

# FPC Wilmington Listening Campaign Themes

## May 2020

### Themes that Emerged as We Listened

**Who are we and what do we value?** *What has been true about us over time? What do we want to remain true?*

### SERVING in the name of Jesus Christ

- We want to make a difference through our service to others. We see this most clearly in our mission work, extensive outreach, and opportunities to take us beyond our walls.

This is the most simple and well-defined of our themes. FPC members speak with a great deal of pride about the real, positive impact we make in the community through dozens of local nonprofit partners. We support these partners not only through our financial giving, but also through our many volunteer hours. If there is a challenge to this area of church life, it is that the large number of partner relationships and missions can leave us feeling “spread too thin,” struggling to connect meaningfully in so many different places.

### BELONGING to the community of Jesus Christ

- We create conditions for connection and belonging. In Congregational Care and other ministries of support, we develop and deepen relationships. We have a number of effective small groups, such as circles and bible studies, but wish for more people to experience them. Challenges include navigating the balance between programs and groups that are more close-knit, but potentially insular, with those that are more wide-ranging and permeable, if potentially diffuse. It is also important to remember that participation in programs does not necessarily equal true belonging. People want to feel connected to the whole church and yet embraced by a particular subset. Personal touches are really important and very challenging in this size congregation.

We are a “big tent” church, bringing together people who hold a diversity of political and theological viewpoints. We see ourselves as “providing something for everyone.” Challenges include the possibly diffuse, disconnected feeling of a mission spread too thin. We may also reach capacity issues in terms of dollars, volunteers, and interest level in our many ministries. Also, the various groups create different constituencies within the church, each with a slightly different sense of culture, communication, etc. There is a sense that information is not reaching enough people.

- We hold tradition and change together in creative tension. This is connected to being a church with families who have been here for generations. Our memory is long. We have made steps toward inclusivity and welcoming of LGBTQ community, even as we have more work to do in this arena.

## NURTURING disciples of Jesus Christ

- We nurture faith from the youngest to the oldest. We are a place where multiple generations come together and some families stay for generations. We see cross generational value particularly clearly in confirmation. Youth and children are important to us. Discipleship and formation are important to us. Christian Education is very important to those, of all ages, who participate. We have a great deal of pride in our preschool, which serves as a vital connection to the community and a tool for outreach. Challenges: The emphasis on children and youth sometimes comes from a place of anxiety, wanting to ensure there is a next generation to replace the current congregation. Also, the familiarity that comes with being in a place for multiple generations can also sometimes be mistaken for a lack of welcome to newcomers.
- Music is an important component of faith practice.
  - Our three worship services offer different ways to engage in formation.
- We value storytelling as a means of connection and communication.
  - Good news leads to transformation.
  - There is a variety of means and a diversity of style. Different ways of communicating stories have a different ability to reach different people.
  - Cross-generational storytelling is a powerful means of connecting.

**These become touchstones that help us know who we are. They are guiding principles.**

### **Next Steps for the team:**

What do we notice from this list?

Is it an accurate representation of what you heard?

Are there important pieces missing?

Some key questions:

- Why do we value offering so many programs, so many opportunities?
- Do we ever say communication when we mean participation?
- What kind of **culture** are we trying to create?

## **Background**

### What drove us to do this?

Let's remember the origin of this listening campaign. Two realities:

1. A sense that the Abundant L.I.F.E. priorities need replacing, or at least revising, to speak to the current mission and ministries of FPC.
2. Needed improvements and major maintenance projects around the church require a guiding vision for the ministry, especially if a capital campaign is to be pursued.

### Process:

A team of volunteer facilitators were trained to lead listening sessions in small groups all around the church. The conversations were intended to identify areas of mutual interest and excitement/energy and NOT to generate specific program proposals or complaints. Facilitators were trained to dig deeper into the responses and conversations, seeking to identify the underlying values, feelings, and motivations. Participation was slow at first. Facilitators did not always adequately convey the intended form and purpose of the conversations.

### Who participated?

Nearly 300 people from across the spectrum of FPC, most of them in pre-existing groups like Sunday School classes, choir, circles, etc. Respondents probably skewed toward the older and more involved, the "regulars."

### What we hope happens:

This time of listening helps us to:

- identify who members and friends of our congregation understand us to be,
- have a shared sense of who we are, what energizes us, what we value, and why,
- create ownership of the identity and values so they are explicitly and implicitly woven into our culture, and
- create touchstones we can come back to in strategic visioning and program development.

The **process** of listening helps us to:

- deepen a culture of relationship and connection within the church,
- help one another listen to each other, and in so doing, have greater appreciation for the diversity of perspectives and experiences that make up our congregation, and
- make meaning out of our experience of church.