

Frequently Asked Questions - 2009

First Presbyterian Church



General Questions

Where are we headed as a church? What is our vision?

The Session developed vision-goals and strategic objectives in 2004-2005. Some of the objectives, as provided in a handout to neighborhood groups at the end of 2005, are as follows:

- Integrate prayer into the fabric of committees, commissions and ministry teams.
- Develop a financial plan for 1) repaying the Sanctuary mortgage and 2) upgrading current facilities.
- Implement a Capital Funds Campaign with RSI as consultants.
- Grow the small groups ministry so that by the end of 2006, 50% of average Worship attendance is also involved in a small group. By 2008, 75%.
- Encourage and teach biblical principles for personal finance, including tithing and regular giving.
- Continue the work of making the church campus safe for children to learn and grow by developing safe procedures for volunteers and staff working with children and teens.
- Develop active, supportive and meaningful youth programs for discipling junior, senior high and college-age youth. Budget for and hire a trained, experienced youth director.
- Develop a plan and budget for growing program staff in response to growth and in anticipation of church growth. Provide for one trained, experienced ministry staff person for every 100 in average worship attendance.
- Care for our current members and attendees effectively and comprehensively. Provide regular contact with FPCers who are missing in worship and fellowship.
- Explore Alpha and other programs for possible use in FPC.

The Session recognizes the need to revisit our mission, vision, goals and strategies. The process was begun at this year's Leadership Retreat and continues as Session devotes 45-60 minutes during each monthly meeting towards the process. A task force of Session has been appointed to work on our mission statement.

It seems like a lot of people are missing from worship and fellowship activities lately. What are we doing about that?

Our attendance records show a slight decline in adult worshipers over the last three years (9:00 service: from an average 81 adults in 2006, to 83 in 2008; 10:30 service: from an average 92 adults in 2006 to 81 in 2008). This is particularly noticeable among younger families, with children, as seen in the decline in Sunday School (average 41 children and helpers - both hours in 2006 to 27 in 2008).

The Session met January 29, to discuss feedback from the Jan. 18 Congregational Meeting and consider various ways to respond. With regard to the concern about losses among participants in worship and giving, the Session appointed two elders to design and, then, use a survey with those who are no longer attending or giving. We expect to receive a report of their findings soon.

In addition, the Deacons have stepped up their visits to those who are sick and homebound. The pastor often calls those who are missing from worship, with a focus on pastoral care: to discern

needs and concerns and to invite them back to church and special events. At various times, volunteers have helped with this.

A task force was appointed by Session at the end of 2008 to contact all members who had not attended or given in the past year. The task force was to make recommendations to Session for updating the church membership rolls, but were also asked to provide any helpful information about why those they called were no longer actively involved in the church. This annual task had not been completed for about five years, so there were many to call. 78 members were called (or attempts made) and a letter was sent to each as a follow-up. The task force noted that eight members intend to become active in the near future and five indicated that they were no longer active because they had moved. One cited theological/belief reasons for leaving, another cited differences over worship style and another cited family changes. Thirty gave no reason for leaving and twenty-five could not be reached by phone and did not respond to the follow-up letter. The task force recommended removing 60 from "Active Member" status.

The Session recognizes that we need a more consistent and systematic ministry for following up with missing worshipers and givers, within weeks of their departure.

Is Session the right size? Are there enough elders on Session?

Our church bylaws currently require twelve Session elders, which results in a Session membership of fifteen (including pastor, Deacons moderator and Clerk). The bylaws also call for fourteen Deacons. We currently have eleven deacons and eight Session elders, resulting in a Session membership of eleven.

The Book of Order does not specify the number of Session members in a church. Neither does the Bible, our ultimate, written authority. The Bible does insist that elders should exhibit several character qualities, such as being above reproach, temperate, sensible, an apt teacher, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, not be a recent convert, etc. (I Timothy 3:1-7). The Book of Order reinforces these guidelines and requires even more (See Section G6). The ordination vows require that officers "receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith." We expect all candidates for office to demonstrate commitment to our church through regular participation in worship and stewardship. It is not unusual for the Nominating Committee to experience difficulty finding enough qualified, available individuals to fill all open positions. This left two options: 1) Lower the standards from those given in the Bible and the Book of Order and fill all positions or 2) maintain high standards and leave positions temporarily unfilled. The 2008 Nominating Committee chose the latter option, but took a more imaginative approach. They began to focus on raising up new leaders who may eventually serve as elders and deacons while, at the same time, attempting to fill all open positions.

There was no effort to reduce the number of elders on Session. But, the shortage of session elders has had two positive results. We have increased the number of people involved in ministry, by emphasizing and increasing the number of ministry teams, from ten to thirty-three. At the same time, we reduced the number of committees and commissions (which must be chaired by a Session elder) from twenty-two to eleven. We have delegated more authority to staff and ministry lay-leaders. During this time, we have begun the process of updating our "Standing Rules for Session and Commissions" but we have not yet updated our church bylaws to reflect this paradigm shift.

A second benefit has been to improve the quality of discussion, debate and decision-making in Session meetings. Studies of group dynamics demonstrate that when the group size is 6-10, more

people usually speak and contribute than when the group size is larger. Larger groups are more prone to a few dominant personalities and, thus, tend to be less democratic. Decision-making is either protracted or pushed through by a dominant personality or faction.

There are two options regarding the difference between the number of officers required by the church bylaws and our current reality. The Nominating Committee could keep filling positions or the Session and congregation can change the bylaws to fit the church's current needs.

(for more, read the article, [What is a Commission-Ministry Team.doc](#) by Pastor Dave)

Is Session departing from Presbyterian polity (governing) by emphasizing Ministry Teams and having a smaller Session?

The Presbyterian Book of Order requires that every church have a Session to govern the church, but the size of the Session is not dictated. The Book of Order does not require any committees or commissions beyond the Session. First Presbyterian Church of Petaluma did not have any commissions, until the 1960s.

We recognize the need to reconcile our church bylaws with our decisions to emphasize ministry over committees.

We invite you to read our constitution, which includes the Book of Confessions, the Book of Order and our FPCP Bylaws. You can pick up a few copies in the Fireside Room Library, or on our church website: <http://www.petalumafirst.com/resources/leaders.shtml>

How is Happy Day doing?

Parents and children continue to be delighted with the love and care children receive in Happy Day. Happy Day has scaled back in enrollment and budget over the last two years. This was necessary to come into full compliance with state licensing requirements, but has continued beyond what was required. Staffing and other budget adjustments have been necessary and difficult.

In addition, the Session has begun a process to achieve alignment of the school with the church, in mission, governing and structure. We have developed one Personnel Manual for all employees, where we once had two. We are currently working on bringing our financial policies and procedures together into one document.

What is the best way to voice a concern about an issue or a complaint about how the church is doing?

Unity is a major goal for a church. Jesus prayed for the church, "protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one." (John 17) However, we cannot be truly united unless we speak openly and honestly with each other. Sometimes we disagree. We may think that a decision was made in an inappropriate way. Sometimes a leader or member acts in a way that is hurtful.

If a member has a problem with a fellow church member, s/he should go to that person directly with their concern. If the problem is broader than a few individuals, the offended or concerned member should talk to an elder or the pastor about their concern. If a resolution is not achieved, the offended or concerned member is encouraged to come to the appropriate ministry team or commission. For example, if one has a complaint about how money is being spent, s/he should

go to elder for Budget, Finance and Stewardship. If it's about worship/music style, s/he should talk to the elder for Worship. If there is still no resolution, a member can write a letter to the appropriate commission or the Session. A good model is the one taught in the Bible, for bringing about reconciliation between two believers.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church (*the larger body*); and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. - Matthew 18:15-18

If a church employee has a complaint or grievance regarding their employment or workplace conditions, a procedure for resolution is provided in the Personnel Manual.

We are committed to resolving conflicts and reconciling conflicting parties. It is essential that we avoid "quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder" (2 Corinthians 12:19-20).

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

General Fund Questions

How is giving coming in so far?

As of the end of March, we have received \$77,488 in giving (preliminary report), compared with \$85,000 needed to make our budget goal. So, we have given 91% of what was projected.

As a comparison, \$89,000 was given the first quarter of 2008.

Which staff have been cut and why?

After completing our stewardship campaign, November 2008, the session projected a significant decrease in giving for 2009. The 2009 budget was reduced from the 2008 budget in several areas, including personnel.

Several options for approaching staff cuts were considered by the Pastor, Personnel Commission and Session:

- 1) We could cut a few whole positions.
- 2) We could make a percentage pay cut across the board.
- 3) We could cut pay, but keep hours for all staff.
- 4) We chose a more surgical approach, consistent with budget cuts the Session has made with Happy Day staff, over the last two years.

We chose to reduce pay and hours to some positions based on the following considerations:

- Which tasks, and related staff, are critical to the continuation of our mission, goals and priorities?
- What is working well & getting desired results? What is not working so well?
- Which staff tasks might be accomplished by volunteers or other staff?
- Financial need: What impact would a cut in pay have on various staff?

- Fairness: we wanted to avoid favoritism and personal bias.
- When feasible, the employee's length of service (seniority) was considered.

After gathering information and recommendations from commissions, prayer and several meetings of Session, the Session chose to cut hours and related pay for the following positions: Facilities Coordinator, Music Director, Organist/Pianist, Child. SS Director, Child. SS Assistant.

Did Session reconsider or adjust the cuts that were made to staff hours?

Session members have listened to the concerns and ideas of staff and members, but has not revisited the budget decisions that were made December 2008.

However, adjustments were made in December and January. A short-term plan was developed so that the Facilities Coordinator would fill in missing hours with Bridge to the Future projects the Session approved (see below). Our Sunday School Director resigned in December and we decided against immediately filling the position. In January, the Personnel Commission considered recommendations for adjustments and restored some lost hours and pay.

Bridge to the Future Questions

What is Bridge to the Future and how is it going so far?

"Bridge to the Future" is the name we gave our three-year capital funds campaign. An intense time of stewardship education took place during the first few months of 2007, followed by pledges made by our members and attendees, totaling \$505,000 for the three year period, April 2007 through March 2010. The total figure has since been adjusted to \$499,605.



Approximately \$244,000 has been given to the Bridge to the Future building fund during the first two years (see latest reports for accurate details).

Bridge to the Future (Building) Funds are committed for 1) planning and constructing a new building to house high-priority needs, 2) making improvements to current facilities to meet high-priority needs, and 3) paying down the mortgage for the sanctuary improvements of 2003.

We are making good progress: 1) The Capital Improvement Planning Committee has completed a "Needs Assessment" and is near completion of a Master Plan to present to Session and then, the Congregation. 2) Building improvements have been made, with the renovation of the restrooms in the CE Wing and the remodeled Nursery, which was opened March 2009. Work is being done now to improve the remainder of the CE Wing. 3) We are continuing payments on the sanctuary mortgage and making additional, quarterly principle payments of \$2,500. In the two years of Bridge to the Future, the mortgage balance has gone from \$353,000 to the current balance of 314,000 (see the latest reports for current numbers).

Will Bridge to the Future funds be used to ease the pressure on the General Fund?

By definition, a capital fund can only be used for property and buildings. We are also restricted by commitments that were made during the pledge campaign, Spring 2007. The staff cuts did result in a change in strategy, but not direction. Rather than hire an outside contractor to build the nursery, we chose to ask Ted Arntz to serve as the contractor, using the hours he lost due to staff

cuts. After seeing positive results, the Session voted to continue this strategy, hiring Ted, 16 hours per week, to remodel the remainder of the CE Wing, in the style of the Nursery, and replace two parts of sidewalk. The spending cap on both projects is \$20,000, for materials and labor.

Should we put plans for a new building on hold, during the time when our finances are stressed?

Some of the assumptions we had when we embarked on this campaign need to be revisited. We began the campaign with the assumption we could raise \$900,000 in pledges, we could borrow more and Happy Day would contribute substantially to the projects. We succeeded in raising \$500,000 in pledges, but giving is coming in at rate that would suggest we will not achieve that amount. No decision has been made about Happy Day's involvement in raising funds for building projects. In addition, the economy and related assumptions have changed substantially since 2006.

At this time, the Session has not changed plans. We are paying down the mortgage, remodeling current facilities, and still making plans for a new building. The Session recognizes the importance of revisiting the assumptions undergirding the Bridge to the Future fundraising. We also need to review the building plans, based on our current reality. The congregation will be included and notified if and when plans change.

Will Bridge to the Future pledgers be given the opportunity to revise their pledges?

We recognize that a three-year commitment is long-term act of faith. We have said, from the beginning, that a pledger can revise their pledge at any time, for any reason. We appreciate knowing, if you expect that you will not be able to fulfill your pledge. In addition, new pledges are also expected during the remaining years of the campaign. Please contact our Bookkeeper (Kathy@petalumafirst.com or 707-762-8269, Wed. or Fri.) if you would like to make a pledge or adjust your pledge, upwards or downwards. Be assured, your pledge and your giving are considered private matters.