

# STEPS TAKEN

## **RATIONALE**

The rationale for the Strategic Planning and Implementation Team comes from Proverbs 29:18. "Where there is not vision, people perish..." Since no other committee was involved in the vision process, the session approved the organization of a Strategic Planning Team for the purpose of developing a vision for First United Presbyterian Church. The time line for the planning process would be three to six months.

Among the many tools available to us, we used sections of the book Holy Conversations, a Mission Study Report of 2004, a demographic study called Percept commissioned by the Presbytery, a leadership video, results from the Pastor talks, the Leadership Summit 2006, interviews with elected officers of the church and other members of the congregation, and our own dreams for First United.

## **MISSION STUDY**

Our first step in the process of developing goals as part of the vision of the church was to determine a precise Mission Statement known as a vision statement that we could focus on as we began to formulate our goals. The Outreach/Mission portion of the 2004 Mission Study was discussed and information of the Presbytery's Strategic Plan from the Presbytery Mission Statement was shared. After much discussion we decided that we needed to have a clear vision of where we wanted to be in five to ten years before we adopted a vision statement.

## **OUR HISTORY**

Therefore the next several meetings we spent putting together a timeline of events at our church for the past twenty-four years. We discussed past projects and studies, how and why they were started, and how and why they ended, including how the role of leadership had affected the successes and failures of various projects and ventures, and what we have learned from these successes and failures.

## **OUR BIBLICAL STORY**

Our next step in the process was to find our Biblical story - a story that would depict where we have been and where we should go. After discussion and prayerful consideration of three stories that were offered by the team, it was decided to base our Bible Study on Mark 6:35-44 to determine how this story was like and unlike our church.

Throughout the remainder of the process we continually reviewed this Bible story to make sure that we still felt that it was appropriate to our own story.

With the completion of our church timeline and the adoption of a Biblical Story we now focused on two questions:

- 1) What do we know about First United Presbyterian Church? and
- 2) Where is God calling us?

Our answers were extremely significant to the remainder of our process. They were:

- 1) We are a comfortable congregation which has received abundantly of God's blessings but still are hesitant to step forward in faith. And
- 2) We believe now is the time to respond to God's call to expand our reach to a hurting world and to share the community of Christ, that they may experience God's love.

## **DEMOGRAPHICS STUDY (PERCEPT)**

From these answers we continued our steps to develop goals which would move us toward "God's calling." To do this we reviewed and discussed the Percept report to get a clearer understanding of the demographic information it contained. We examined the People and Place section of the Percept information for the area around our church and compared the growth rate of the surrounding community with the decline in the membership of our church. We studied the diversity of the community and how that related to our church. We discussed the Community Issues which could help us with finding potential missions. And we looked at Faith Preferences of the community from which we might add to our membership and our programs.

## PASTOR TALKS

We next reviewed information from the pastor talks that were hosted by members of the congregation when Pastor Stovell first arrived to get a feeling for some of the strengths, weaknesses, and dreams of the congregation. We also saw a Leadership Summit Video on turning vision into reality. The Reverend Doctor Kyrbjon Caldwell, pastor of one of the largest Texas United Methodist Churches discussed the need for 1) boldness with integrity 2) speed and tempo (timing) and 3) prayer (with God all things are possible).

## INTERVIEWS WITH CHURCH LEADERS

With the information gained from the Percept, the pastor talks, and the leadership video we now wrote and refined questions to be asked of church leaders in personal interviews. We also decided that the congregation in general should be given the chance to answer those questions as well. Over the next couple of weeks our committee members made arrangements to interview the Elders, Trustees, and Deacons where we could arrange a convenient time. After giving the congregation sufficient time to return their answers to the questionnaire in the "Steeple," and a very enlightening Leadership Summit 2006 in Chicago which Pastor Stovell had attended, we began to share the interview and questionnaire responses that we had received. To this information we added our own dreams for First United.

## VISION STATEMENT

Now armed with our church timeline, our Biblical Story, our statement of God's calling, the answers to our questions from church leader interviews and from the congregation as well as our own dreams we began to see our vision statement materialize. As Christ said, "I am the bread of life..." our vision statement became "We are a church called to feed the hungry." This is meant physically, emotionally, and of course spiritually. As the quest for our goals progressed with much prayer and holy conversation we could feel God's direction toward five specific areas which emerged and would manifest themselves into the four goals that we would like to present to you today.

# OUR HISTORY – THE FIRST 25 YEARS

### Introduction

History or His Story of First United Presbyterian

1982-----Combining of two congregations

Recollections of the first Clerk of Session

Fall of 1982

Rev. Blythe Denhan

Fall of 1983

Exit of Rev. Jim Capps

Molding of congregation

1985 Arrival of Rev. Drew Kramer

Spring 1988

Retirement of Rev. Fred Cornell

1990 Arrival of Rev. Gary Looman

1994

Exit of Rev. Blythe Denham-Kieffer

1996

Christian Educator, Liz Carlstrom

1996

Exit Glenn Freiner, organist

Josh & Nancy Peterson Co-Directors of Music

Staffing 1996 forward

Liz Carlstrom exits May 1999

Mardi Mauch joins in October 1999 as Coordinator of Christian Education

Launches FaithQuest in Sept 2000

Stephanie Foltz joins in October 2000 as Coordinator of Christian Education

Youth Directors.....

Doug Eppley: November 15, 1999 – November 2000

Ryan Moore: January 15, 2001 – December 1, 2002

Brent Kilman: June 9, 2004 – July 16, 2006

Kris Schondelmeyer: September 1, 2006 –

Rev. Gary Looman retires June 2003

Interim Pastor Liz Kanerva arrives

Rev. Drew Kramer exits December 2003

Rev. Greg Stovell arrives fall of 2005

Conclusion.....challenge of His Story at First United

# OUR STRENGTHS TODAY

First United is a Strong Church in Many Ways

1. Strong, dynamic, and talented head pastor, with special gift for preaching.
2. Outstanding Interim Associate Pastor, with skills and gifts for caregiving.
3. Dynamic, enthusiastic Director of Christian Education
4. World class Christian Education program (FaithQuest)
5. New Youth Director with excellent credentials and a deep spiritual faith.
6. Outstanding and talented choir director/organist team
7. Dedicated and professional support staff
8. Strong lay leadership, working throughout the many opportunities to serve and volunteer
9. Large active Presbyterian Pre-School
10. Sunday Morning FaithQuest and Youth Programs (PYC, KIX, and TIM) very well attended
11. Large number of church groups: 5 PW Circles, 3 Mariner groups, Young Mothers, Praise Band, 5 music groups
12. Adult Education, both short-term and on-going
13. Large congregation with over 800 members
14. Bus ministry that brings people to church who are unable to drive themselves.
15. Increased financial giving in past few years
16. Two styles of worship service: traditional and contemporary
17. Sense of family and of belonging at First United
18. Adult and youth mission trips each year
19. Over 11% of annual budget devoted to Mission
20. Have a dedicated and well trained audio-visual team
21. According to a recent Percept Demographics study, there is a residential boom around our church and in our community. The survey estimates that because of this growth, there are 5000 people who express affiliation with the Presbyterian and/or a Reformed church.

We ARE a strong church, with wonderful opportunities to “feed the hungry.”

## OUR WEAKNESSES

### COMMUNITY

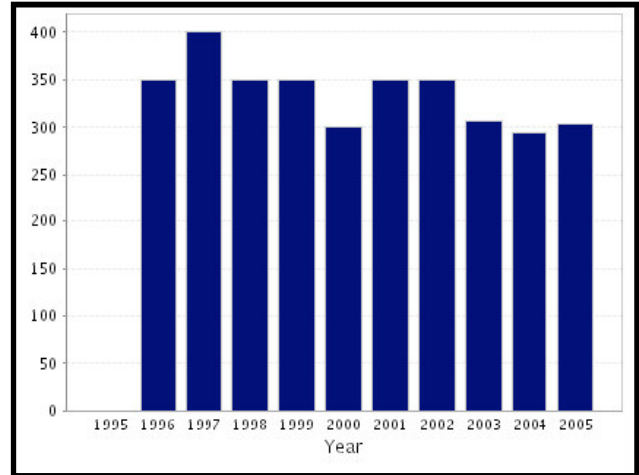
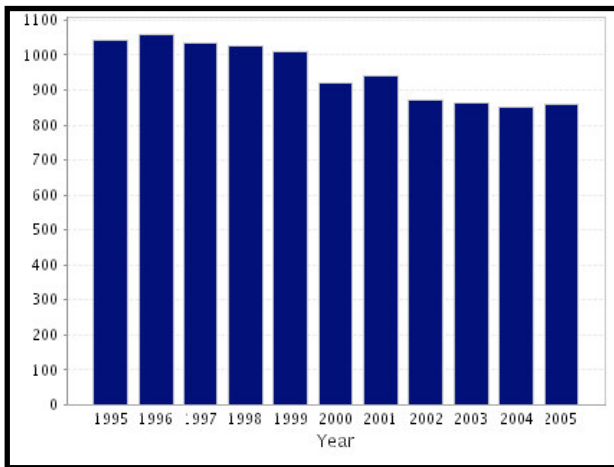
“You’re goin’ to love ‘em once you get to know ‘em.....”

Perhaps this could be said of First United’s congregation, but the problem is that we loose a lot of people before we get to “know ‘em”.

Often there is an initial failure to connect with those who come to worship. Is this due in part to the fact that to join our Coffee Hour most first time visitors would need a treasure map and a lot of determination to find Eversall all..... perhaps? Would we connect more easily if our reception area were immediately outside the sanctuary.... probably? Is there someway to remedy this .....sure. Even for our own membership, is there a failure to gel? Have we made it too easy for our members of our church family to head right back out the door they came in and never connect with others? This gelling factor seems to be something of a crisis for First United. We have a rather large population of visitors and members who fail to make significant connections with other church family members. How can we fulfill our role of the body of Christ if we don’t even share Sunday morning greetings with each other?

## WORSHIP

In the past 10 years, our church has seen both a membership and worship attendance decline as illustrated by the following graphics:



As we look around, we notice there are so many of us who are missing. For many of the adults, their absence is partly due to the crisis of community that was spoken about earlier. We believe there is a different reason at work in the faith development of our children.

I took the membership books and looked at the Confirmation classes of 1991 - 1998 . There were a total of 107 eighth graders who went through confirmation during those years. Of the 107, none are sitting in our pews today. Zero out of 107!

Grant it, some moved. Some got married and joined other churches. But certainly not all 107 of them. We look around at the empty pews in the Sanctuary and ask ourselves. Where are they? We don't know. But one thing is certain. They are not worshipping with us. The reason we believe simple. They never went to worship while they were growing up! We, as a church, never taught them how to worship.

If the shorter catechism is right, our children are growing up without the opportunity to engage in the most important thing we do – to worship God! They are being very well instructed in the faith, but they are also rarely exposed to an encounter with God through worship!

15 years have passed, and we are starting to suffer from the effects of our current model.

*We believe therefore that we are raising a generation of children who really know their Bibles, but do not know how to worship. They are presently growing without worship as a regular part of their lives.*

For our adults, we believe the problem is exactly the opposite.

One of the primary concern expressed at the initial pastor-talks, was the conflict caused by our current worship and Christian education schedule. Some people wanted to volunteer to teach FaithQuest, but did not want to miss our 9:30 worship service – the best attended of the three. Others wanted to go to a regular Sunday School, but would again have to miss out on a traditional worship service in the Sanctuary. There were others who felt they shouldn't have to choose between studying Scripture in an adult Sunday School setting and singing in the choir.

It was easy for us to see that we presently offer very limited opportunities for adult Christian Ed. The majority of our congregation is exposed to Scripture only through what they learn is from sermons... But a sermon is very rarely designed to impart knowledge regarding Scripture. One preaches most of the time for persuasion, and transformation.. and only once in a while for instruction. There are a few groups in our church who gather for Bible study, but the vast majority do so only once a month. This lack of exposure to God's word, makes it very difficult to have any significant spiritual growth. It is important to note that there is great interest in our church for adult Christian Education. Bible Bootcamp rivals Laddie Day's class in size. Since it's first session, we immediately doubled our Sunday morning adult attendance, and the introduction of a new class did not take away any of the people who regularly attend the other.

There is a track of great attendance at bite-sized educational opportunities as evidenced by our studies on Ruth, The A2 church, The DaVinci Code, The Nativity Story.

We believe that DISCIPLESHIP is defined not only in terms of worship... or only study... or only service. Faithful discipleship is a combination of all three.

*We believe therefore that we are a church whose adults are committed to worship and are very interested in studying the Word, but have very limited opportunities to do so.*

## **SPACE**

We are blessed with a Sanctuary that is more than adequate for our worship needs. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of our facilities as they serve our need for Christian education. We believe that when it comes to our educational space, we are full to capacity.

- Presently we have about 100 people involved in our Christian Education Sunday program (not counting toddler or crib rooms)
- We have 3 rooms available for 40 children and their teachers (Vista room, Cine 1, First Expression)
- The stairs are occasionally used as a classroom. While they are indeed beautifully painted with Biblical murals, do not offer seating for more than 20 at a time, and because of the seating surface, cannot be used for more than 20 minutes.
- The stage and multipurpose room are unavailable from May to September due to the lack of climate control during the Summer months.

For Adult Christian Education, we are currently using 2 rooms for 30 adults: the library and Eversull Hall.

Both the library and Eversull Hall present problems of their own, and are not designed for class growth. Take for example what happened a few Sundays ago.

The Preschool held their annual bookfair in the Library, and Laddie Day's adult class had to move to the yellow room – which is used and furnished for 3-4 year old preschoolers.

The other adult class (Bible Bootcamp for Christians) was interrupted by a large group of people coming downstairs for coffee and donuts because the 9:30 worship service finished 5 minutes early. It is very difficult to plan for a class that takes place in a high-traffic area.

*Therefore, we believe that when it comes to our educational space, we are full to capacity.*

## **MISSION**

Weaknesses- We are a congregation that has been richly blessed with a variety of resources both financially and with the talents of our membership. Sharing our faith means reaching out to those beyond the walls of our building. Many of the interviews with church leaders indicated the desire to be more active in reaching out into the community. We have taken part in a number of mission efforts from the dental grants program to adult mission trips. Our youth through senior citizens participate in mission projects, but it is still a small number of our membership. Only about 20 members participate in our adult mission and a few members help serve the monthly meals at the Belleville Christian Center. While we have a few dedicated individuals working very hard for the Abraham Lincoln Neighborhood Association the support from the congregation in general has declined. Most of us could be doing more to feed a world that is hungry both physically and spiritually. We need look at the needs of the world outside of our church and decide how what we can do to share Christ's love. This congregation needs to get more involved in feeding the hungry.

## **LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE**

- The current Leadership structure (Session, Trustees, and Deacons), their existing committee structures and the areas to which they are assigned, may or may not be the most efficient in terms of time and personnel.
- Session, especially, becomes a report receiving committee and a committee of the whole, which leaves it no time for planning and goal setting
- At one time the "Vision Committee" was the planning and goal setting committee, but it has become a money-managing committee, which does not leave any committee doing long-range planning.

# GOALS AND DREAMS

## COMMUNITY

### The Implementation of a church-wide care network

First United is called to “Feed the Hungry”. We are called to feed those within our own faith community, as well as those in the community beyond our walls. One of the means by which this is accomplished is through a strong ministry of caring – a CARE NETWORK. Included in a Care Network are the pastors, professional staff, trained and available to handle congregation emergencies, as well as both the Deacons and Stephen Ministers. A goal for the future is to have available affordable professional counseling as well, for those who are in need of it. The leadership of this Care Network will be the responsibility of the new Associate Pastor.

### The Implementation of a church-wide small group ministry

Under the heading of COMMUNITY, another of our goals and dreams is that of expanding our present Small Group Ministry. It is our dream that everyone in our congregation who desires to, would have the opportunity to be involved in a small group of some kind. These groups would be formed by people with similar interests and needs. Small Group Ministries center around shared interests, fellowship, education, and growing in faith. These small groups could be, but not limited to, Bible studies, or men and women’s “special interest” groups. It might also involve youth and adult sports or fitness groups or small groups interested in activities such as drama, clown ministry, music, or puppetry.

A Small Group Ministry is vital today, in strengthening the bonds of fellowship within a congregation. It helps everyone to have the feeling of belonging, and offers new members, especially, the opportunity to become acquainted and share their interests with new friends. It also provides opportunities for faith to be shared in areas other than Sunday morning worship, Christian Education or service. The Small Group Ministry will be under the leadership of the new Associate Pastor.

## WORSHIP AND EDUCATION

### The Implementation of a new Sunday worship schedule

An overriding theme that developed both during our deliberations and as a prominent response from the congregational questionnaire was a need to allow time on Sunday mornings for people to attend both a worship service and a Christian Educational experience. In response, we propose the following as a new Sunday Morning worship schedule:

- 8:00 – 9:00 Traditional Worship Service in the Chapel
  - 9:00 – 9:15 Coffee fellowship in Eversull Hall
  - 9:15 – 10:15 Sunday school for all ages
  - 10:15 – 10:30 Coffee fellowship in Eversull Hall
  - 10:30 – 11:30 Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary
  - 10:30 – 11:30 Children’s Worship Hour (8 years and under).
- Designed to be the most exciting hour in the child’s week!

### A new Wednesday Night Contemporary Worship and Education Experience

- 5:30 – 6:20 Family fellowship dinner with adults and PYC
- 6:30 – 7:30 Worship and Study Series in the Sanctuary

The above schedules are planned to be instituted in the fall of 2007, as the new school year begins. The primary reason is to allow adequate time for adult Christian education classes to be planned, curriculum developed, and staffed with teachers.

### Building Space / Facilities

As was pointed out earlier in the discussion on weaknesses, we have an issue today with adequate space for Christian education. On Sunday mornings, all of the existing class rooms are full with FaithQuest and Sunday school classes. Classes are meeting in stairwells, and on the stage in the MPR. The current adult CE classes have to share the fellowship hall and meet behind screens and often must cancel classes when a large display or program is running in Eversull Hall (Book Fair, Cookie Walk, special receptions, etc.).

When the new schedule is implemented, many more adults will be involved in CE and the number of classes will expand. We will have to be really creative about our use of existing space. We will have to completely re-look our present use of space, perhaps go into tents or pods on the MPR floor, possibly employ trailers or temporary classrooms outside the building.

No matter how clever we are however, the Team is convinced that soon we will need a new Christian Education Wing to house the proper classrooms for adults as well as children and youth. This new wing would not only allow for the expanded number of classrooms that would be dedicated for that use, but it would also allow First United to expand the Narthex of our Sanctuary to provide a much needed large gathering area. As was pointed out earlier, our current arrangement for the fellowship/coffee hour is difficult to locate for visitors, and is uninviting. Many of our members, let alone visitors, find it easy to come and go without taking the trouble to go down the hall and down the stairs. Modern churches have found that by having a large, warm, inviting, fellowship space as you enter the sanctuary promotes fellowship among parishioners, builds a sense of community and most importantly, promotes a friendly inviting atmosphere for visitors and potential new members.

## **MISSION**

Our dream for this Congregation is more involvement in mission. We hope for more hands-on-mission participation and more support for the mission works of others. We hope to be more active in mission in our community. We need to evaluate needs and creatively match them to the talents of our Congregation.

- Food pantry
- Tutor program for at risk youth
- Mother's day out
- Health screenings
- Senior Day Care
- Living Center for Seniors
- Soup kitchen
- Neighbors for Renewal
- Abraham Lincoln Neighborhood Association

We desire to reach out to hurting world.

- Church sponsored foreign mission trip
- More support for foreign mission work
  - Bibles for the World
  - African Bible College
  - Aids Relief

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Philemon 1:6

All of us could be more active in the field of mission work. We hope that our new associate pastor will work with our Mission Committee to coordinate and encourage additional mission work. We struggle with the option of starting more projects or supporting the work started by others.

## **LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE**

One of the goals is to bring in an Alban Institute consultant to review structure and offer recommendations.

- Why? Because an outside consultant may see things that we are "too close to", thereby opening up ideas to make our structure and our leadership processes more efficient, and more open to God's leadership.
- Furthermore, Proverbs 29:18 states, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." We do not wish to take that literally, of course, but our study book, *Holy Conversations*, indicated that organizations that do not plan to grow, are planning to decline.

## **CLOSING REMARKS RECCOMENDATION**

The Strategic Planning and Implementation team recommends that the session of the First United Presbyterian Church adopts and seeks ways to implement all the goals and dreams in the community, worship and education, mission and leadership areas as stated in the above report.