

Summary of Four First Church Listening Sessions: January 2025

Sunday, January 5, 2025

How do priorities set in 2020 resonate today?

2020 Priorities

- Sunday Worship
- Racial and Social Justice
- Outreach and Service
- Desire for the intimacy of small group gatherings
- Family Ministries

Sunday Worship

- Helps me stay connected to church and being able to tune in online is wonderful
- I look forward to Sunday worship because we could hear what is happening in the world. The Church is part of something bigger than we are.... should be a non-polarizing voice. We need to continue to be invited to share how we feel about issues.
- We have only one Service.... Sundays should not be the only time we get together.

Racial and Social Justice

- Has been integral to us historically and it is crucial to keep that vibrant, alive, and relevant. Since 2020 we have integrated land acknowledgement, reparations, anti-racist church. We have acted both locally and globally.
- American Truth Tellers....one of the efforts that changed our posture vis a vis social Justice.
- The church allows me to be proactive. I do not just come to church and leave. We get to know one another and then go out into the world together. I want to be in a Living church where we are all together in being a part of the healing of the world and where people feel safe.

Family Ministries

- There are fewer children than there used to be
- Family ministry has subsided since before the Pandemic

Outreach and Service

- Does this include Pastoral Care?
- What would invite new people into our church? Why do people leave our church?

- How do we thoughtfully engage with new people? How do we give them passive/noncommittal ways to be involved, help people find their own way into the church? When they come on Sunday, how do we engage them the rest of the week?

Desire for Intimacy of Small Group Gatherings

- Invite everyone to share their pain; make sure everyone is invited and feels included.

What do the 2020 priorities leave out?

- Reach out more to those who do not articulate their views with regularity. Make sure that everyone has a voice
- Specific opportunities for spiritual growth; for example, opportunity to compare Christianity to other forms of finding God; Bible study
- I do not want us to forget that we are a feminist church...we need to grow in our dynamism in terms of gender/binary/cultural/spiritual backgrounds. Will help us expand our idea of spirituality.
- We need more creativity in the way we connect with each other to build trust, to find ways to increase trust and getting to know each other. Circles enable us to feel safer and more open to sharing.
- This is one of the most historically significant churches in North America. Let us continue to bring the past alive through a critical lens.

How the context in which the church operates has shifted:

- How are foundational pillars changing?
- What we counted on in the past is not there: environment and democracy.
- There is a sense of urgency and fear during these times: who are we as a church in a world that is more uncertain?
- How can the church be a sanctuary amid large societal changes?

Financial sustainability

- How do we live within our means? I am concerned about our physical plant and what it costs us. This relates to membership: is there a concerted effort to increase membership to reach out to other populations?
- How do we envision our building? How else do we use our Church? How do we make it a living building? How do we leverage the resources we have to be the church we want to be?
- Staffing: important to develop a staffing model that the Church can consistently support
- Membership: what are the implications of significantly growing our membership?

- Community, pastoral support...and other questions. There are models for Church growth that show that growing beyond 400 (where FCC is now) has an impact on how the Church is organized/operates.

Sunday, January 12, 2025 (10:00 a.m. session)

How do priorities set in 2020 resonate today?

2020 Priorities

- Sunday Worship
 - Racial and Social Justice
 - Outreach and Service
 - Desire for the intimacy of small group gatherings
 - Family Ministries
- As new members, these priorities are exactly why we're here. Each is equally important to us. Without one of those, FCC would not be what it is.
 - Priorities are broad umbrellas. Sunday worship might look different to each of us. How do we bring in details for each priority? Maybe the Discovery Team can help us understand exactly what we mean by each priority.

Sunday Worship

- What are the possibilities of poetry and song as ways of engaging outside of Sunday service. Poetry is important as a way of exploring where the world is. We've shared artwork.... why not song and poetry? Use other forms than Sunday worship to express engagement. Nurture arts and music.

Racial and Social Justice

- One of our objectives 5 years ago was to hire a senior minister of color. This might help diversify our congregation. We can be anti-racist and predominantly white. Are we emotionally ready to have a senior minister of color? It is important vis a vis our place in the community
- The national racial reckoning has helped us look inward on this issue.
- Reflecting on racial justice is particularly important. It will lead to action, but reflection must precede action.

Outreach and Service

- Where is the explicit mention of individual/private pastoral care? Dan did a lot of that and it was invisible. It is a lot of work and the most important force in one's life when one needs it.

- We have a cadre of community ministers in our congregation. They can be of help in pastoral care.
- The pandemic helped us be more intentional about how we care for each other.
- Membership is part of outreach. Membership relates to each priority. I want to know more as far as where we have been and where we are going. Who is our membership in terms of diversity/life stages/families with small kids? What are we doing to grow our membership?

Desire for Intimacy of Small Group Gatherings

- Adding music/poetry/art to our worship might create more opportunities for small group gatherings.

What do the 2020 priorities leave out?

- Where is Christianity? Is there anything here that cannot be applied to another religious body? 'Afflict the comfortable; comfort the afflicted.'
- We are robust enough to support multiple retreats.... women's, family, men's.
- There are approximately 80 people who join us online each Sunday. We are not building community with them. Could we help online participants partake in the service rather than just watching? How do we involve those who are joining us digitally?
- Our community is one that genuinely welcomes people at all stages of faith and life. We encourage questions, doubt as well as robust faith. We can create opportunities for these conversations in small groups as well as Sunday worship.
- Accessibility issue: audible clarity is a problem for some in the sanctuary

Why are we part of First Church?

- I feel fed; get sustenance from coming to Church, being in community with other people.
- I'm a potted plant and I need to be watered every week.
- I feel welcome no matter what my beliefs
- This is a community of faith
- I feel known here and I want my son to feel known here
- Reflection, restoration, and connection
- The community feeds me deep inside
- Inclusion/better fit/community in action
- We aren't afraid of the tough questions; we much better than many churches at being willing to grapple with the challenging questions.
- An intentionally loving community
- Choir/music
- Wherever you are is ok

Sunday, January 12, 2025 (12:20 p.m. session)

How are each of us feeling at this point in the transition?

- Getting together
- Smooth (2)
- Engagement
- Hopeful (3)
- Curious
- Novel
- Steady (2)
- Grateful (2)
- Memory provoking
- Thoughtful
- Optimistic
- Heartened
- Open
- Interested
- Anticipating with joy
- Strong
- Safe
- Secure

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- All these priorities are what I was looking for in 2020. What do people want to be showing up now?
 - We have done a lot for our priorities in the last 5 years. What's next? What is still moving? What has stalled?

Sunday Worship

- Does Sunday worship capture continuous learning for our spiritual journey?

Racial and Social Justice

- These priorities are what makes the Church. There are many ways for the Church to achieve racial and social justice. It is complicated.
- Working on reparations is one way that we have created more relationships with other congregations. As has the Refugee Ministry.
- How do we achieve the priority of diversity/anti racism in our membership? We need a deeper conversation on how to move on each of these priorities.

Family Ministries

- Is this the first listening session that has provided childcare? We are not welcoming to single parent families; I've lost opportunities to engage because we don't structure things so that these parents can participate. Sometimes we think we are better at families than we are. It is very hard to be a single parent at First Church. If we get better, it could increase our diversity.
- A multi generational church strengthens our sustainability.

Outreach and Service

- Pastoral work is not visible except when you need it.
- We need to nurture pastoral work. New members, new leadership need to support pastoral care with new people. The commitment to participate is unique in our church. We need to continue to welcome and nourish participation. This brings inspiration and vitality to the Church.
- Our Church has changed the way we do ministry since 2020. We used to be all about DOING. We've started to slow down and listen. The way we do things has changed a lot. Getting to do more WITH rather than FOR.
- Don't want to get wrapped up in marketing too much to increase our membership.

Desire for Intimacy of Small Group Gatherings

- Small groups helped bring me into the Church. That's why I'm here.... because of how that group embraced and supported me. What are the needs of new people?
- Small groups continue to be very important. Can we expand small group gatherings to build a stronger sense of community and belonging?

What do the 2020 priorities leave out?

- The Church has strengthened its community internally. Being a Christian activist means working with other congregations in an ecumenical way. We can't address all the suffering on our own. Our priorities should include working in partnership/collaborations.

- Education not mentioned in our priorities. It is worthy of its own mention.
- I really miss women's retreats. I wonder how women can be brought together. Where is the women's breakfast? Can we revive our pilgrimages down south and to El Salvador? Those trips added to our community.
- Earth and Environmental Justice should be highlighted along with Racial and Social Justice.

How the context in which the church operates has shifted:

- In this political climate, it is important to be in a community who is discerning what it means to be a Christian in this time and place. Is it good to be out of synch with the rest of the world at this time. It is important that we seek to discern in a different way.

Financial sustainability

- We need to move 'live within our means' into a priority. I get anxious about not living within our means. Otherwise, everything else will be compromised. We've demonstrated that we're good at letting go (cockerel). Don't make financial sustainability a guard rail; rather something that we're excited about. This relates to membership. The younger generation is ambitious about issues of sustainability.

Thursday, January 30, 2025 (Zoom session)

How are each of us feeling at this point in the transition?

- Discernment individually and collectively
- Thinking through hopes, values, expectations, opportunities
- Learning (2)
- Anticipation and joy in the present
- Encouraged
- Hopeful
- Wonder (2) at the process and being beautifully held
- Curiosity and excitement
- Listening is a privilege
- Adventurous and excited
- Reflective and silent
- Hopeful

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Sunday Worship

- Church allows us a safe space that is different from any other activities that I do in the week. I need sermons that help me go deeper spiritually.
- Transition of music director is in our future. Music has always been an important part of the Church. It should be an element of the settled pastor's job description. It will be a huge transition for us. There has been, in the long ago past, controversy about the music director/compensation. Music has divided the Church.
- The services are too long.... routinely 80 minutes. This is a marketing and strategic issue for the church. Sermons, announcements, and prayers are too long. A fourth hymn has been added. Services need to be run more tightly. *(NOTE: this comment was not made at the Zoom meeting but offline to Martha).*

Outreach and Service

Desire for Intimacy and Small Group Gatherings

- Organized for Care is an intentional volunteer group that commits to visiting people who would like to be visited (ongoing or short term). This relates to intimacy question, the opportunity to establish a friendship that a person has not imagined in the past. Do we need a staff member to organize this, or can it be congregation led?

Family Ministries

- What does this mean? Does it mean the kids are important to our Church? That intergenerational ministry is important.
- It is a particularly important part of how the Church will grow.
- As one whose children are grown, I never cross over with young families.
- What is connection between "Intimacy of Small Groups" and "Family Ministries?"
- We are clearer about outward looking efforts and less clear about inward looking/sustaining connections. What do we need in our lives?
- We are a great Church that sends us outward, but people come to Church because of one-to-one connections. Hopefully, we can coach people to develop these connections more intentionally.
- We need to train more Pauline Fennels - 'I miss the cookie lady who would call and ask me to bring cookies.'

- How do we pay attention to the deepening of relationships across the board? It is tempting to focus on a programmatic approach. In our ongoing programs, can we audit as to how we are deepening our relationships with one another and with God? It is not a good idea to enclose the deepening of relationships into a small group container.
- We need to facilitate/invite/encourage more intimate gatherings.
- People are burned out.... are we doing enough to take care of ourselves?

Sustaining Ourselves Financially

- What is the balance between the staff and the congregation? Can we manage more as a congregation?
- FCC has not given enough emphasis as to how we sustain ourselves. This depends on the resources we have/how many members we have and how committed they are in terms of time, money, and effort. This should be one of our TOP PRIORITIES.
- What about our real estate? Things are falling apart. We should be more concerned as a Church that our buildings are well taken care of. It does not feel like we, as a community, are committed to taking care of it. The Parsonage is not the pride and joy of the Church. The cost of facilities is a huge burden to congregations.... this is a challenge and an opportunity. We need to position our real estate as an asset, not a liability.
- What should we do with the Parsonage?
- Finances are a big issue. I worry that the Church will become condominiums.

Why do you come to First Church?

- Social justice keeps me coming as well as the friends I have made. What are we doing for each other? And how is it being done? I have been empowered to do whatever I want to do (Women's Book Group, Women's Retreat), but I do not think that is the experience of everyone.

How do you feel about this discovery process?

- Yearning (3)
- Solidarity
- Intimate connection
- Hopeful
- Communication
- Ranking of priorities/dilemmas
- Transition
- More music
- Hope
- Encompassing

- Deepening of relationships with each other and with God.