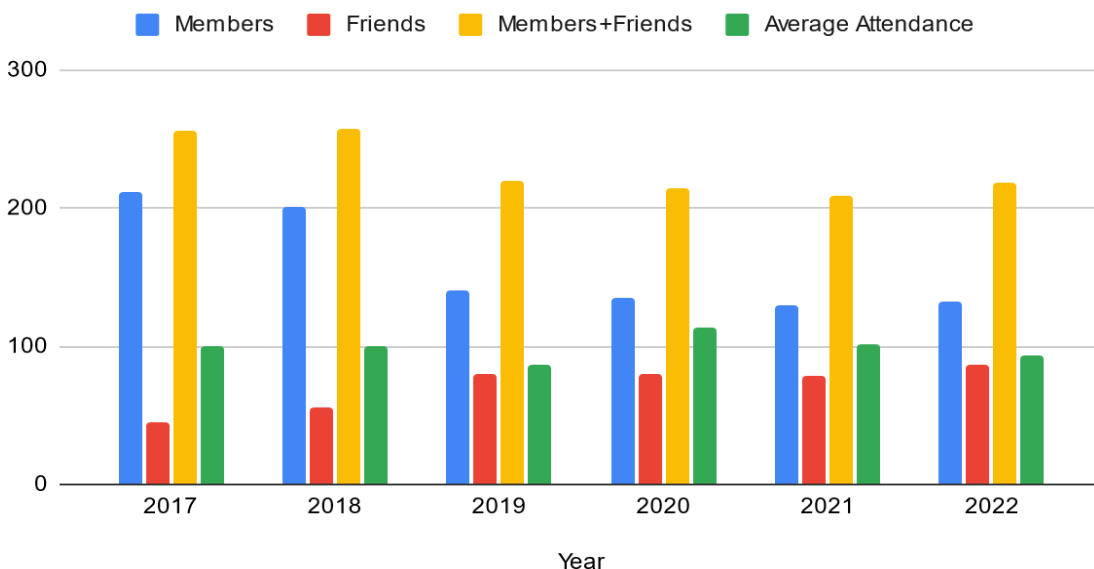
As with other congregations, our membership and attendance numbers have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, our numbers have been remarkably steady due to a quick retooling at the start of the pandemic. We created a worship service that was completely on Zoom but has since moved to a hybrid in-person and Zoom experience. Zoom, and now hybrid worship, has created opportunities for former members and friends who left our congregation when they moved out of the area to reconnect and attend regularly.

Zoom has also made it possible for us to have remote worship leaders and participants, as well as our first Session member who is located outside of the Bay Area. In addition to the ways listed above in which we welcome Zoom worshippers, remote-access attendees also participate as liturgists, in opening prayer, and by offering prayer requests. FPC Palo Alto is intentionally creating a whole worshipping community that joins the physical sanctuary space and the sanctuary of the home.

We now face the challenge of attracting people back into the in-person worship experience. Particularly with many older adults, there are still serious health concerns. The Worship Committee has created procedures to increase the safety of those attending and provide ways for them to choose a comfortable level of physical interaction with other attendees.

FPC Palo Alto has a long tradition of treating members and other participants (formerly “friends”) equally, except that only members may vote in congregational meetings or serve on Session. Others are invited to participate in most of our working committees, and many of them actively pledge to and volunteer with the church.

Members, Friends, Members+Friends and Average Attendance

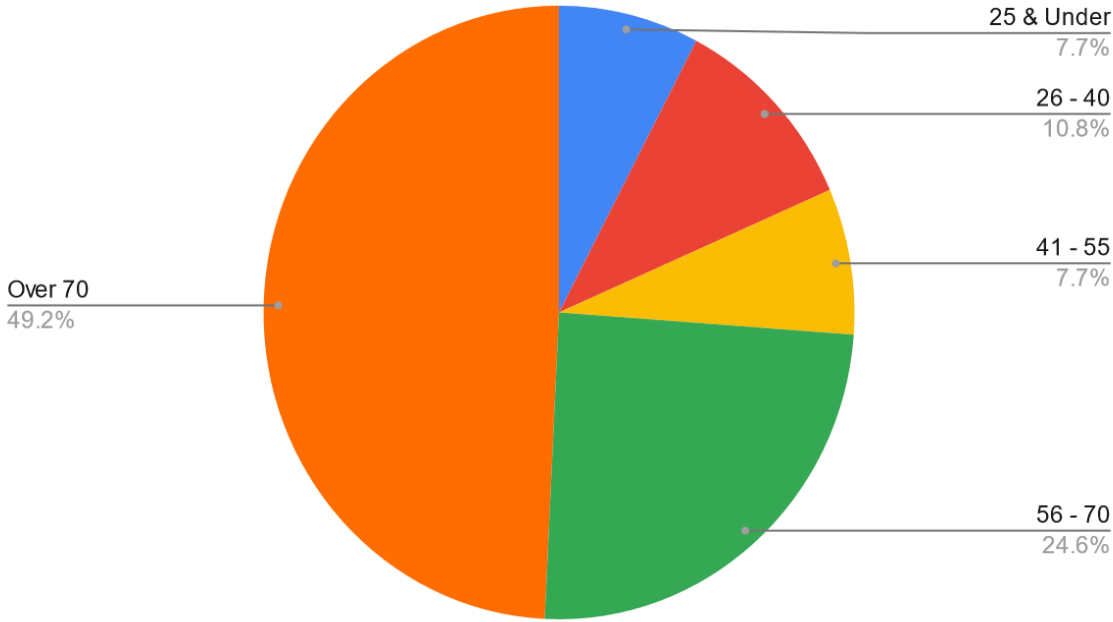


For various reasons, during the years between 2003 and 2018, our congregation did not grow. In 2019, we updated our membership rolls and removed many people who had stayed on the rolls long after they left the church or the area. This accounts for the drop in members between 2018 and 2019. Other reasons for recent attrition include members passing away, and not having membership classes or active recruitment during the pandemic. Declining or static membership definitely affects our ability to recruit people to serve on Session, committees, and working groups.

Diversity

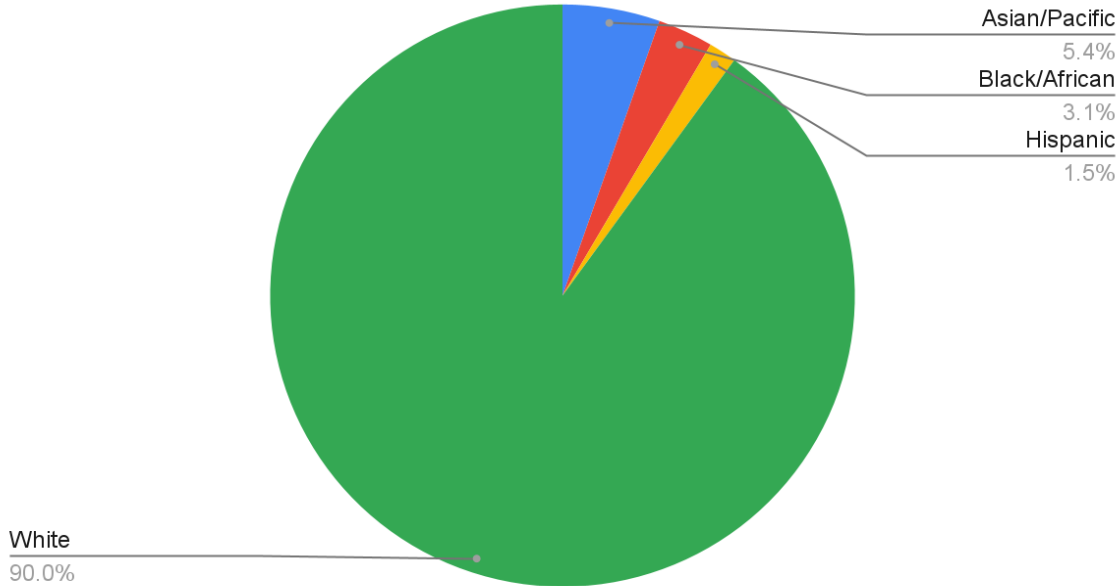
Almost three-fourths of our congregation is 56 years or older. As we move forward, we have a shared desire to build a more intergenerational, age-diverse congregation.

Age Distribution



We are largely a white congregation and it deserves some introspection and congregational dialogue to honestly assess why this is so. We have expressed a desire over the years for racial diversity within our congregation that is more representative of the demographics of the Bay Area. We have also expressed a desire, and have taken early steps, to understand what it means to be an anti-racist community. There is much more work to do to achieve our vision of becoming a multi-ethnic community.

Racial Distribution



FPC Palo Alto’s shrinking and aging membership is a concern for our congregation. There is a broadly held desire to grow our numbers—and our age/racial/ethnic/economic diversity—not just to sustain the community we love, but to increase our impact and achieve our mission.

In addition to outreach, we wish to be a spiritual home to those who share our values and vision. We don’t seek to be a megachurch; we seek to make a difference and share the story of God’s love that inspires us. We believe there are many others who would be glad to hear that inclusive, liberating story.

*We are seeking to thrive,
not just seeking to grow.*

Finances

FPC Palo Alto is blessed to have three primary sources of financial support:

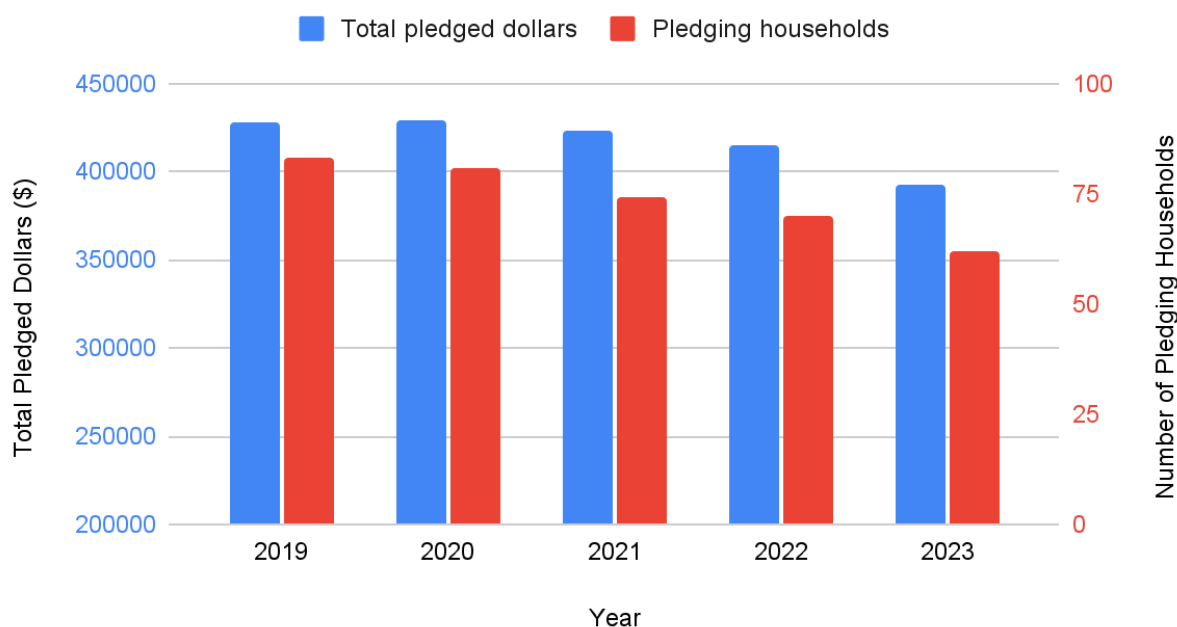
- **Stewardship** - annual pledges and donations from individuals and families in our congregation.
- **Rental income** - income from nonprofit tenants who use our campus during the week
- **Legacy Fund** - the generosity of individuals and families who make gifts to the church or include FPC Palo Alto in estate planning

Stewardship

We are thankful for the generous ongoing financial commitment of our congregation in annual pledging and regular giving to support the ministry of FPC Palo Alto. Our history demonstrates that readiness to give: in each of the three decades prior to the pandemic, as the number of members decreased, our very generous donors increased the size of their pledges substantially.

We have, however, seen a drop in the number of pledges by individuals and families particularly during the pandemic and the current year of pastoral transition.

FPC Palo Alto Pledging



In the winter of 2021, our church hired Vandersall Collective to study our stewardship and financial practices. Specifically, it “sought to explore the money narratives of the past, gaze towards the future, and do so through a lens of establishing new patterns and having a more intentional relationship with money, God, and each other.” The report and the insights that it produced are still timely and a valuable resource to our congregation and future church leadership.

A few conclusions from the report:

- There is a sense that we have a "hockey stick" giving curve where a very few donors do most of the giving. The reality is more nuanced. It is true that a few major donors contribute around 52 percent of our giving. But this contrasts to national data where major donors represent 80 to 90 percent of a church's financial support. We may have stronger congregational participation than many other churches but we also seek to increase and broaden that participation.
- There is attrition in giving, at least partially due to economic uncertainty.

- Our social justice mission is often cited as inspiration for giving.
- There is a strong feeling of ownership, that this is “our church” so we need to financially support it.
- Our stewardship drive results could likely improve if we highlighted stories, particularly from our social justice partners, throughout the year. We could also benefit from discussion of money and stewardship being better integrated into our Christian Education program, sermons, and Biblical study.
- We should clearly communicate to the congregation how financial decisions are made and how these decisions are related to our core mission.

The Vandersall report reminds us to build upon the many blessings and gifts that are present in our congregation, rather than focusing on our deficits. It is easy to tend towards a scarcity mentality, though we have tremendous abundance in our midst. We advise our new pastor to read the report for more details on recommended best practices.

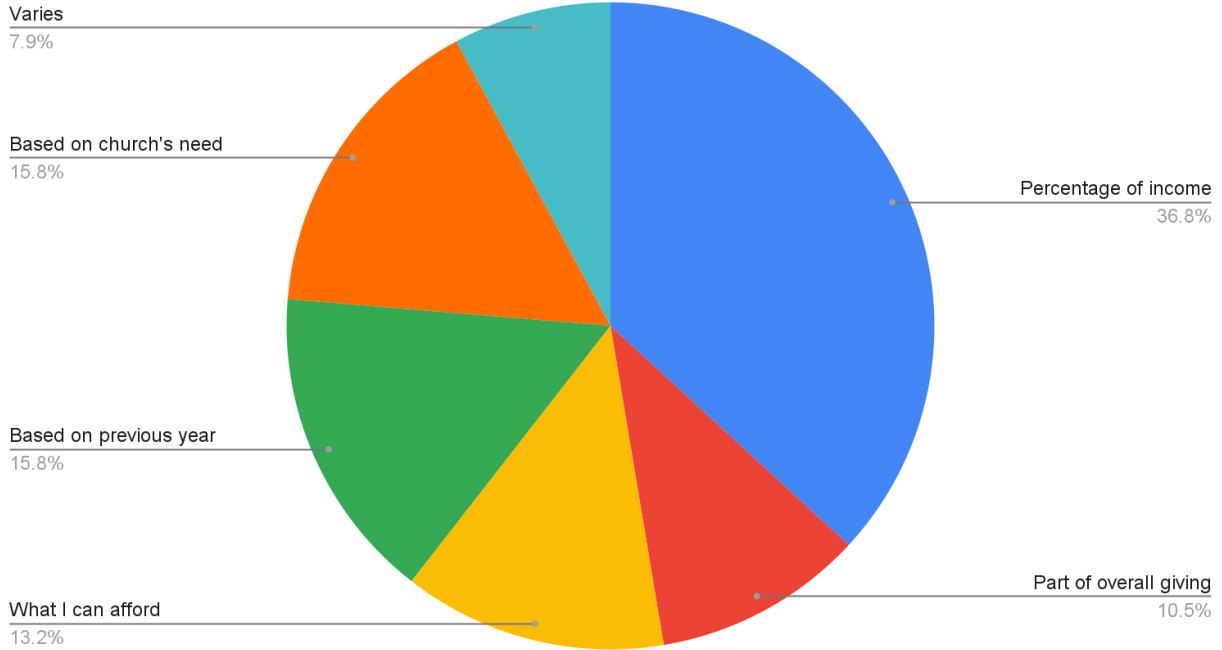
In September 2022, another congregational survey gave us an updated understanding of how and why people give (or don't give) to FPC Palo Alto.

We received a total of 40 responses, and of those, 87 percent said they pledge. The reasons for pledging ranged from “It’s just what I feel I should do,” to “Because the good work of the church requires cash, and reliable budgets, in addition to our hands and hearts.”

“I pledge partly to support this church, which is an important part of my life, but also because I know that First Pres uses its combined resources to support many groups in the community, nationally, and internationally.”

The responses to the question of how the people settle on a pledge amount mirrors that range. Just over a third (37 percent) of the responses involved tithing or a percent of income to the church and other charities, and 13 percent said their pledges are based on what they can afford. Sixteen percent said their pledge was based on the previous year’s pledge, and 16 percent said the pledges were based on the church’s needs. Eleven percent said the pledge was part of their overall charitable giving. A few people said their reasoning varies.

How I Determine My Pledge



Three-quarters of respondents said their pledge was their primary donation or the church was in the top five organizations to whom they donate.

In terms of factors that would inspire increased giving, the responses ranged from personal (examples: “nothing because I’m on a fixed income” or “I got a pay raise”) to the church’s programs or needs. These ranged from clarity on money needed for specific goals or exciting initiatives, willingness to spend the Legacy Fund more freely, a capital campaign, or confidence in the church’s future, mission, and ability to grow.

Word Cloud of Answers to "Why We Pledge?"



Rental Income and Facility Use Fees

Our campus includes Westminster House, a historic mansion that was purchased by the church early in our history. We currently lease space to three nonprofit tenants:

- KARA - providing grief support and grief therapy services
- Peninsula Bridge - empowering motivated students with financial need to achieve college and career success through individualized support and transformational educational opportunities
- The Learning Center - a very stable, non-church affiliated child care and education center

Finally, we offer the use of our campus for affordable fees during the week for other organizations to meet and host occasional meetings and events. We rely on rental income to fund our church activities.

Legacy Fund and Legacy Circle

Following the receipt of a large gift from the estate of a member, in 2000 Session established a fund to receive and distribute further bequests to the church. Now named the “Legacy Fund,” the assets in the fund are managed by an Investment Committee of church members.

The Legacy Fund has enabled the church to weather challenging financial times, as well as provide funding for new and innovative projects and staffing. At the end of 2022 the assets in the Fund were \$1.52 million. The annual payout has been in the range of 5-8%, but Session has the authority to use any or all the funds at its discretion for the benefit of the church and its programs since the Legacy Fund is not a legally restricted fund.

Almost 20 years ago, the church created the Legacy Circle to recognize and thank those who had taken steps to include FPC Palo Alto in their estate planning. Over the years, more than 43 households have become members of the Legacy Circle. While some are now deceased, currently about 30 individuals and households are in this group of church benefactors, quite a large number for a church of our size. Signed commitment letters are in a file at the church. While the total dollar amount of future bequests is unknown, the level of commitment expressed by these Legacy Circle members is an encouraging sign for the financial health of the church in the years ahead.

Periodically since 2006, Legacy Circle members have been invited to special receptions as an expression of thanks for their commitments. Additionally, a Planned Giving Committee of members provides education to the congregation regarding giving.

Current Staffing Configuration

FPC Palo Alto current staff includes:

- Transitional Pastor (30 hours/week)
- Director of Operations (40 hours/week)

- Provides leadership, direction, and management of major administrative areas for the ministries of FPC Palo Alto, handles rentals and tenant relations, and supervises the Facilities Maintenance Technician
- Facilities Maintenance Technician (40 hours/week)
 - Responsible for monitoring, maintaining, repairing, cleaning and otherwise ensuring that the physical plant is fully operational to meet the needs of the church
- Director of Music (30 hours/week)
 - Develops and leads the worship music ministry for the church
- Pledge and Gift Accountant (2 hours/week)
- Bookkeeper (8 hours/week)
- Hybrid Worship Team (temporary employees)
 - Worship and Education Consultant (10 hours/week)
 - Audio Visual Coordinator (4-6 hours/week)
 - Zoom Host (4-6 hours/week)
 - Event Host (4-6 hours/week)

The 2022 budget for the total staff and professional expenses was \$547k.

The 2023 budget for the total staff and professional expenses is \$590k.

Recommendation: Invest in staff to realize our mission and vision

Grounded in the mission and vision of FPC Palo Alto, MSC sees the need to strategically invest a greater portion of our abundance in pastoral staff in order to increase our impact and build the Beloved Community.

Specifically, the Mission Study Committee believes the vision laid out in this report indicates a need for 80 hours/week of combined pastoral leadership staff. That might mean, for example, one full-time Head of Staff/Lead Pastor and additional pastoral staff to be configured in consultation with the Pastor, Session, and the Personnel Committee. (Options could include another FTE, multiple part-time staff, interns, etc.) We recommend dedicating significant staff time to small groups, outreach, and communications, as each will play a vital role in advancing our mission.

Staffing at this level can create impact beyond our numbers, based on faith-based relationship building and our history as a “catalyst community.” To that end, staff should be prepared to use in-person and hybrid channels and effective small group ministry to **inspire, welcome, lead, and sustain current and future congregation members and other participants.** We believe such engagement with our congregation and the wider community will lead to growth in our numbers as well as in financial support from our members and friends.

While we anticipate expanding our leadership beyond one pastor to fulfill the vision outlined in this Mission Study, we recognize that our move to staffing at 80 hours/week will need to be incremental. Meanwhile, we have taken an initial leap of faith by increasing our staff expenses:

changing the Head of Staff position from 80% to 100% time, providing full cost-of-living raises for other staff, and adding staff to enable hybrid worship.

The path to reaching this vision can be better assessed after our full-time pastor arrives. Our current 2023-24 budget creates a pastoral and hybrid-worship staff of 60 hours/week and adds \$38k to staff expense in 2023. The new head pastor will add another \$32k when in place for the full 2024. This staff configuration, coupled with flat pledges, increases the annual shortfall to \$175,000 beginning in 2024, with no added staff. This \$175k shortfall can be covered by the Legacy Fund for only a few years with no significant increases in revenue.

There are some positive elements to keep in mind: (1) thirty members have included the Legacy Fund in their estate planning and (2) in the past as our membership has declined, our congregation has increased its support by impressive margins: the 1990 average pledge (from 168 households) was \$1560; the 2000 average pledge (from 161 households) was \$2366; and the 2010 average pledge (from 113 households) was \$3938. In conjunction with our new pastor, the congregation can determine how to fund the increase in staff recommended in this MSC report.

Strategic areas of focus for pastoral leadership

We need new pastoral leadership with the skills and experience to successfully advance these priorities for our church.

Small Group Ministry: A staff-led, refreshed and trained small group ministry will strengthen and deepen friendships and our commitment to one another. This approach, characterized by skillful planning, facilitation, and leadership, should inform a wide range of our activities. We could use small group skills in our activism, social gatherings, and committee meetings, as well as while engaging partners in the wider community, in person and online. Small groups could be places for intersectional and intergenerational dialogue, learning, and other activities related to anti-racism, equity, and our social justice activism. This competency is essential to our community feeling cohesive in a hybrid remote/in-person environment.

“I really liked the small group feel of these EFT discussions. I really appreciate the learning that is happening in these groups.”

Reimagined Worship Offerings: Rethinking our worship offerings and/or adding new options or experiences will help us reach and welcome some of the types of people we want to reach, such as young adults, college students, and families. Our 10 AM service is fairly traditional, and while it is familiar and beloved by current members of our congregation, it may not appeal to

“Allow young people to lead, which might also attract young people.”

everyone. Adding a third service is one option, which could happen at a time that is more accessible for the community we are trying to reach. Exploring new ways of worship in our existing services will also be important.

Community Partnerships: As our community re-emerges from COVID isolation, FPC Palo Alto should create and build on community partnerships around climate change, peace-making, student support, resources for LGBTQ+ people, civic and justice causes, partnerships for racial equity, and more. Staff-led outreach and communication that leverage existing relationships ‘

could move FPC Palo Alto from a “best-kept secret” to a physical and virtual hub of impactful change-making. Such activities could include trainings, teach-ins, joyful celebrations, and creative performances.

We have heard in the voices of our members, participants and partners the courage and confidence that investing up front in the right combination of pastoral and leadership staff can, with God’s help, lead us to the truly intergenerational, diverse and sustainable faith community that we all yearn for—and that works toward fulfilling our vision and mission.

“Partnering with other organizations (multifaith or secular) enables us to lighten the load for staff and volunteers and also to build connections.”

“Think bigger than we have in the past, consider outward possibilities. Especially with all the technology we have now—Zoom, etc.”

About our Community and Neighbors

Thanks to our facility with Zoom-connected hybrid worship, our local faith community has been blessed and enriched with friends and members from across the country. Still, our core identity has been centered in our Palo Alto-Stanford neighborhoods and broader Silicon Valley area.

Our neighborhood here and abroad

Originally an agricultural region—the Valley of Heart’s Delight—Palo Alto’s proximity to Stanford University attracted highly educated families. Racist red-lining practices laid a foundation of segregated housing that divided Black and brown communities across the freeway from the white and privileged. This only accelerated with the emergence of Silicon Valley, which attracted highly-paid technology professionals from around the world. Today, the stark inequality of income, education, and professional status characterizes our neighbors in Palo Alto, Stanford, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and the broader Bay Area region—with intersecting dimensions that play out in the lives of our young people. Stanford and the tech economy have enhanced our neighborhoods with international diversity. In Palo Alto, for example, our local students reflect high percentages of East Asian and South Asian families. In East Palo Alto, high percentages of Spanish-speaking immigrants fill our schools, along with a significant number of Pacific Islanders from Tonga and Samoa.

“It will be important to reach out to really get to know other communities that are around us, and not just bring people to us.”

For many years, our faith has moved members of the congregation to lead immersive delegations to our partner community, Comunidad Octavio Ortiz in El Salvador, and to the

U.S.-Mexico border. Annual visits and mission trips happened for decades. Our hearts have been touched and changed by witnessing personal examples of courage, resilience, and faith. These experiences have strengthened our ongoing commitment to replace unjust systems. A Salvadoran cross hangs at the front of our church, given to us by refugees from El Salvador to whom we offered sanctuary. They, too, are our neighbors.

Organizational neighbors

Our neighbors are also the many midpeninsula congregations that share a progressive mindset. We have active partnerships in working for peace, economic justice, affordable housing solutions, and support for immigrants. Together we have created a well-regarded Opportunity Center for previously unhoused neighbors. Nonprofit senior living residences like Lytton Gardens and Channing House are also home to a number of members.

Examples of faith-based collaboratives with which we partner include Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice (with Muslim, Jewish, Baha'i, Friends, Catholic and other Christian members), as well as the progressive United Campus Christian Ministry at Stanford (UCCM).

Our community of local congregations support a network of diverse nonprofits that address educational inequality, food and housing insecurity, racial equity and immigrant rights, healthcare and mental health challenges, and other peace and justice initiatives. Together, through mutual acts of service, protest, and shared worship, our lives have been enriched by a sense of interwoven destinies and new friendships, building trust by showing up, year after year. These are the places and the spaces where we find and meet our neighbors.

One of our strongest areas of outreach and advocacy over the last 30+ years has been working for justice in the LGBTQ+ community, both in the PC(USA) and out in the world. Many LGBTQ+ people in the Bay Area and across the country have found welcome and a faith home where they can fully serve God in this church. Our church has been immeasurably enriched through this invitation. There is much more we can do to similarly reach more LGBTQ+ people of color.

In sum, the lives of our neighbors reflect intersections of abundance and scarcity—of loving families and rich cultural diversity, of significant mental health challenges that affect many of our young people, of world-class professional talents and resources, of quiet desperation among the unhoused and those facing substance abuse challenges. We have many opportunities to sustain an active and effective witness of God's love and beloved community with our partners and neighbors.

Pathways to Welcome

There is widespread enthusiasm in our congregation to increase our impact and live out our faith in ways that will attract more people—especially young adults, families with children, people of color, and immigrants—into the life of our church. To be clear, we seek first to fulfill our church's mission and vision and bring love and joy to our congregation, then build on that

strength to go out into the wider community. We are not interested in growth for growth's sake, or in compromising our values for the sake of growth—rather, we have faith that truly living our progressive theological and social values out loud will attract the new community members we seek to welcome.

In order to recommit to our mission and vision in ways that welcome newcomers into our midst, we know we must carefully consider the needs and desires of those who are not yet here, not just our own wishes and preferences. We seek to welcome newcomers into our physical, virtual, and spiritual spaces with genuine joy.

Our new head pastor will bring their own talents, experience, and inspiration to this calling, and we aim to be flexible and accommodating to their unique approach to expanding our impact.

The following ideas are therefore not a checklist or a blueprint for our new leader to follow, but a brainstorm of strategies and programs that might build on the strengths and relationships our church has nurtured over time.

Maximizing use of our campus

FPC Palo Alto has a large campus, as described above in the Facilities paragraph. It is underutilized (for example, our chapel, fellowship hall, and youth house are largely unused on weekdays) and could potentially anchor additional engaging community events, services, and programs. This could be a huge asset to our congregation and surrounding area.

- There may be a need/opportunity to provide reduced rent to host a Palo Alto Pride Center. Could the San Mateo Pride Center, Billy DeFrank Center in San Jose, or Adolescent Counseling Services (Outlet) in Redwood City benefit from a satellite location? What do Stanford and other local LGBTQ+ students need that we may be able to help create or provide?
- For over a decade before the pandemic, we hosted a very popular annual Social Justice Holiday Craft and Information Fair in conjunction with Cool Planet's yearly "Re-Gifting Fair." These should continue and be more widely publicized. We could also consider other fairs and events. In April 2019, several hundred people attended when we hosted climate activist Bill McKibben preaching from our pulpit and following that with a book signing. Many attendees of these events were not otherwise connected to our church.
- Friday evenings (particularly with food) are ideal to have a young adult event or service. Another nearby congregation has a successful middle school program on Friday nights. Might we create something similar for youth and/or their families?

Challenges:

- Our large kitchen has a lot of potential but is not up to current standards in several respects, including safety. Planning is in progress to undertake a significant remodel and upgrade of our kitchen so that it can again support community events, and we hope to have that work well underway if not completed by the end of 2023.
- An increase in activity on our campus might well require increased staff time for maintenance and liaising with tenants and community members using our space.

- Our church's Use Permit with the City of Palo Alto, which was last updated in the mid-1980s, could impose a limitation on certain types of events and activities taking place on our campus, particularly repeat events with large numbers of attendees. We might revisit this with our neighbors and the City.

Hybrid events

- Robert McAfee Brown championed the concept of the "Seminary Out in the World" with the lectureship weekends we used to sponsor. Could we recreate a version of this as part of our Adult Study program? At one point, we reimagined this as PAL Talks (inspired by TED talks) where PAL stood for Prophecy, Action, Liberation. Our hybrid capability now has overcome many of the technical barriers to implementing such a program.
- Our formidable hybrid capability could allow us to bring a More Light church or service into a community that doesn't have one.
- Strong lay leadership in planning and leading worship services over the years has resulted in creative use of spoken word, music, art, theater, and dance in deepening and understanding our faith. This is an inherent strength of our congregation worth restoring and building upon.

Challenges:

- Right now only the sanctuary is "hybrid-ready." Optimizing additional spaces (such as the chapel and fellowship hall) for hybrid events will involve significant planning and expense. This is on the Facilities Committee's list of needed future projects.

Providing spiritual community and belonging

- We might be able to meet the unmet spiritual needs of **younger adults working in the nonprofit and mental health sectors**. What would provide them a weekly dose of spiritual renewal and energy to continue making the world a better place? Many members of our church have already found this sort of respite here.
- We might provide a place for spiritual renewal and direction for **frontline health providers** (many of whom are Filipinx or Hispanic, and not an insignificant number LGBTQ+). How adaptive can we be to their demanding schedules?
- **Many LGBTQ+ people, particularly people of color**, have been excluded from their own faith communities and could find a welcoming and inclusive home at FPC Palo Alto.
- We might host a resident church poet laureate, or resident artist, performer, or arts instructor.
- We might form partnerships with Channing House and other senior communities to provide new purpose and spiritual discovery for **older adults**.

Conclusion

This report expresses the Mission Study Committee's and Session's hope and excitement about our church's future with new pastoral leadership. It will also give prospective candidates a sense of who we are as a church community and who we aspire to become.

In conclusion, the Mission Study Committee would like to highlight the key recommendations made above for consideration as we prepare to call a new pastor.

- **Prioritize staff support for a robust small group ministry** to inform many church activities. This means skilled planning, facilitation, and leadership of small groups as well as training congregants to build this competency and lead themselves.
- **Re-imagine and enrich the worship experience** to express our faith in new, creative ways and attract people who are not yet here. This does not necessarily mean re-creating our 10 AM traditional service, though we recommend being open to some change there as well, as is inevitable with any new pastor.
- **Renew and strengthen relationships** with key partner organizations near and far, including those we already support financially and with volunteer time, as well as those we wish to know better. This should involve more participation in activities led by partners outside of our church, not just inviting partners to join our activities.
- **Invest in staff to realize our mission and vision**, to a degree we have not done in several years. We recommend moving by steps to 80 hours/week of pastoral leadership staff, with the details of a new staffing configuration to be decided by our new pastor, Session, and the Personnel Committee. We believe that this increased staffing will begin to achieve the goals laid out in this report.
- We further recommend some use of the Legacy Fund to kick-start the growth that we hope will become self-sustaining in time.

We are poised in this moment to become the FPC Palo Alto that we believe God has envisioned us to be. New leadership and initiative will enable us to share the liberating story of God's love in a world desperately seeking hope.

The Session of First Presbyterian Church Palo Alto extends its immense gratitude to the members of the Mission Study Committee who devoted nine months of steady work to its creation: Derrick Kikuchi (co-chair), Edie Irons (co-chair), Evelyn Wong, Vida Kenk, Scott Brennehan, Leif Erickson, and David Thornton.

Appendix: Quotes from the Congregation

The following quotes were taken from contemporaneous notes taken during the January 2022 Envisioning the Future Together small group discussions. Group co-chairs took the notes during the meetings. Several of these are highlighted in the Mission Study Report, but the Committee thought it was worth including all of the quotes we looked at in this addendum.

General

"It's hard to separate each of the pillars [of the mission statement]... I'm impressed by the vision of the mission statement - it's magnificent. The vision is very well thought out and compelling."

"Allow young people to lead, which might also attract young people."

"I believe there is a yearning among young people for something spiritual - looking for something that connects them to a community where they can be seen and heard and supported."

"The power of partnership, humility, relationships."

"Mix of faith, contemplation, learning and studying, social justice - all feed off each other."

Seeking Wisdom

"Expand wisdom with action and listening - not just study, Get into situations."

"Recognize each other's work and excitement. Learn what others of us are doing."

"Seeking other perspectives and experiences helps us avoid the error of projecting our own conclusions on others."

"Several people mentioned being drawn to the church by the focus on understanding theology and how it fits today's problems."

"There's a difference between knowledge and wisdom. It's a deeper process than just being informed."

"Have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand."

"Robert Brown Lectureship series is what brought someone here and kept him. His impression of the church was formed by the content of the lecture series."

"I'm excited about getting national and international speakers (Like Robert McAfee Brown Lectureship) with diverse perspectives."

"Putting Christ at the center; we're not just smart do-gooders."

“Emphasis on Bible Study was surprising, unexpected. Has a ‘traditional’ feel, has not been our go-to. Adult study is possibly the closest example in terms of Bible-focused. Also Robert McAfee Brown Lectureship bringing theologians was amazing.”

“Do national and international, but also local. Like the Tongan community in East Palo Alto, and the Bayview-Hunters Point in San Francisco. We have opportunities for consistent proximity to expand the voices we hear.”

“Twenty years ago, involvement with the Tongan/Pacific Islander community was meaningful engagement then. Might be a good thing to pursue now. Experience working with Tongan friends was better than studying racism.”

“Want to act, not just sit around talking. Concerned about anti-racist focus - impatient with hours spent on adjusting attitudes when there is so much to do locally.”

“We’ve not had broader prayer groups (that weren’t topic-focused). Would be a good addition.”

“For prayer groups, an obstacle is a tension between inward and outward focus. They may feel like inaction to some.”

“Wisdom in deepening our own understanding about ourselves, and for how we approach what we do. Specific ways to do this could be through more focused Bible study, books, speakers from within our community, as well as from other places in the world.”

“Liberation theology is in our DNA - praxis.”

“Wisdom comes through opportunities - face-to-face situations.”

“We have done accompaniment (with immigrants, BorderLinks trips, South Bay Sanctuary Covenant) - before the pandemic.”

“We need humility - a willingness to learn new things. Look in our hearts first.”

“We want to get in the frame of mind to listen to everybody, not just chosen leaders.

“I’ve liked the interfaith (e.g. seders) and experiential (e.g. uh dance). Getting out of our heads.”

“Is there an aspect of seeking wisdom using music? There is wisdom and spirituality found in music and poetry.”

“We like to be challenged, do deep thinking and respond honestly.”

“We don’t know all the answers. It’s important to learn and grow in our own understanding.”

“The church can provide leadership to connect the dots on why these activities are relevant to our mission.”

“There is a disparity between being humble and also wanting to be recognized for what we are doing - we need to look at the purpose behind it, not for the goal of looking good, but for growing spiritually.”

“I like the idea of lectures and study, which could also be a form of evangelism because we could share more broadly.”

Practicing Empathy

“The new vision for ‘Deacons’ may be not just a ministry to ourselves, but to reach beyond the church.”

“Healing is needed with everyone after COVID. Young people are isolated. Older people are isolated. Social glue and support structures have been lost. I’m not sure how we penetrate that, but healing and health are needed. This is going to be an issue for a while.”

“Could practicing empathy first among ourselves enable us to more successfully move out?”

“Seems like reaching out to others often brings more empathy and rejuvenation. Do we attend to practicing empathy for ourselves (more inward, already depleted from COVID), or expand out to the community and others to gain more empathy and understanding in the process.”

“Our church is embedded in a community - Does the community know we exist?... Look at the people reasonably close to the church and have we found a way to reach out to them?”

“We have really appreciated small groups in the past. This is the way that many of us feel most connected to the church. Everyone in our group was very enthusiastic about this idea - the only way to have a deeper connection,”

“In the past, small groups have expanded the number of people who feel part of the church even if they are not officially members. In the past there were Elder and Deacon liaisons, so people felt they could influence the direction of the church even through participating in a group.”

“Some members originally came in through small groups (e.g. Cool Planet).”

“Good facilitation makes a big difference in sustaining small groups,”

“Staffing can make a big difference to make small groups active and engaging.”

“I’m beginning to understand the connection between wider focus (more than us) and Book of Order definition... Empathy is an important component of activism, so that the help is respectful”

“Small groups are a way to connect with others in friendship, support, self-care, and deepening of faith AND as a means to go out and engage the community in different ways that reflect our mission.”

“Having small groups is a way to create more meaning and relationships if we need to do them online - like the EFT groups and after-church breakout groups.”

“Empathy is ‘standing with,’ not just understanding.”

“An example was support for LGBT (as called then) when that meant significant risk to the church and pastors. Not just being friendly and expressing agreement, but in doing weddings

and ordaining leadership. Walk the walk. This was very important - especially to the people being walked with. That's an example that can be extrapolated to other issues."

"Friendship has to be about something - activities that bring small groups together. One says that the choir is her small group. Film group has been meeting for 20 years. Hotel de Zinc group and Early Church people are examples of deep friendships that have evolved."

"Another community example - Israel Palestine dialogue group has met for many years - a network of people across a divide."

"People with busy jobs and young families with young children may not have extra time, especially during the week. Age may be an obstacle for older people, but Zoom may make things possible that were not done before."

"College outreach is a good idea."

"I'm excited about more outreach to young people. More peers for existing young people, energy and ideas. It's OK if they move on, because the group benefits from their presence while they are here and the character of the community benefits from the mix."

"My suggestion is to make a pamphlet of past/present activities and share in campus ministries to show what we are about - something they could get involved in... Young people don't want traditional church, but want to get involved; they want something spiritual."

"We want to grow to have critical mass for these things."

"I hope that understanding how the pillars work together can help to overcome the silos of activities and interests that some of us feel that separate us from each other within our congregation. I hope for a stronger feeling in the future of the body as a whole."

"Advantage of having a small group within the larger group, Have the expectation that those who join the church are also part of a small group. It will create more buy-in with being a part of everything when they have those more personal connections."

"Treating each other and others in the community with care and kindness. We need to think about that as we go out into the world to share our message and deepen our understanding and experiences."

"Would be great to have a toolkit or a manual for how to invite people in, to help people feel comfortable doing it."

Disrupting Injustice

"We need to do the work again, but do it differently."

"I understand the need for prophetic witness; tone is of urgency, but prefer a more positive phrasing. Doing justice resonates with me. We need to put the emphasis on focus. Remember the adage: liberals march, conservatives vote."

"Positive phrasing, such as 'increasing justice through faith and love,' vs. 'disrupting.' I like the idea of framing things in a more positive way."

"Although 'disrupting' may be negative, it's a more important way to express what needs to be done. I like the phrasing that way; it speaks to me as a young person."

"I love this pillar and have a million ideas about how to do that. It's what we do. It's what we've done. It's what we should be doing."

"We need 'fire prevention.' We can take the safe and predictable way to throw water on the fire, but sometimes that doesn't get at the roots of what's causing it. Sometimes you have to take risks and do things that are not as easily understood for actual prevention - not just responding or reacting."

"Young people can lead. We need to open space for them that will be relevant to them and their priorities and style of communication and action. Are we willing to do this?"

"I feel it is important to look inwardly at biases and perspectives that we have that may be inherently racist or rooted in long-standing beliefs. These past two years have created a greater need to look at our own assumptions, as well as within our overall church community."

"'Walk the talk' - we are activists. Continue to take that lead/role."

"This vision could be beyond the scope of what we now know."

"Social justice has been a part of who we are as a church, a core value."

"It was the activism that led me to this church."

"Let's find broader groups working on similar projects to share the workload."

"Solar energy is disruptive of other energy sources."

Sharing God's inclusive love

"We miss Adult Study and the Robert McAfee Brown Lectureship series. Those were really good venues to invite people who wouldn't have been comfortable inviting them to church. It made evangelism easy to do - 'a safe invitation.'"

"A joyful sense of welcome seems to be the most important thing. The pandemic, inability to gather really has gotten in the way of that. We need to find a way to do that even in our current circumstances."

"Maybe we need to reframe the goal to be welcoming and integrating for whatever time people are with us."

"We had some success during the time of interns, because young people attract other young people."

“There are lots of “as you go” opportunities. Small groups especially, both long term and short term, can build relationships.”

“Getting out into the community and sharing organically. One person gave an example of working at a Habitat for Humanity project. Ordinary talking with other people about being there because it was work our church believed in, and other people there were interested.”

“We need to do a better job of communicating possibilities and strengthen the ways for getting involved. Lots of people want to be involved but don’t know how or don’t know enough to envision themselves in particular work or roles. We need better publicity about what people are doing. For example, people didn’t know about the accompaniment program.”

“It’s important to reach out to new people. Not everybody has known everybody forever.”

“Adding an associate pastor... would allow more diversity. Single pastor can’t be all things to all people.”

“Build relationships... Lean into the ‘as we go’ frame of thinking... Look at our money allocations... Find out about what works for others.”

“Pay attention to those who are not here yet.”

“A third service would likely be aimed at a younger crowd and be at a time when people from other geographical areas could attend virtually.”

“I’m excited about having a third service with a very different format, and more energy to it, more lively and innovative. The 10:00 service has mostly not changed for decades. I’m ready for some change that would appeal to a different segment/audience.”

“Sunday morning is an obstacle for young people. Weekend afternoons could help as an option.”

“One person was at a protest at the jail earlier in the week. When someone asked why he was there, he said was with the Racial Equity group. He thought later that he also could have said that he was there because of his faith and his faith community. That would have opened up a different conversation.”

“It will be important to reach out to really get to know other communities that are around us, and not just bring people to us.”

“A survey of LGBTQ youth in San Mateo County shows that they don’t think of church as a place to get support. We need to be at least out in the world enough so that these people can find us.”

“So many people think of church as toxic. Would be wonderful for people to know that we are a safe and welcoming place.”

“How do we both share our message in ways that connect with others AND have the foundation for sustaining that connection with experiences, resources, etc?”

“We need to think about the means and ways to provide more inspirational gatherings, new access points and tools for creative story-telling. There are a multitude of ways to build experiences that draw people here. Chapel sessions.. Could be helpful now - spoken word, poetry, music, etc.”

“Let’s share our efforts with other local Presbyterian churches (Covenant, Valley Pres, Stone in San Jose, Sunnyvale Pres, St. Andrews in Pacifica)

Why we give (from 2022 Stewardship survey)

“Because the good work of the church requires cash and reliable budgets, in addition to our hands and hearts.”

“I want to support the church community and make sure it thrives.”

“I believe in the mission of the church, especially after our January [2022] small group discussions.”

“[It is a way we show] our steady long-term commitment to the church.”

“First Pres. was very important in [my mother's] life”

“I pledge partly to support this church, which is an important part of my life, but also because I know that First Pres. uses its combined resources to support many groups in the community, nationally, and internationally, so this is an example of combining efforts to amplify and multiply the output to more than the sum of its parts.”

Small Group Ministry

“There’s a lot of power in small groups and Bible study.”

“Small groups - acknowledge and respect each other and what others are doing - even if it’s not your thing.”

“As a group, identify where each group member puts possible actions in three concentric circles: (inner) safe for me, (middle) challenge for me, (outer) too much.”

“Are we only talking about appeals to us? (Age, race, neighborhood)

“Life stage groups have been especially good in the past at making ties. Also want diverse fun (not just old people group). One person would be glad to lead a cancer support group, but that needs to be in person.”

“Twenty years ago, involvement with Tongan/Pacific Islander community was meaningful engagement then. Might be a good thing to pursue now. Experience working with Tongan friends was better than studying racism.”

“I really liked the small group feel of these EFT discussions and sermons. I really appreciate the learning that is happening in these groups.”

“Want to get in a frame of mind to listen to everybody, not just chosen leaders.”

“Want to act, not just sit around talking. Concern about anti-racist focus - impatient with hours spent on adjusting attitudes when there is so much to do locally.”

“Exploring systemic racism in a more personal way rather than it being so abstract - hearing stories from those we know, learning more directly from those who have experienced it can make it more real and give us more understanding.”

“We can do both—individual and group—with group support for individual commitments and expertise.”