



Synopsis of the Faith Forward Discovery Phase Report

Introduction

The report from Leighton Ford Ministries (LFM) is complete on the Discovery Phase of our Faith Forward initiative. The report contains a level of detail you would expect from a nearly 50-page document. It includes statistical analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data compiled over a six-month period from the congregation and pastors. LFM gathered advanced church documentation and abundant data via a strength assessment tool, interviews, focus groups, written surveys, and demographic analysis of our membership. The full report is available by request through the church office. This document is a summary of the report's key themes that emerged from the findings.

The State of Our Church – The Highs and Lows

Our church is fundamentally sound. In fact, LFM reports that First Presbyterian Church (FPC) is among the strongest and healthiest Presbyterian churches with which they have worked. We have a complementary pastoral staff and have the characteristics of a healthy church as reflected by LFM's long-term data compilation. The strengths of FPC as perceived by our congregation include our use and care for our buildings, the stewardship of our finances, and the communication and management of our ministries.

At the same time, however, on a number of important strategic elements our congregation's impressions are less compatible with LFM's observations of thriving churches: clear sense of vision and direction, outreach, learning/education, and tolerance for change. LFM asserts that our focus on the components of maintaining our church's building and resources -- though important -- is out of balance with our fundamental commitment to our mission. LFM recommends a rebalance as key to the future health of our church.

LFM suggests, as we learned from the results of the Vital Congregations Initiative, that FPC is in the maturity phase of the development/decline continuum, where systems and processes are going relatively smoothly. However, it is precisely this comfort zone (status quo) that often breeds organizational lethargy and erodes a focus on our mission. This can result in resistance to change, which can become a precursor to decline. We are in an enviable position, however, to boldly and actively reimagine our current focus to avoid such an outcome. We should preserve our values and mission but change our vision and strategy.

Key Findings from the Clifton StrengthFinders Assessment Tool

Pastors Aaron and Erin have similar core talents that are complementary in how they make decisions, as well as motivate and drive personal and professional relationships.

Key Findings from the Transforming Church Insight (TCI) Survey

LFM compared the TCI survey from our church against some 11 million records in its database to ascertain how FPC members' perceived strengths and weaknesses compared to thriving churches in the national database. From a composite standpoint, FPC ranked higher than 56% of the churches in the database.

FPC members ranked the following as strengths compared to the national database: Finance (84th percentile); Building (81st percentile); Involvement (76th percentile); Implementation (Management) (74th percentile).

FPC members ranked the following as challenges compared to the national database: Outreach/Local Evangelism and Missions (33rd percentile); Relationships (38th percentile); Learning/Spiritual Growth (39th percentile); Vision (40th percentile); and Families (41st percentile).

Key Findings from the Focus Groups

Focus group information is observational by nature and often not fully reflective of the sentiments of the entire congregation. However, focus group comments can provide additional insight into the information gathered from the TCI Survey and the StrengthFinders Assessment Tool.

Many positive aspects of our church were mentioned in our focus groups such as excellent buildings to support programs; successful streaming services; a welcoming church community; and strong pastoral leadership.

On the other hand, there emerged a desire for better organizational clarity and pathways for involvement, especially for newcomers and younger members; a need to revitalize youth and Christian Education programming; a desire to make the church more accessible to families with busy schedules; the need for mentoring and succession planning; and the necessity to reach out more to our community.

Moving Forward

The results of the Discovery Report will be the foundation for the Visioning Phase, which will commence at the end of September and continue with collaborative retreats in the fall and winter. Determining the future direction of our church will be the imperative of the Vision Team: What must we preserve? What must we change to be a thriving church? It will be among the most important work of our church since its founding.