



seattle first baptist

Long Range Planning Team

Findings and Recommendations
Personal Statements from Team Members

August 1, 2020

Version 1.1

Be Different, Be Bold, Be Better

Introduction

The Long Range Planning Team, made up of six laypersons appointed by the Diaconate (Jim Segaar and Angie Buysse, Co-Chairs, Karin Zaugg Black, Larry Green, Deepty Gulati and Cherry Johnson), has been working since September of 2019 to provide guidance for Seattle First Baptist Church as we make our way into the coming years. We are a diverse group in terms of age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, parental status, spiritual orientation, years of experience with SFBC, and professional expertise. The COVID-19 pandemic, which caused a shelter in place order in March 2020, and is still strongly affecting all aspects of personal and church life, has impacted our work and thinking.

In the early months of our work together, we gathered data not only about the current status of the church (buildings, finances, membership and attendance, personnel, etc.) but also about the neighborhood in which we are situated. We also read as much as we could find about what other churches locally and nationwide have done to remain relevant in this era of church decline so that we could get at least some sense of best practices. In January, at their annual retreat, we guided the church leadership through a series of exercises designed to assist them with discernment about the church's current status and future direction. All of these things informed our thinking.

Our plan was to hold focus groups to gather input from the membership in March and April at the church. However, COVID-19 made that impossible. We were finally able to conduct focus groups in June by using the Zoom teleconferencing platform. One hundred twenty-five members and friends of SFBC each took part in one of a series of 90-minute sessions. We are grateful to all who participated. You all took this task seriously and spoke from your hearts, expressing your concerns and visions for SFBC's future. Your clear dedication to our church and our shared mission and values gave us hope both for this process and our collective future.

So, what have we learned and how has that informed our recommendations? Some opinions were expressed almost universally during the focus groups, and this impacted our thinking, but so did the unique concerns and visions of lone individuals. In addition, we were influenced by what we learned about broader communities – both geographic and spiritual. Finally, our interactions with this team of six very different people as we wrestled with the difficult questions below, caused us to sharpen our thinking as individuals and even to modify opinions as we listened to one another. We are producing the following documents as a result of our work:

- An Executive Summary of our efforts and recommendations (coming soon)
- Findings and Recommendations organized around questions we have sought to answer (this document)
- A Detailed Analysis of input from the Focus Groups (delivered as separate report)
- Personal messages from each of our team members (this document)

We plan to make more detailed information about particular topics (notably, greater detail on focus group input) available to relevant staff or commissions as requested.

Current Context

Our Church

Church membership has been relatively stable for a decade:

- Total membership is approximately 350 members
- 17 more people have joined than died or officially left in that period
- The total does not account for people who moved on “unofficially”

A trend analysis of attendance at Sunday Worship for the last five years produced these findings:

- Overall attendance declined steadily at a rate of about 2% or 5 people per year
- Average attendance over this period was between 175 and 200 people
- If this “before COVID” trend continues, average Sunday worship attendance will be about 125 in 10 years
- In recent months, due to the COVID pandemic, members have been worshipping online. While it is difficult to get exact attendance numbers, online statistics suggest that more people are worshipping online than had been worshipping in person. Additionally, a noticeable number of former members and friends outside the Seattle area are now attending online worship and other online forums.

Based on best estimates from pastors and lay leaders, the current membership can be defined by the following demographics:

- 65% of our members are over 60, and 25% are over 80. 14% are under 40
- The majority of members are female at 61% and Euro (white) at 86%
- A notable number of people identify as part of a cultural or social minority which includes a substantial LGBTQIA+ constituency.

SFBC has been in a relatively strong financial position and over the past five years has maintained a balanced income and expense budget of about \$1.1 million

- However, if adjusted for inflation, overall income would be down by 12% since 2014
- In addition, building use income has been a vital part of the overall income and has helped cover the significant building expenses associated with an aging facility and large campus. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have already lost several tenants, including our largest tenant. It is likely that our building use income will be down substantially for some time.

Annual Income		Annual Expenses	
Foundation Support	\$200,000	Personnel	\$663,000
Pledges/Other Offerings	\$496,500	Church Operations and Building Expenses	\$339,250
Interest	\$90,000	Benevolence	\$81,500
Building Use	\$333,000	Other	\$77,850
Other	\$15,100		
Total	\$1,134,600	Total	\$1,161,600

The three buildings and the land have an assessed value of \$11.4 Million. A recent competitive assessment valued the land at about \$18 Million. A recent seismic study found a number of opportunities for improvement, mostly in the Sanctuary building. The study findings are still being analyzed. A developer has expressed interest in working with SFBC to redevelop a portion of or all of our property.

Our Mission Statement and Values

We are a community of faith united in exploring what it means to follow the way of Jesus Christ, to be a people of God, and to love and care for our neighbors. As a church we will know no circles of exclusion, no boundaries we will not cross, and no loyalties above those which we owe to God.

Affirmation of Values (adopted in 2017)

Faithful to our Baptist heritage, we strive for a world where people are welcomed regardless of, and with respect for, their religious beliefs; where the separation of church and state is vigorously defended; where freedom is a fundamental right that values the dignity of all persons without regard to their race, country of birth, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, or disabilities; and where compassion is the measure of our actions.

- **We will go deeper in faith** as we do justice, love mercy, work for peace and walk humbly with God.
- **We will be present** to one another and our neighbors in our personal relationships and by creating venues for engagement where we can learn about viewpoints different from our own.
- **We will respect all religions** by learning about the beliefs, values and struggles of our neighbors and by demonstrating support for them.
- **We will welcome the stranger**, including immigrants and refugees, as our Scriptures instruct. We will explore how to support their causes and advocate for justice, remembering that many of us are the children of immigrants and refugees.
- **We will actively work to recognize and change our own biases** and to fight racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ageism and other systemic prejudices.

- **We will protect our environment** and support preservation programs that are based on scientific data designed to improve our resources, enhance biodiversity, and reverse human-caused climate change.
- **We affirm these commitments as we continue to follow the way of Jesus Christ.**

Our Community

- First Hill/Capitol Hill urban center defined as E. Mercer Street to the north, 15th Ave to the east, Yesler Way to the south and I-5 to the west
 - 770 acres, 1.2 square miles
- As of 2017, there were over 36,000 people residing in this area (47.43 people per acre)
- 67% identify as white and 33% BIPOC (Including Asian, LatinX, African American , and Indigenous.)
- Median age of population – 32.3 years old
- 22,117 households with average household size of 1.48 people
 - Only 17.7% or 3,920 are living in “family” households
- 22,117 housing units with 17.8% owner occupied
- Median household income was \$54,921
 - Unemployment rate - 3.3%
 - 16.8% of population living below the poverty level

Our World

The decline in membership and influence of mainline Christian churches in the United States is well documented. Following are links to a few of the articles we read about this trend:

Three Decades Ago, America Lost Its Religion. Why?

“Not religious” has become a specific American identity—one that distinguishes secular, liberal whites from the conservative, evangelical right.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/09/atheism-fastest-growing-religion-us/598843/>

When the church you lead is the Titanic

https://baptistnews.com/article/when-the-church-you-lead-is-the-titanic/?fbclid=IwAR2zG8pxf5jMuh76DCE1_tlaI-bXrvEs1gF2gnf6iE_qKW6Ds8BGfzwUu5A#.XZ_v_i2ZPAK

U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>

Washingtonians are less religious than ever, Gallup poll finds

<https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/washingtonians-are-less-religious-than-ever-gallup-poll-finds/>

Churches in the Seattle area provide a number of examples of shrinkage and closures, but also of trying new ideas and finding new energy. Examples are:

First United Methodist – sold their downtown property and redeveloped near Seattle Center. They appear to be declining in attendance and membership.

<https://firstchurchseattle.org/>

First Presbyterian on Madison – closed and property is being redeveloped.

First Congregational Church in Bellevue – sold their downtown property and moved to a different part of downtown Bellevue. Appear to be doing well.

<http://www.fccbellevue.org/>

New Beginnings Christian Fellowship – This church in Kent was begun by people who left Mt. Zion Baptist Church. An Evergreen Association church, it now has about 3,000 members, per the Evergreen Executive Minister, Rev. Doug Avilesbernal.

<https://thenbcf.org/>

Epiphany of Seattle – An Episcopal congregation in Madrona has been successful rejuvenating itself, focusing on Episcopalian tradition and on the beauty of its facility.

<https://www.epiphanyseattle.org/>

Valley and Mountain – This new church was started by United Methodists in Rainier Valley and has plans to expand to Ravenna. They “offer an unconditional invitation to belong, to dive deep, and to co-create a better world with us.”

<https://valleyandmountain.org/>

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on churches all over the world. In the United States, the vast majority of church activity occurs online. Some in-person church activities have become virus “super spreader” events. How long the pandemic will last, and what the future holds for churches, is largely unknown at this time.

Findings and Recommendations

QUESTION #1: Do we believe that we need to make changes in order to thrive, and are we capable of making those changes?

We believe the overwhelming answer to the first part of this question is “YES.” Nearly all participants in the focus groups agreed that we need to make changes if we are to survive, let alone thrive, in the coming years. In fact, when asked how SFBC would be doing ten years from now if we make no changes, 58% of respondents expressed the belief that we would be closed or hanging on by a thread. Almost no one had hope for survival to twenty-five years in the future without making changes. Our planning team strongly agrees with this sentiment. In our research into what other churches have done, we found that churches who maintain the status quo do not survive. We have been lucky enough to have sufficient resources to survive this long, but that will not be the case indefinitely. As one focus group member said, “We need to be bold, courageous, innovative and willing to change.”

Our church is truly in a liminal time, when forces are converging to compel us to make changes. These include:

1. Our lead pastor’s retirement is imminent, and one of our associate pastors has less than 1.5 years left on her contract.
2. COVID-19 has forced us to move activity online, where in some ways attendance and participation is stronger than it was pre-pandemic. We are learning to “do church” in new ways.
3. Our facilities may require significant seismic retrofitting, and we have lost several of our rental tenants. In addition, a developer has shown interest in redeveloping part or all of our property with us.

Regarding our capability as an organization to make the needed changes, the answer is more complicated. We certainly have the will and resources. What we may lack in some areas is the necessary energy, expertise and experience. We must be realistic about how much this aging congregation can take on, and how much we are asking of our pastoral staff.

Recommendations

- Commit to being bold and innovative in the interest of thriving into the future – making significant changes and employing outside professionals in areas where we lack sufficient skills or need someone knowledgeable about best practices and evidence-based approaches.

QUESTION #2: What is our identity?

In the focus groups, it was no surprise to hear opinions and ideas that spanned a wide spectrum of religious traditions and spiritual practice. Participants broadly agreed in some areas, but in others exhibited very different visions and hopes. Less spiritually traditional members expressed

feeling their views were not reflected in worship or other programs. Most of the participants fit into one of three spiritual identity categories:

1. Traditional Christian
2. Progressive Christian
3. Post-Christian, another faith, or spiritual identification outside of or beyond Christianity

Likewise, when it comes to disposition toward change, we see a similar spectrum from those wanting little change to those open to starting anew. Another way to think about information like this is to use archetypes. With regard to the issue of change, we heard at least three archetypes shared:

1. Historic Preservation – people who place a strong value on our collective history and want, as much as possible, to preserve our present form out of the belief that we serve our mission and values well as we are.
2. Evolutionary Change – people who like much of what we have, but favor changes in select areas, both for survival's sake and to be truer to our mission and values.
3. Revolutionary Change – people who are wanting to create something new, something that may not exist yet, in service of our mission and values.

Our team encountered examples of successful churches that fit all three of these archetypes, including (greater detail can be found on their websites):

1. Historic Preservation - Epiphany Parish, Episcopal, in the Madrona neighborhood of Seattle, WA
2. Evolutionary Change – New Beginnings Christian Fellowship, American Baptist, Kent, WA; CrossWalk Community Church, American Baptist-Napa, CA
3. Revolutionary Change –Valley and Mountain Church, United Methodist-Rainier Valley and Ravenna neighborhoods, Seattle, WA; The Church of the Holy Apostles, Episcopal-New York City, NY.

At SFBC, at least for the near future, we would exclude sizable portions of our current congregation if we modeled any one of these identities or archetypes for change exclusively. It is one of our strengths as a church (as well as one of our challenges) that we have managed to mix attributes of all these in recent decades.

One issue related to our identity as a social justice and peace church came up in several focus groups and that is the notion of, as some put it, faith-based or root justice work and as one person called it “faithing.” This is the link between faith and action – involving the study of our tradition’s commitment to peace and justice and how that relates to the stories and texts of Christian tradition. Those who called this out asked for increased opportunities for congregational growth in this area.

Recommendations

- Celebrate our inclusion of traditionalists, evolutionists and revolutionaries in the best ways possible, providing a safe and nurturing space for all, and consistently communicating from the pulpit, in programming, and in online and print publications that we are not monolithic spiritually and that we welcome people wherever they are on their spiritual journeys.
 - Ensure this message is reflected in worship services by including texts, music, readings and speakers from across the spiritual spectrum (including those outside Christianity).
 - Use these standards when considering the dissemination of materials produced outside of SFBC.
- Increase opportunities for learning, reflection and discourse regarding the links between faith and action related to social justice and peace. Focus on action as the goal, as many members pointed out that we tend to be more comfortable intellectualizing than “showing up.”

QUESTION #3: How should we “do church” in the future?

In the focus groups, it was very obvious that we place a strong value on the concept of community. Many talked about valuing time spent with fellow congregants and lamented how infrequently this happens not only in the time COVID-19 but also more and more in recent years when the church has been open – because traffic congestion, parking problems, and other barriers limit time spent at the church facility. It is also clear that we prize radical inclusivity and the concept of soul freedom, as is evident in the spectrum of our spiritual leanings and religious beliefs outlined above.

We believe that the church should strive for a balance of ideas and traditions in all communal activities. We also should expand opportunities for the learning and practice of contemplative spirituality. As one member said “This provides the centeredness, energy and inspiration needed for doing social justice work.”

In the focus groups, we heard a strong call for a small group ministry. The call for an array of small affinity groups was endorsed by more than 80% of focus group participants. Moving to this kind of programming would necessitate fewer trips to the church building because most could be held online or in homes. Most could be lay-led. In addition, they would provide the potential for all members to experience a greater sense of belonging and to get spiritual growth, educational, and social needs met as well as making connections by geographic area and being able to connect with others for social justice work. They would necessitate fewer trips to First Hill, thus being aligned with our value of protecting the environment. One focus group had several members excited at the idea of a group doing an “intense theological conversation about the relevance of Christianity in today’s society.” One person wanted a group for mothers, another a group for international members. Many focus group members lamented the cliquishness at SFBC as well as deficits in our ability to be welcoming to newcomers – both of which could be mitigated by small group programming. This type of programming would be a way of living up to our value of being present to one another and to our goal of being radically

inclusive. Individual groups could be held at times workable for its members, and this kind of scheduling flexibility would benefit everyone from working parents to isolated seniors. Furthermore, it was suggested by some that having small groups available would be a strong outreach tool, specifically a way to outreach to young adults who have been moved to Seattle by local tech companies and who are isolated and lonely and needing a sense of “family.” There were members who expressed interest in being involved in leadership with such a ministry.

Using adult education as an example, SFBC could do all of the following:

1. Historic Preservation – have Bible study and opportunities to learn about and celebrate our Baptist heritage.
2. Evolutionary Change – gather together for book studies and other forms of education about comparative religions, and how we can work together to serve our world. (This group might include some visits to other faith communities or some social justice actions.)
3. Revolutionary Change – offer opportunities for “seekers” to share ideas and explore together.

We recognize that such a program will require coordination. Perhaps a Companis volunteer could be brought on staff to coordinate this ministry.

Our team wrestled with ways to meet diverse worship needs (addressed to some extent in Question #2 – What is our identity?). We also discussed at length whether there were ways to reduce the percentage of our budget that goes toward the 11am hour on Sunday mornings. We looked at the model Temple Bet Alef uses of worshipping once a month and on high holidays rather than every week. We are not making specific recommendations on this topic.

Recommendations

- Create a small group ministries program with lay leadership, professionally coordinated by non-clergy staff, perhaps a Companis volunteer. These groups, the number of which would be fluid, would tend to congregational needs such as spiritual growth and development, education, special interests, support for special populations, neighborhood connections, social justice study and action, and other needs as they arise.

QUESTION #4: What barriers hinder our visions?

What is a strength to one person is often an obstacle to another. That being said, we believe that some parts of our heritage at SFBC present significant obstacles both from within and outside the walls of the church. We believe such barriers must be addressed. These include:

Church Building/Facilities

The Face of “Welcome” at SFBC, our sanctuary building, looks like an “old Baptist church.” It suggests stiff and formal more than warm and welcoming. We believe that to provide a welcoming presence we need to overcome that appearance as much as possible. Current use of banners and signage is helpful and should be continued. One focus group member urged us to “place a marker on our property acknowledging we’re on Duwamish land.”

Welcome also includes providing easy access to our facility. We currently fail to do this in several ways: easy ADA access to all activities and parts of the church, adequate parking or other transportation options, and an inviting street presence. This is especially concerning given the fact that the vast majority of our members are seniors.

Recommendations:

- Consistently use welcoming signage, banners and the like on the outside of our building. Consider an acknowledgment of the Duwamish people.
- Prioritize accessibility in all its forms in SFBC buildings.
- (Further recommendations regarding the building/facilities below.)

Systemic Racism

As one focus group member wrote “Because of COVID-19 and the protests following the death of George Floyd, we find ourselves in a liminal time -- when dreams and visions are born and we have the time to pay attention to them. These global crises are inextricably linked to our call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God -- and to the future of SFBC in ways we could not have imagined six months ago. Let's use this moment in time as an opportunity to move SFBC forward in the service of our justice mission.” And to this, we say “Amen.” As another member put it, “We need to center the issue of race and assign enough resources to really become an anti-racist church!” As a white culture church, we have for years considered ourselves to be “kind” and “good” and therefore having nothing to do with racism. We now know this to be faulty thinking. It was clear from the responses of racial and ethnic minority members in focus groups that most or all have experienced varying degrees of isolation and personal harm at SFBC due to systemic and personal racism. It is clearly the time for us as a church to “show up” and commit to the hard work of changing ourselves as individuals and as an institution in order to be relevant and welcoming to ALL and in order to grow more fully into our mission and values. This will be hard work, but as one focus group member said, “SFBC has done this kind of thing before – with LGBT issues and with AIDS. We can do it again.”

Recommendations

- Create a broad-based initiative with the goal of becoming an anti-racist church.
 - Appoint a guiding team
 - Complete a thorough audit of all aspects of church life, identifying the impacts of systemic racism
 - Create and execute a comprehensive plan for dismantling systemic racism at SFBC and for being a consistent anti-racism presence in the greater community.

Economic Disparities

In addition to being a “white culture” at SFBC, our culture is also upper middle class. We would question whether the makeup of the congregation still leans toward economic privilege as much as it once did, but it is apparent from stories told in the focus groups that there are some in the congregation who have felt shame or isolation related to their lack of resources.

Recommendations

- In all aspects of church life, increase awareness of economic disparities and increase efforts to ensure the dignity and full inclusion of those in our midst who are economically-disadvantaged.

Music

SFBC has a long tradition of using a hymnal and performing predominantly classical, European music written by white men in our services. Some of us love that. For many, this is a barrier to full participation in worship or to inviting others to give SFBC a try. We want to acknowledge that steps have been taken in the past to make our music more inclusive, especially with regard to masculine pronouns and militaristic language to describe God. However, much work still lies before us. One focus group member posed this question which we find particularly important: “Is our music serving the choir or the congregation?” Many members called for an increase in music that reflects our multicultural congregation (though not necessarily sung solely by our majority white choir). Calls were also made for musical collaboration and exchanges, especially with other churches in the Evergreen Association. Younger adults called for more contemporary music. Others called for an array of styles from gospel to folk to contemporary Christian. Some admitted to loving the classical repertoire and expressed hope it would not be abandoned completely. Many expressed a desire for music that moved them, made them want to get up and dance or clap or go out and change the world. The topic of music is one that universally brought out responses in the focus groups and on our team. Like everything else, this highlights the cultural diversity of our congregation.

Recommendations

- Revitalize our music selection and include music that is more reflective of our multicultural congregation and a broad spectrum of ages, musical interests and beliefs.

Name of the Church

From information provided in the focus groups, it is clear that some of our members joined because they had positive connections with American Baptist tradition and were specifically looking for a Baptist church. However, many others were put off by that word “Baptist” in our name, and had to be convinced that it was safe to attend SFBC. “Baptist” has extremely negative connotations for many people today – especially progressive Seattleites. When asked what deters them from inviting others to SFBC, 24% of focus group members responded that the word “Baptist” is a hurdle too difficult to jump for people in their lives they might otherwise invite. As an exercise, we “googled” the word “Baptist” and the first page or two of results were quite revealing. It is no wonder people do not flock to our church -- even when we explain we are “not THAT kind of Baptist.”

It is important to note that we are not suggesting distancing ourselves from Baptist principles or disaffiliating with the American Baptist denomination or the Evergreen Association. We are speaking only of the name of the church, in the interest of helping the greater community know who we truly are.

Recommendations:

- Change the name of SFBC to something which better communicates the fulness of who we are and whom we welcome. Affiliations with American Baptist Churches and the Evergreen Association would remain as would the valuing of Baptist principles and heritage within the church.

Question #5: Are we being good stewards of our collective resources?

Many of us remember a time when our average attendance was much higher than it is today. Regardless of what we recall, the fact remains that we have a smaller membership today, though in the current urban church environment, SFBC would be considered a medium-sized congregation with more resources than most. Our land and investments are worth more than \$20 million. We receive more than half of our income from sources other than congregational giving, although with the impact of COVID-19, much or all of our rental income is in jeopardy. It is important to note that pledges, offerings and gifts are substantially lacking in terms of meeting budgetary requirements, and we rely on that rental income to keep us afloat. A recent financial analysis calculated that we spend about 70% of our budget on maintaining our facilities and funding personnel and internal programs and services, while only 30% goes to serving the broader community.

Focus group members overwhelmingly supported our values of being present to our neighbors and of doing social justice work. Many members expressed the desire for more ways to be of service and endorsed some form of outreach to our neighbors as critical to survival. Many were enthusiastic in their visions about being of service in our community. Calls were made for greater collaboration with community groups and Evergreen partners who share our values. One member, reflecting on the 70% internal expenditure vs. 30% external put it this way: "Let's flip that!" As another said, "Jesus didn't say 'Build a church and worry about the parking lot!'"

This is clearly a process ... this aspirational desire to share a greater percentage of our resources with our neighbors. ... this following the Way of Jesus. The shift will have to happen one decision at a time over the coming years. It will happen when members and friends step up to provide leadership that takes some of the load off of our pastoral staff, and it will happen when the rest of us embrace that lay leadership. It will happen when programs that could have increased internal expense go online and instead reduce expense. It will happen as we discern what to do with our facilities which currently add considerable cost to our internal expenses. It will happen as we all embrace greater accountability and develop the discipline of measuring every decision against our values. It will happen because our mission is out there in the community and so is any hope for growth.

Recommendations

- Gradually shift our priorities, consciously focusing on sharing a higher percentage of our resources with those in need in our community as we make decisions about facilities, staffing, programs, and giving. Measure our decisions against the imperative to increase

outreach to our community and our value of serving our neighbors and working for justice.

- “Right size” our facilities to reduce the financial burden of maintaining them. (See Section 9 below regarding this.)

Question #6: What is the future of the online ministry?

In the early stages of our work together, this team talked about the need for more of an online presence and how that could enlarge our membership beyond the walls of the church. Little did we know a public health crisis would force the church’s hand on this. The COVID pandemic forced SFBC and other churches to move our worship services and any programming online. Our staff has done an exemplary job of adjusting to this new reality. We agree with many participants in the focus groups that our online ministry must continue even when it becomes safe to once again meet in person.

During this time, we also have experienced the “digital divide.” Some people are unable to access online worship or other activities effectively or at all. Some people lack the equipment or connectivity required. With others it is a matter of knowing how. It is notable that a member of our team coached several members at their homes, helping them access online programs, to great success (and appreciation). We cannot assume people are unable to learn these skills.

On the other hand, our online activities have been joined by a number of people who used to attend SFBC and have moved away. Other people who live outside the Seattle area have been introduced to our church online. And some of our current members have enjoyed participating online from locations other than Seattle. We believe that online ministry provides a significant opportunity for SFBC to reach people anywhere who need our message.

Recommendations

- Once in-person activities at the church buildings resume:
 - Continue to provide online worship. The exact form and means of doing this remain to be determined.
 - Continue to offer other programming online.
 - Expand the number and variety of small, special-interest and support groups sponsored by the church, primarily online. (See recommendations listed under #3 above - How should we “do church” in the future“?)
- Implement an effort to reduce the digital divide. This could include providing equipment or network access, configuring equipment for people, and providing one-on-one technical support and education. We encourage the tech-savvy among us to volunteer their efforts.
- Leverage our online ministry to build a “global” congregation. Recognize our beyond-Seattle members in our publications and during worship and other activities. Embrace the concept of distance membership.

Question #7: What about “growing” the SFBC community?

In the focus groups it became obvious that the majority of participants believe we must attract new members and friends in order to survive and thrive in the future. Many, however, had thoughts about doing this differently than would have been done a generation or two ago. As one person said “We need to invite our neighbors for something THEY want.” In another group, someone put it this way: “Meet a need and they will come.”

Many expressed a desire for our congregation to attract more young adults and young families to our congregation. It was clear from those who participated in the Young Adults Focus Group that, in accordance with our literature survey, “church” and Christianity are not only a stretch, but an alienating factor, for a large proportion of progressive young adults within and outside our church. We therefore see a need to listen deeply to young adults – not just those in our membership, but also those who have left our church or who never came. We cannot expect to attract young adults if we do not know who they are and what they do and do not need. Furthermore, we need to do this listening without any expectation that they will then “join” us. It is also important to note that in recent years there has been significant improvement in SFBC’s work with children, youth, young adults and parents. Creative programming is revitalizing service to this segment of our congregation. This needs to continue, and any efforts to outreach to children, youth, families and young adults in the community who would benefit from these services should be encouraged and resourced.

Several young adults and parents of young families in the focus groups asked that we consider changing the time of our worship service and/or provide the option of a second service to better serve the needs of younger members. Parents of young children spoke of the benefit of a 9:30 service for families, who could then leave church with a lot of Sunday left for family time. Many other focus group members offered the idea of a second service to focus on a particular style of worship such as contemporary or traditional or folk or contemplative, so it is not only younger adults who are hoping to get their needs met with a worship alternative. One option would be to have these specially-focused services held on a rotational basis and less frequently than weekly. Clearly, there would have to be a strong lay leadership component since we are not suggesting shifting more resources to worship or further burdening pastoral staff.

A number of group members called for us to focus on attracting more racial and ethnic minority members, while others (not the least of which were those in the Cultural Minorities Focus Group) called for us to focus on improving our welcome and inclusivity for those minorities already in our midst and to change ourselves before we can think about being attractive to others.

SFBC has a history of active support of the LGBTQIA+ community. However, several focus group members called out the need to address shortcomings in our welcome of transgender and non-binary persons, while others had creative suggestions for outreach to compatible segments of the local LGBTQIA+ community.

It is also important that we not just look at the aging of our congregation as a deficit. We are familiar with “doing church” with seniors. As several focus group members pointed out, this is

one of our strengths and may beg the question: “Why not outreach to neighborhood seniors?” Currently the vast majority of our congregation are seniors, and yet this group has no dedicated pastor and insufficient programs designed to meet their needs. We must ensure the needs of this group are met, especially the most isolated among them. This might require a group of trained volunteers and would benefit from the addition of a Companis volunteer or other qualified volunteer to coordinate the program. With these further services in place, outreach to seniors could be worth considering.

All of these issues are complex with numerous related barriers. However, if the mission of the church is to serve our neighbors, we must commit to making the necessary changes within ourselves and the church in order to live out that mission. We must ensure that young adults, children, youth and families, ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTQIA+ neighbors, seniors and others see themselves in our church, including in leadership roles. Whether that will “grow” our church remains to be seen, but we believe that if we fail to make needed changes, there will definitely be no growth.

Recommendations

- Create opportunities for deep listening to young adults – both in our church and in the broader community. Offer programs that appeal to them.
- Continue our active support and outreach to the LGBTQIA+ community, with renewed focus on the needs of transgender and non-binary persons.
- Modify our worship, music and programs to be more relevant to and more effectively reflect the multicultural and age-diverse congregation we have now. (See recommendation in Section #1 above)
- Consider changing the time of our worship service and/or provide the option of a second service to better meet the needs expressed above.

Question #8: How do we Communicate who we are and what we are doing?

Internal Communications

Many focus group members talked about lacking the information needed to fully participate in church programs or social justice activities. For some this was a matter of finding our website and/or Facebook page difficult to navigate; for others, it was about finding the needed information lacking. Either way, if people don't know what's going on, they will not show up. People also talked about not knowing there was a weekly email update, not understanding how to navigate the website calendar to get information about specific events, and other such barriers. Some talked about finding Facebook confusing (the digital divide again).

External Communications or “Marketing”

In the process of researching what other churches are doing, our team looked at a lot of church websites which do a far better job than SFBC at making it easy to discover who they are, what they value, and what they are doing in their churches and in the world. This kind of online presence is essential to any church hoping to do effective outreach. For SFBC, traffic to our

public website has dropped substantially, while we have been focused on private communications within the congregation (Spire and weekly e-mails, private Facebook page). Telling people about SFBC is not a luxury. It is a necessity if we are to survive. External Communications, also known as Evangelism, also known as Marketing, should be treated as a ministry rather than a cost center to be managed.

The burden of communicating who we are and what we are doing today falls almost exclusively to paid staff. If we are to improve our capabilities in this arena, we need to leverage volunteer expertise from within and outside the church (Companis comes to mind again). Members of our community have considerable expertise in areas such as technology and marketing, and we need to make better use of their talents. We may also need paid professional help in areas that we do not have sufficient expertise.

Recommendations

- Establish a taskforce or committee to provide guidance, expertise, and assistance relating to technology, communications, and marketing.
 - Improve our communications within the SFBC family, understanding the different needs of people of varying ages and technical expertise, with the goal being that any member of the congregation be able to find any needed information with ease.
 - Increase our focus and investment on communications/marketing to the broader community, including our website and public social media presence.

Question #9: What should we do regarding our facilities?

The focus groups reinforced the fact that our current facilities have a number of strengths and challenges.

Strengths include:

1. A beautiful, historic sanctuary with excellent acoustics, which is deeply loved by many.
2. Other buildings have provided significant income in recent years, as well as a home for our pastor and his spouse.
3. We have been able to provide support to nonprofit agencies, including Companis, by providing office space at lower than market rates.

Challenges include:

1. Our facilities, especially the sanctuary building, are not environmentally responsible. Our utilities usage is extremely high and our carbon footprint is in serious conflict with our stated value of protecting the environment.
2. The sanctuary building has extremely poor access for people with mobility, sight and hearing impairments.
3. The sanctuary building also has serious egress safety barriers.
4. Temperature control in our buildings is terrible to the extent of being unhealthy.
5. Our buildings, most particularly the sanctuary, have seismic deficiencies that will be extremely costly to mitigate.

6. Our sanctuary is much too large for our current needs, which negatively impacts the goal of creating a sense of community.
7. Our sanctuary is set up for a more authoritarian worship style which is not in alignment with our beliefs and values. Pastors and choir are raised above the congregation. Furthermore, the stairs to get to the pulpit and choir levels are safety barriers. Pews are immovable which limits worship style. The congregation faces the one, rather than the many.
8. We own no parking, and do not provide other means of transporting people to the church (with the exception of the Hilltop van on Sundays). Off-campus parking options present further economic, mobility and safety barriers.
9. The church buildings are a hodgepodge, and difficult for newcomers to navigate.
10. Facilities for children are awkwardly located and include spaces with no windows.
11. We have substantial space that is inefficiently used, hard to access, and in some cases in a state of disrepair.
12. The curb appeal of our buildings is a negative to many people, especially younger people, the economically disadvantaged, and those with mobility impairments.

If we are to provide a safe environment, and to thrive in the future, we must do significant modification to our facilities. This could include extensive remodeling or replacing some or all of our buildings. We know that developers exist who are interested in working with SFBC to enhance our facilities while simultaneously meeting other community needs.

Many questions arise out of these realities. One focus group member asked, “Does our love for our beautiful building unnecessarily impact our decision-making?” And another implored “Don’t think of our buildings in the long-term. Think survival and whether they meet those needs.” One questioned whether pouring such a large percentage of our budget into our buildings is consistent with the Way of Jesus we seek to follow. Finally, someone asked “Do we want buildings that fit our values or do we want to try to fit our values to our buildings?” To this last question, our team heartily believes that our values come first and our facilities should follow.

It is imperative that we understand that responsibility for our facilities belongs to the entire congregation, not to small groups (often exclusively of white males) working with little or no congregational visibility. Care must be taken to assist the congregation in dealing with the understandable grief that comes with any significant change to beloved facilities. It is important to note that in focus groups in which some members spoke eloquently in favor of redevelopment – expressing visions of green buildings and the ability to offer the community a gathering place for both faith activities and social justice organizing (to say nothing of parking and possible low income housing) - other members were clearly inspired. We believe that while this conversation will be difficult for the congregation, that they too will come to stand on the side of downsizing, putting more of our resources into supporting our mission, and protecting the environment – all while giving ourselves a source of income for the future, a community-friendly space, greater latitude for living our values, and a place to park!

With regard to this issue, we are reminded of Isaiah 43: 18-19 (Inclusive Version)

*Forget the events of the past, ignore the things of long ago!
Look, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth -- can't you see it?
I'm making a road in the desert
and setting rivers to flow in the wasteland.*

Recommendations

- Form a facilities task force consisting of members who reflect our church community. This group will be responsible for guiding the work of determining and addressing our future facilities needs based on our program plans, and by working with developers or others to identify options, and involving and listening to the congregation and leadership throughout the process.

Question #10: What changes to our pastoral team should we consider?

Input during the focus groups proves that we love and deeply value our current pastoral team. Change in the short term is inevitable, however. Lead Pastor Dr. Tim Phillips has told us that his retirement is imminent. Dr. Patricia Hunter, Pastor for Education and Outreach, is about one-third of the way through a two-year contract. We want Rev. Anita Peebles, Pastor for Next Gen Ministries, to stay with us for many years, but we can't take her for granted.

Then there are the considerations beyond what we wish or want. What will we be able to afford? What do we need? We are spending a significant percentage of our budget on personnel. Do we continue to endorse that priority? Along those lines, the high cost of living in Seattle and the decreasing ratio of congregational giving to personnel costs are limiting factors. Also, we know from research that the age, sex and ethnicity of the pastoral staff is a major factor in determining the makeup of the congregation, so these things are important considerations. We need, too, to be aware of changes in the job market for pastors, and a shrinking number of people entering that profession. Finally, given the recommendations in this document, we must ask what shifts in staffing will be necessary in the future?

We also must consider skills and expertise that future pastors need to succeed in our ever-changing world. This includes fresh ideas, technology and other skills, and a broad social media presence.

Recommendations

- The Diaconate should designate a team to work closely with Pastor Tim to plan for his transition into retirement and the onboarding of a new Lead Pastor at SFBC. This conversation and cooperation needs to begin now. We recommend that the Search Committee be familiar with this report, and that the contents of this report be shared with pastoral candidates as appropriate.
- We must ensure our pastoral staff reflects the congregation's desire for diversity in pastoral leadership, including age, sex, sexuality, and race/ethnicity. We recommend that we seek a younger lead pastor than has been our practice in the past, and that we prioritize seeking qualified female and/or BIPOC and/or transgender candidates.

- We must study the feasibility of utilizing skilled volunteers from the congregation for some staff functions and continue to leverage Companis to help meet some of our program and staffing needs.

Question #11: Are adjustments needed in our Governance Model?

Our commission-based governance model is defined in our bylaws and worked well when the church was larger, allowing and encouraging many people to be involved in church governance. Conversely, in recent years we have had difficulty filling all open positions. The model is also complex, making it difficult to understand where to go with a particular challenge or idea. We need a simpler model that still allows for and encourages congregational involvement but is more appropriate for our current size and allows flexibility for the future.

From the responses of focus group members, it is clear that members who have not been involved on a commission or the Diaconate are largely uninformed about church governance. Some creative suggestions were made for a completely new governance model such as one based on spiritual discernment, or one based on a caucus system. While a complete overhaul of how we make decisions could be beneficial, we feel that at this time given the major decisions and personnel changes that are in our near future, it is not the right time. However, revisiting such suggestions down the road is warranted.

In addition, the SFBC bylaws contain language no longer reflective of our values and congregation. For instance, they require “professing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior” in order to become a member. While this is desirable to some, it is not representative of many, and we believe that any such restriction is antithetical to Baptist principles.

Recommendations

- Revise the bylaws by appointing a person to edit the bylaws as follows and presenting the changes for approval at the next congregational meeting:
 - While maintaining officers and the Diaconate, a committee for Personnel and one for Stewardship/Finance, remove all other commissions from the bylaws.
 - Replace the commission structure with committees and task forces, appointed as needed by the Diaconate. Open committee membership to active non-members. These groups would be established as needed and dissolved when their work is accomplished or no longer necessary, providing opportunities for people to serve for shorter, defined timeframes to accomplish a specific task(s).
 - Remove any language from the bylaws which places religious litmus tests for membership or participation

Next Steps

Following is a summary of our recommendations, grouped into three categories:

- **Immediate Priorities** must be undertaken within 2-6 months.
- **Other Recommendations** should be undertaken as we have capacity.
- **Guiding Principles** provide guidance across our communal life. These are the measuring tools against which all recommended work and all SFBC programs, services and activities should be planned and accomplished.

We offer these recommendations to the Diaconate to accept or reject, prioritize further, and implement.

Immediate Priorities

We believe recommendations in this category should be addressed immediately. None of them are quick fixes, but they are critical to the future of the church and need to be set in motion right away.

- Create a small group ministries program with lay leadership, professionally coordinated by non-clergy staff, perhaps a Companis volunteer. These groups, the number of which would be fluid, would tend to congregational needs such as spiritual growth and development, education, special interests, support for special populations, neighborhood connections, social justice study and action, and other needs as they arise. (Section 3)
- Create a broad-based initiative with the goal of becoming an anti-racist church.
 - Appoint a guiding team
 - Complete a thorough audit of all aspects of church life, identifying the impacts of systemic racism
 - Create and execute a comprehensive plan for dismantling systemic racism at SFBC and for being a consistent anti-racism presence in the greater community.
 - (Section 4)
- Form a facilities task force consisting of a membership that reflects our church community. This group will be responsible for guiding the work of addressing our future facilities needs by determining our facility needs based on our program plans, working with developers or others to identify options, and involving and listening to the congregation and leadership throughout the process. (Section 9)
- The Diaconate should designate a team to work closely with Pastor Tim to plan for his transition into retirement and SFBC's transition to a new Lead Pastor. This conversation and cooperation needs to begin now. (Section 10)

Other Recommendations

- Change the name of SFBC to something which better communicates the fulness of who we are and whom we welcome. Affiliations with American Baptist Churches and the Evergreen Association would remain as would the valuing of Baptist principles and heritage within the church. (Section 4)
- Implement an effort to reduce the digital divide. This could include providing equipment or network access, configuring equipment for people, and providing one-on-one technical support and education. We encourage the tech-savvy among us to volunteer their efforts. (Section 6)
- Modify our worship, music and programs to be more relevant to and more effectively reflect the multicultural and age-diverse congregation we have now. (See recommendation in Section #1 above) (Section 7)
- Create opportunities for deep listening to young adults – both in our church and in the broader community. Offer programs that appeal to them. (Section 7)
- Consider changing the time of our worship service and/or provide the option of a second service to better meet the needs expressed above. (Section 7)
- Establish a taskforce or committee to provide guidance and expertise relating to technology, communications, and marketing. (Section 8)
 - Improve our communications within the SFBC family, understanding the different needs of people of varying ages and technical expertise, with the goal being that any member of the congregation be able to find any needed information with ease. (Section 8)
 - Increase our focus and investment on communications/marketing to the broader community, including our website and public social media presence. (Section 8)
- We must study the feasibility of utilizing skilled volunteers from the congregation for some staff functions and continue to leverage Companis to help meet some of our program and staffing needs. (Section 10)
- Revise the bylaws by appointing a person to edit the bylaws as follows and presenting the changes for approval at the next congregational meeting:
 - While maintaining officers and the Diaconate, a committee for Personnel and one for Stewardship/Finance, remove all other commissions from the bylaws.
 - Replace the commission structure with committees and task forces, appointed as needed by the Diaconate. Open committee membership to active non-members. These groups would be established as needed and dissolved when their work is accomplished or no longer necessary, providing opportunities for people to serve for shorter, defined timeframes to accomplish a specific task(s).

- Remove any language from the bylaws which places religious litmus tests for membership or participation. (Section 11)

Guiding Principles

- Commit to being bold and innovative in the interest of thriving into the future – making significant changes and employing outside professionals in areas where we lack sufficient skills or need someone knowledgeable about best practices and evidence-based approaches. (Section 1)
- Celebrate our inclusion of traditionalists, evolutionists and revolutionaries in the best ways possible, providing a safe and nurturing space for all, and consistently communicating from the pulpit, in programming, and in online and print publications that we are not monolithic spiritually and that we welcome people wherever they are on their spiritual journeys.
 - Ensure this message is reflected in worship services by including texts, music, readings and speakers from across the spiritual spectrum (including those outside Christianity).
 - Apply these standards to publications produced outside SFBC that we distribute. (Section 2)
- Increase opportunities for learning, reflection and discourse regarding the links between faith and action related to social justice and peace. However, make sure action is the goal, as many members pointed out that we tend to be more comfortable intellectualizing than “showing up.” (Section 2)
- Consistently use welcoming signage, banners and the like on the outside of our building. Consider an acknowledgment of the Duwamish people. (Section 4)
- Prioritize accessibility in all its forms in SFBC buildings. (Section 4)
- In all aspects of church life, increase awareness of economic disparities and increase efforts to ensure the dignity and full inclusion of those in our midst who are economically-disadvantaged. (Section 4)
- Revitalize our music selection and include music that is more reflective of our multicultural congregation and a broad spectrum of ages, musical interests and beliefs. (Section 4)
- Gradually shift our priorities, consciously focusing on sharing a higher percentage of our resources with those in need in our community as we make decisions about facilities, staffing, programs, and giving. Measure our decisions against the imperative to increase outreach to our community and our value of serving our neighbors and working for justice. (Section 5)

- “Right size” our facilities to reduce the financial burden of maintaining them. (See Section 9 below regarding this.) (Section 5)
- Once in-person activities at the church buildings resume:
 - Continue to provide online worship. The exact form and means of doing this remain to be determined.
 - Continue to offer other programming online.
 - Expand the number and variety of small, special-interest and support groups sponsored by the church, primarily online. (See recommendations listed under #3 above - How should we “do church” in the future“?)
 - (Section 6)
- Leverage our online ministry to build a “global” congregation. Recognize our beyond-Seattle members in our publications and during worship and other activities. Embrace the concept of distance membership. (Section 6)
- Continue our active support and outreach to the LGBTQIA+ community, with renewed focus on the needs of transgender and non-binary persons. (Section 7)
- We must ensure our pastoral staff remains as diverse as possible by age, sex, sexuality, and race/ethnicity. We should strongly consider hiring a younger lead pastor than has been our practice in the past. Many believe it is past time for a female lead pastor. (Section 10)