



First Presbyterian Church – Joliet, IL
Mission Study Report
December 2023

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PREFACE

After the departure of their tenured pastor, to call a new pastor, a Presbyterian Church PC(USA) must first conduct a Mission Study. This is a time of reflection where the church assesses its situation and adjusts to prepare itself for its next season of ministry. With this new direction and a renewed spirit, it calls and installs a new pastor.

Our goal in the following pages is a portrait, as clear as we are able, of where we have been, where we are today, and where, with God in Spirit leading us, we can and need to go in the future. It is our hope that this Mission Study Report will help all understand FPJ's values, the situation(s) it finds itself in, current and future prospects for growth, and identifies hopes and dreams for the future that the Session in partnership with the pastor(s), along with lay leadership and assistants, can transform into reality.

We need to thank Pastors Roy Backus, Bo Mircea, and Carrie Kapral for their endorsements and insights, the FPJ staff for marketing and advertising, and the 178 from our congregation that thoughtfully filled out the United States Congregational Survey (USCMS) surveys. Without their individual participation, none of this corporate audit would be possible. Christianity is both an individual and corporate endeavor.

Our hope is that the Session, the congregation, and the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) will use these findings as a resource to build on the many blessings God has bestowed on First Presbyterian Church, Joliet, IL. We look forward to the new things God will accomplish through us. We believe in the potential of the people gathered here at FPJ. We believe we have been situated to grow in our services in a variety of ways to Christ. We optimistically look forward in our journey of faith.

In Christ,

The Pastor Nominating Committee:

Bernie Blaser

David Church

Lisa Haldorson-Diaz

Jen Gabl

Jill Mueller

Jeff Pritz

Craig Randolph

Clarence Red

Ed Schultz

Helen Steinberg

INTRODUCTION

Bidding farewell to a long-time pastor is not easy. For better and worse, pastors and church members form and shape one another with the passage of time.

After 32 years, Rev. Dr. Craig Herr retired from FPJ. In May 2022, after some now realized missteps, a Pastor Nominating Committee was appointed. Since that time, it has struggled with how to gather input from the congregants to gain clarity in its core values and those that shape FPJ into what we are and hope to be. In collecting said inputs for this audit, more, but not complete, understanding has been gained.

After a marketing campaign, we began the collection of surveys on Sunday, March 19th, 2023, both in on-line and paper forms. For comparison's sake, ourselves versus the community in which we live (Joliet, IL) data was obtained from the US Census website. The survey's closing date for completion was Mother's Day, Sunday, May 14th, 2023.

The USCMS, put out by the Research Services of PC(USA) is a comprehensive, yet concise, survey of all ministerial areas of concern. Through it, several themes established themselves. These should be referenced by the session to assist FPJ going forward with or without the installation of any new pastor(s).

As you work your way through these pages, it is our hope the Holy Spirit reinvigorates your commitment to our church. We must have a spirit of openness to new and different ways to minister. This attitude will strengthen and mature us as followers of Christ Jesus.

This report is well supported by documents and data in the appendices. These supports are the Calling Process, the Survey Administration, the role of the PNC, the 5 Areas of Ministerial Concerns, Financial Findings, PC(USA) Research Services Delivered Data, Methods for Open Question Analysis, Church Size Theory, PC(USA) Book of Order Outline, and the FPJ Congregational Leadership and Staffing, and Financial Red Flags. If you are interested in reading about any of these appendices, contact the church office. Our overarching goal is to openly and honestly ([Luke 8:16-17](#)) educate and motivate.

FPJ has been richly endowed with abilities and gifts for ministry. We simply must take hold and apply what we have ([Ex. 35:30-35](#), [Deut. 1:1-8](#), [Jer. 11:1-8](#), [Rom. 12:3-8](#), [1 Cor. 4:7-8](#), [1 Pet. 4:7-11](#)). These should be leveraged to their full extent. To give ourselves more completely, we need to strengthen our internal relationships, mature our faith, and increase our impact in the community we serve.

We are ready, even eager, to meet all challenges with the growth that comes from their meeting. Needed is stronger bonds between ourselves. With this strengthening, and God's Grace, we will then be enabled to turn outward and better serve our community and the world.

CHURCH HISTORY

1866 – 1890. On August 3rd, 1866 First Presbyterian Church, Joliet, Illinois was organized by the Reverend JH Thowbridge of Chicago at the home of HN Marsh. Among the 28 founding members was early Will County historian George H. Woodruff. The first service was held at the Will County courthouse. For a time, services continued, free of charge, at the courthouse. Music was led by way of a mobile, bellow driven cottage pipe organ. FPJ was placed under the jurisdiction of the Chicago Presbytery.

In April of 1867, a lot for the first church building was purchased for \$283 at the corner of Western and Broadway. Preliminary construction was completed, and the new building was dedicated to the Almighty LORD on December 22, 1867. The total cost of the enterprise was just under \$9000.

As Joliet grew, so did FPJ's congregation. In February of 1873, the newly installed Reverend James McLeod voluntarily reduced his salary from \$1600 to \$1200 due to economic challenges. The next pastor called, in September of 1877, the Reverend TA Gunn, came on board with a yearly salary of \$1000.

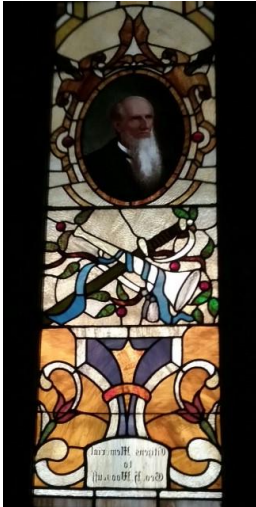
By 1890, the church building had nearly doubled in size. For the sanctuary, a pipe organ was purchased and installed.

1913 – 1993. In 1913, the lot for the present building, west a bit from the original, on the corner of Western and Raynor was purchased. Construction of the new building was delayed due to the conclusion of World War I.

In 1924, a building fund drive was completed. It yielded \$150,000 in pledges. On June 21, 1925, the last member living from the original 28 in 1866, FE Marsh's shovel broke the earth to initiate construction.



The English Tudor Gothic style building was completed in 1926 at a total cost of \$180,000. Joliet limestone was employed for the exterior walls. The side of the sanctuary was adorned with the memorial windows from the previous building.



In 1959, the education building – office space, classrooms, and Hoffman (Fellowship) Hall, in honor of Pastor Dr. AW Hoffman (1918 – 1953), was appended to the existing building at a cost of \$250,000.

1965-1966 saw the layout of the sanctuary reverse, placing the altar on the east wall. This wall was endowed with a stained-glass window, designed by the then pastor Reverend RW Gibson, Jr., and dedicated to the Glory of God on April 17, 1966.

Restoration and the addition of ranks was made to the pipe organ in 1992.



1994–1995 brought major building renovations. These renovations included upgrades to the roofs, windows, wall coverings, HVAC systems, carpeting, lighting, rooms, drinking fountains and parking places at a total cost of \$1.7 million. Following a three-year fund-raising campaign the \$800,000 10 year mortgage was paid off ahead of schedule, after 7 or 8 years.

2005 brought the installation of an elevator, just inside of the outside doors facing Western Avenue, to the second floor of the education building. 29 parking spaces were added to the parking lot on Western Ave.

In 2017, First Presbyterian celebrated its 150th Anniversary with a special worship service followed by a luncheon at the Jacob Henry Mansion. There were several hundred people in attendance, including some former pastors.

In 2018, Hoffman Hall underwent updating and redecorating.

In 2021, the main restrooms on the first and second floors were redecorated and improved.

MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS

Taken from the website is a brief history and description of the church for the 125th Anniversary in 1992. Included was a listing of the previous pastors in the years in which they served. Also included were summaries of the activities of the ministries and councils. These will serve as a baseline of comparison against what is happening now.

Mission Council

1992. Chaired by Elaine Griffin. The areas, 14, of activities included the Joliet Area Organized Body (JACOB), Habitat for Humanity, the Will/Grundy Medical Clinic, MorningStar Mission, Groundwork, Meals on Wheels, HELP Food Pantry, Lambsfold, Salvation Army, Sheltering Arms, Daybreak, Adelante, AIDS Ministry of Illinois, and Amnesty international. Some of the monies to support these came from antique and estate sales.



The council also oversaw church space use for a variety of not-for-profit organizations – AA, ACOA, Incest Survivors, Gamblers Anonymous, Tough Love, and Overeaters Anonymous.

2023. The areas, 23, of activities include MorningStar Mission, Will-Grundy Medical Clinic, Groundwork, Meals on Wheels, Salvation Army, Daybreak Shelter, Angel House, Habitat for Humanity, Mendenhall Ministries, Synod, Theological Education, Blackhawk Presbytery, General Assembly – Local/Int'l. Relief, Micro Pantry, Through the pastor's Fund, Farragut School, Water Within, Blood Drives, Project Linus, HELPS, Inc., and PC(USA) Relief Funds.

Although no longer overseen by the Mission Council, a variety of organizations still use the First Pres. facilities including GA, TOPS, Girl Scouts, and Community Services Council.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have died down but it is still having its effects on the church and neighborhood communities.

Night Deacons

1992. The Night Deacons provided Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets for needy families, maintained a food pantry at the church, and met other needs as required.

2023. The Night Deacons are responsible for ushering at worship services and host coffee fellowship on Sunday mornings. They also service free monthly community Pancake Breakfasts, meal deliveries to our shut-ins, serve at and support various local food pantries, run the Summer Lunch Program, and host the Palm Sunday and Christmas Breakfasts.

Day Deacons

1992. The Day Deacons maintain nursery care during worship, are “greeters” and visit shut-ins and nursing homes.

2023. The Day Deacons visit and call shut-ins and support ministries for the homebound such as Helping Hands. The Sunshine Committee sends “sympathy” and “get well” cards to church members. They also host the annual churchwide Maundy Thursday Dinner. It is serviced by just 5 members; it is chartered for 12.

Parish Council

1992. Chaired by Joyce Miner. The areas of concern, 6, included Stephen Ministries, Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment (ACME), the annual women's retreat, “Mothers of Young Children,” and Presbyterian Women in the Congregation (PWC). The PWC was active in the annual Fall Style Show and the “Cookie Walk” before Christmas, and a variety of luncheon programs throughout the year. PWC met monthly for fellowship, prayer, study, and discussions.

2023. Chaired by Kris Hayden. Events that took place under their leadership include a *Water Within* community concert, an outing to a Joliet Slammers baseball game, Back to Church Sunday Picnic, Craft & Vendor Fair with 42 vendors, Stars of Hope providing Christmas gifts for local needy families, Stephen Ministry, and the newly formed Oasis Women's Ministry. This new venture has brought women of the church together for planned mission, learning, and fellowship events.



Music Ministry

1992. Under the direction of Marth Sayles, the ministry was composed of Chancel (adult), Youth (6th-12th grades), Choristers (2nd-5th grades), and Cherub (4 years old-1st grade) choirs. In 1971, the English handbell Choir was formed after long-time member, Glen Evans, donated the bells in memory of his wife Lucille.

First Presbyterian has always believed our LORD can be powerfully worshiped through music. Music is an earnest expression of one's faith.

2023. Under the direction of Ken Myers is the Chancel (adult) Choir which performs during worship September-May. Kristina Wilson heads the Worship Band which is part of weekly Sunday morning worship service. The Glory Ringers Handbell Choir, under the direction of Susan Pemble, performs monthly in the fall, winter, and spring during worship services. Under the direction of Sarah Randolph, a children's musical was given – *Who, What, When, Where, Why?* in April.

Adult Education

1992. First Presbyterian Church values Christian education and seeks to provide avenues, 7, to increase one's knowledge of God's Word. Adult courses are offered in the fall, winter, and spring during the Sunday School hour, and on Sunday and Wednesday evenings. Each of these studies are Bible related and led by either pastors or laity.

On Wednesday mornings an adult Bible study was led by Rev. Shedenhelm based on the common lectionary series.

2023. Adult Sunday School Bible Study is offered before worship on the featured scriptures of the service. Midweek Family Nights offer adult Bible study to all that are interested in after the meal.

Children and Youth

1992. First Presbyterian Church offers classes and programs for children and youth of all ages. For the fall, winter, and spring during worship hour, the following.

Nursery (infants to 2 years old) – provided.

Preschool Children (3 to 5 years old) – for Bible stories, songs, and arts & crafts.

Children's Worship (K to 5th grade) – prepare children for worship in the Reformed tradition.

During Sunday School hour, from (10-11 AM), classes employ curriculum in Reformed beliefs, tailored for ages 2 to the 12th grade.

Junior and Senior High groups meet on Sunday evenings for Bible study, worship, discussions, food and activities. These activities included retreats and mission trips.

Confirmation classes (7th and 8th grades) begin in January and conclude in April. The confirmands share their statements of faith with the Session before they are confirmed by the entire congregation in June.

Vacation Bible School (VBS) is held in June for children aged 3 through the 5th grade. The themed week is filled with Bible study, singing, learning, art projects, recreation, and refreshments.

The RAFTERS programs run through the summer for grade school children. Two to four field trips are run to enable the youngster to experience and explore the natural world God has given us.

2023. Nursery care is offered for kids 2 and under.

Children's Worship (3 to 5th grade) is held every Sunday during the worship service and includes Bible stories, songs, and arts & crafts and helps prepare children for worship in the reformed tradition.

Matt and Laura Pritz maintained the Youth program while a director was not on staff. A Director of Children and Youth Ministry has recently been hired. The confirmation program is currently run by one of the pastors.



Events serviced include the Easter Egg Hunt, Vacation Bible School (VBS), Trunk ‘n Treat, and Midweek Family Nights.



Fellowship

1992. Opportunities exist for members to enjoy, grow in their faith, and simply enjoy one another. Small groups – “Saturday Night Gang,” Sociables,” “Adult Fellowship,” “Men’s Breakfast Group,” “Dinner Bells,” and all church dinners were the main offerings. Other, less formal, ministries existed for prayer, study, covenant, and serendipity groups. These are designed for people to further their spiritual growth and grow friendships.

Sunday morning coffee and fellowship in Hoffman Hall is a time set aside between worship services to encourage informal fellowship.

2023. Midweek Family Night is an opportunity for dinner, children, and adult time together. Sunday morning coffee and conversation remains a mainstay in Hoffman Hall after worship. The Dinner Out Group has resumed following a hiatus due to COVID and Why 30, a new group to foster fellowship among young adults is just getting underway. Additional small group opportunities exist through PraiseYoga, Project Linus, and Centering Prayer. Parish Council also offers many opportunities for fellowship (as referenced above).

FPJ TODAY

Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Total Membership	707	698	698	690	680	528
Average Attendance	194	184	164	152 live/ 449 on- line	75 live/ 200 on- line	89 live/ 182 on- line
Total Average Attendance	194	184	164	601	275	271

Background Information of Worshippers

- Of those who completed the survey, 52 % are over age 65, 34% are 36-65, 8% are 26-35 and 6% are 18-25. (Q18). US Census, Joliet, IL – under 18 27.3%, over 65+ 9.9%.
- Females (62%) outnumber males (38%) here by nearly 2 to 1, no other gender varieties were recorded (Q19). US Census, Joliet, IL – 50.2% women.
- 96% of respondents are White. Our congregation has only a few Asians (1%), African Americans (2%), and Hispanics (1%). We have no representation at all of those from the Middle East or who are Native Americans. US Census, Joliet, IL – 44.9% White Alone, 17.1% African Americans Alone, .7% American Indians Alone, 1.8% Asians Alone, 33.8% Latino Alone, 7.6% Two or More Races.
- 58% of households are a couple only, 13% are a couple with children, 3% single adult with children, 7% live with extended family, 2% have roommates, and 175 live alone. (Q21). US Census, Joliet, IL – Persons per household 2.98. Language other than English spoken at home – 28.8%.
- 51% are retired, 32% work full time, 12% work part-time, 4% are self-employed, 2% are full-time homemakers, 2% are students, and 1% are stay-at-home parents. (Q24).
- The education level at FPJ is elevated. 34% have a Bachelor's degree, 29% Master's degree, 14% Associate degree, 14% high school diploma, 6% doctorate or professional degree, and 4% have a trade certificate. (Q22). US Census, Joliet, IL – High School Graduate or higher – 84.3%, Bachelor's Degree or higher – 24.5%.
- 1 in 10 have household income (pre-tax) levels of \$49,999 or less. 9 in 10 household are above \$50K. 1 in 10 are over \$200K (Q23). US Census, Joliet, IL – Median household income - \$77,373, Per capita income - \$33,390.
- We lean moderate to conservative in what we believe about ourselves politically with 51% being more on the conservative side, 38% more on the moderate side, and 18% more on the liberal side (Q25, Q26). Theologically, we are 42% more on the conservative side, 37% more on the moderate side, and 21% more on the liberal side.

CHARACTERISTICS & VALUES

Beginning in January 2023, members and regular attendees were invited to participate in the USCMS. The survey was comprised of questions requiring a choice response, forced ranking responses, “other” write-in responses, and open “write-in” opinion responses. A total of 178 responders participated. The results, from the Research Services of PC(USA), are summarized under the titles of the surveys following.

Our Life of Faith

Over 70% of our congregation strongly feels God’s presence and applies their faith in everyday living (Q1a, b, c, d).

78% believe salvation is only available to followers of Jesus Christ. (Q2a).

54% believe the Bible should not be reinterpreted according to changing circumstances, 19% neutral, 18% disagree, 9% strongly disagree. (Q2b, d)

96% of our congregation believes everyone is loved by God (Q2c)

A solid majority (62.4%) believe that people choose Jesus as their Savior, 16.2% believe God saves everyone, 13.9% believe God choose who is to be saved through Jesus, and 4.6% believe the idea that salvation is an outdated concept.

Open comments (60) about our own spiritual and theological beliefs are varied in their subject areas. The biggest number (16) is termed “Seeker.” These Christians are engaged in struggles to further and mature their faith. Next largest (13) “Good Works,” related and not related to their own salvation. Recall, Jesus’ ministry, while on earth was one of “Good Works.” Others cited “Evangelism” (3), “Reformed Believers” (4), “Grace” (4), and “God is Love” (3) (B1).

Caring for Our Generations

The satisfaction levels in our congregation are shown on the following chart

Ages	Stage In Life	Not Satisfied %	Somewhat Satisfied %	Satisfied %	Very Satisfied %
0-11	Child	14	25	26	11
12-18	Youth	25	20	23	7
19-25	Young Adult	30	24	13	4
26-40	Middle Aged Adult	18	26	27	6
41-64	Older Adult	10	24	38	7
65+	Senior Citizen	6	26	40	12

General satisfaction is indicated. The level is related to their stage in life (C1).

The following chart shows the number of people in a household versus those in said household that attend FPJ

Ages	Stage In Life	# In Household	# To FPJ
0-11	Child	23	21
12-18	Youth	7	5
19-25	Young Adult	22	12
26-40	Middle Aged Adult	36	26
41-64	Older Adult	90	64
65+	Senior Citizen	161	146

It's not surprising that FPJ splits some households, either between another church or not attending anywhere. For a solid majority of households, they all attend worship at FPJ, at least occasionally.



9 in 10 believe our children and youth are valued and worked into the life of our church (C4a, b, c). 9 in 10, at least, believe Senior Citizens are gaining in their spiritual development, that their opinions matter, and are provided opportunities to involve themselves in the ministries of our church (C4d, e, f).

You and Your Congregation

The highlights of how we compare ourselves amongst others in our congregation are as follows:

- 9 in 10 that attend worship services are members (Q10).
- 9 in 10 have been coming for 6 years or more; 51% for 30 years or longer (Q11).
- Roughly half have served as an elder or deacon in their past. The other half have never served. About 10% responding to the survey are staff, Christian educators, or past/current clergy (Q13).

- Only 1 in 5 (16%) say their involvement is increasing, leaving 48% staying the same and 36% decreasing.
- 9 in 10 give less than a tithe – 10% before taxes.
- 60% attend worship two or more times monthly. 40% attend once or less a month (Q16).
- Work (22%), health (21%), family (17%), and travel (19%) were cited as the top reasons for not being able to attend worship service. Other reasons for not attending service were – lack of interest (11%), distance (10%), transportation (3%), none of the above (25%), and other (15%).

Our Church

The reasons folk were originally attracted towards FPJ is expressed in the chart below...

By Selections	Attribute
1	Sunday Worship in General
2	The People
3	Children & Youth Programming
4	Music Programming
5	The Preaching
6	The Welcome I Received
7	Fellowship Opportunities & Hospitalities
8	I Grew Up Here
9	Theological Viewpoints
10	Missions & Outreach
11	Adult Christian Education
12	Volunteering Opportunities
13	Social Justice Opportunities
14	Other

There were 30 “Other” comments posted. The attractions are related to the pastor (4), new to area (4), building (6), and family (6) (Q4).

44% feel positive energy levels, 33% neutral, and 23% disagree. (Q6a, c). However, 72% find church activities and functions for the community personally meaningful (Q6b). 1% believe that nothing can be done to improve our situation(s) (Q6d).

Open comments (85) were recorded regarding what members and attendees like, some say love, most about FPJ in 33 subject areas. Most popular is “Fellowship” (26) we enjoy between one another, closely followed by “Music” (21) of all our varieties – Contemporary, Traditional, Choral, Bells, and Organ and the “Worship” (17) service generally. Lesser

numbers include “Building” (6), “Caring for Joliet” (8), a feeling of “Belonging” (6), “Youth Groups” (8), and “Preaching” (9). Those with numerical strength agree with the previous chart (B2).

89 open comments were recorded regarding what members and attendees do not care for at FPJ in 50 subject areas. The highest response number was “Cliques” (17), next was “Worship” (12) followed by “Change” (11), “Youth Programs” (11) and “Contemporary Music” (7). The smallest response was “All Good” (6).

Financials

Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
# Giving Units	243	235	233	203	184	184
# Pledges	128	109	103	102	84	68
Giving Receipts	\$635K	\$587K	\$634K	\$541K	\$526K	\$500K
Total Income	\$777K	\$764K	\$719K	\$642K	\$623K	\$664K
Total Expenses	\$765K	\$777K	\$712K	\$642K	\$613K	\$685K
Annual Budget	\$792K	\$800K	\$768K	\$734K	\$746K	\$773K

The giving receipts is the sum of all offerings.

The total income is the sum of giving receipts, building use income, investment income, other income, and cash taken from reserves.

The total expenses are the sum of administrative, facilities, and programming costs.

Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Average Gift	\$2602	\$2500	\$2772	\$2666	\$2453	\$2718
Median Gift	\$1200	\$1080	\$1090	\$1300	\$1302	\$1040
Std. Deviation	\$7092	\$7070	\$7334	\$6031	\$3463	\$7878
Skewness	11.1	11.5	10.5	9.0	2.8	10.6

The difference between the average gift and median gift indicates a non-normal distribution caused by a significant number of gifts well above the distribution’s median. A normal distribution is not skewed (Skewness = 1). Skewness, then, indicates how non-normal a distribution is.

Looking Inside & Outside Ourselves

Our giving to organizations outside of our church is related to “Schools,” (39%) “Children,” (39%) “Health/Hospitals,” (38%) and “Community Ministries” (28%), “Anti-Cruelty,” (20%) “Nature,” (20%) “Arts,” (16%) “Advocacy,” (12%) “Political,” (11%) and those media related (8%). Of the 22 specific “Others,” they all fit into the above categories (Q7).

By a narrow consensus, more are interested in exercising more attention internally – “Bonds Between Us,” (56%) “Children/Youth Programming” (50%) over “Looking After” members who are ill, lonely, elderly, and otherwise need assistance (41%) over our “Community Presence” (39%) and “Aid” (34%), what we call “Caring for Joliet.”

Less frequent responses were helping members to “Spiritual Maturity” (22%) and “Evangelism” (16%) to all. The smallest response was “Social Justice” (8%) – the reasons for poverty, hunger, racism, etc., commonly all under the title of ESG nowadays (Q8).

In total, 69 opinions were registered on the general topic of missions. Far and away, the #1 area of concern penned is “Caring for Joliet,” (34) the most common response combined (79). Following are “Missions” in general (10) and “Youth Programs” (11). In total, 24 subject areas were called out. Some of these, it could be argued, might be combined to increase their count a bit. (B4).

Another fill-in (B5), 85 responses in 40 subject areas, asked us to forecast where God’s best is for FPJ in the next 2-3 years. Once again, “Caring for Joliet” (22) led, followed by “Open to All” (19). The rest of the responses are all in single digits.

Our congregants have advised their main concerns are local “Food/Hunger Programs” (65%), “Youth Programming” (62%), “Serving the Poor/Homeless” (58%) and “Support for Social Service Agencies” (28%), “Racial Justice” (11%), “LGBTQIA+ Justice” (9%), “International Ministries” (11%), “Environmental Concerns” (8%), and “Refugee Ministries” (4%) (Q9).

DISCERNING OURSELVES

The first step in understanding the situation we find ourselves in is to dispassionately appreciate the truth(s) of the preceding statistics. The chore is one of discerning what the data tells. So that an organization may advance, it is sometimes incumbent on an individual of said organization to set aside their own wants and desires ([Jn. 3:22-30](#)).

At times, moderns adopt their “own truth(s).” Such valuing conflicts directly with the high value our Bible places in the discovery of what is true ([Ex. 20:16](#), [Ps. 43:3](#), [Prov. 6:16-20, 10:9](#), [Jn. 8:32, 18:37-38](#), [Eph. 4:25](#), [Phil. 4:8-9](#), [Titus 1:1-3](#), [1 Pet. 3:10-12](#)). Complicating the pursuit of truth are lies ([Gen. 3:1-5](#), [Prov. 12:22](#), [Luke 12:1-2](#), [Rom. 1:18](#), [1 Cor. 13:4-8, Rev. 21:8](#)). Sometimes, we prefer to be lied to, as Cicero observed long ago...

In this light and spirit, the following analysis are made.

FPJ Today

Substantial reductions are noted, 179, in the total membership due in large part to a church membership roll update.

Tracking average attendance has been complicated by the addition of on-line services done during the COVID years.

Background Information of Worshippers

First Presbyterian’s demographics do not currently represent the local community of Joliet IL.

Our Life of Faith

By in large, the beliefs of those participating in the survey have strong faith.

Caring For Our Generations

Room for improvement exists at all age levels as those “Very Satisfied” with the care they are receiving from FPJ is low. How this could be addressed is a matter of study for each age level applying “best practices” previously used at other churches. Improvement in this area has the potential to drive improvement in other areas.

You and Your Congregation

Potential, both in worship and ministries, exists for some to increase their current moderate levels of participation and giving.

Our Church

Most were originally attracted to FPJ for personal reasons – worship, people, kids programming, and music. Fewer came and stayed for beliefs, missions, education, volunteering, and social justice.

None of the open-ended commentaries are terribly surprising to anyone remotely familiar with present day FPJ. The largest, “Cliques” (22), is still a small percentage of the whole ($22/178 \times 100\% = 12\%$). With that, they cannot be dismissed; they exist. All that can be done now is to pray/seek forgiveness by/with the Holy Spirits assistance and work towards reconciliation and improvement.

Financials

The reduced number of giving units and pledges over the past 6 years has resulted in a decline of \$135K over this period. The budget was also reduced by \$19k during this period.

The difference between the giving receipts and the total expenses is primarily made up by an increasing employment of investment income and cash reserves. From what is known, for this period, this employment amounts to an average of around \$120K per year.

The investment funds were at \$1.6 million as of March 31, 2023.

The budget estimations are conservative.

The skewness situation can be viewed either positively or negatively. It is positive in that a distinct few individuals have both the inclination and facilities to give at very high levels. It is negative in that if something should happen to these (e.g. leave, or pass away) the loss of income to FPJ would be significant. This loss could put immediate pressure on the cash reserves and investment income.

A more secure financial situation is gained by significantly increasing the number of giving units, thereby spreading the risk of departures and/or deaths over an increased number of giving units. For instance, in 2022-23 the average gift of \$2718 would need to be given by 285 givers to yield just over the budgeted amount of \$773K.

Mission Study Report Inferred Mission Statement

“Our purpose is to connect with God, connect with each other, and connect with the community we serve.”

THE ROAD AHEAD

Indicated from the previous are some concerns for our long-term viability. The financials are the result of decreasing attendance and giving levels that have not kept up with inflation. Related are demographic concerns, our average age, and the public's perception of FPJ. To address some of these concerns, the following is submitted.

Church Growth

Our current attendance to physical worship services puts us in the realm of a pastor sized church (average attendance = 50–150). The most prevalent attribute for this size is a sense of belonging. This is felt by many at FPJ. In this situation, the needs, spiritual and otherwise, are met by the pastor. Power and authority are in the hands of a few. The overall sense of things – the head pastor is the hub of the wheel. It all rotates, for good or ill, around her or him.

For the majority of FPJ's existence, we have been a program sized church (average attendance = 150–300). This type is known for variety and quality in its offerings. The head pastor is more a facilitator and delegator with the role of recruiting, equipping, and inspiring a small circle of lay and ordained, paid or not, program leaders. Teamwork is the order of the day. Decisions are made by consensus within this small circle society with input from the head pastor.

Church size designations are not set in stone. There is no reason a pastor sized church cannot behave like a program sized church. The point of this “church size theory” is to underline the differences required in pastor skill sets for each size.

Operationally, they are different. If FPJ accomplishes significant growth and seeks to become the program sized church it once was, the expectations of the head pastor will need to change. Additionally, some staffing may need reconfiguration. The congregation's expectations of personal relationships with the pastor will need to be different.

This does not mean church growth is not a valid concern. It does mean that FPJ considers how it grows carefully, that it is defined and measured, that it is “sustaining membership” as it is “growing membership.” To achieve these, it is advised FPJ employs the “best practices” other churches in similar circumstances have employed.

Youth Movement

Embedded in the previous discussion is the need to welcome more young families into our fold. This happening will necessitate the reconstruction of children and youth programming. In total, in open ended inquiries, 65 related subject comments were registered. The interest in these programs has been waning for years. The advent of COVID simply accelerated their decline.

The expectations for this growth needs tempered by our demographics, half of us are retired. As such, the numbers of younger, middle aged, and youth within our midst is not increasing. The 35 and under aged group participating in these surveys was 14%. If these ministries are to grow, it will be accomplished mostly by the employment of more modern means. These are different from how most of us found our way to FPJ.

Open to All

The overall “feel” of our experience at FPJ is positive. This is expressed in the friendships that have been formed, many through the programming, ministries, and volunteering opportunities. For those who have chosen to become involved, FPJ is found to be friendly and accepting, having a feeling of “belonging.” Of course, there are some disagreements among us.

The significance of LGBTQIA+ within the Joliet area is bound to increase with the passage of time. Currently, within our midst, 9% expressed concern towards this demographic.

In the open comment areas, the subject of being “Open to All” and it’s like affiliations – “Caring for Joliet” (79), “Youth Programs” (37). “Good Works” (16), and “Open to All” (27) are significant. Biblically, it must be admitted the ground is level, we are all equals ([Gen. 6:11-13](#), [Ps. 53:1-3](#), [Job 15:16](#), [Matt. 15:16-20](#), [Gal. 3:22](#), [1 Jn. 1:7-10](#)), surrounding the cross. As equals, we are all saved by the sacrificial love of the one mounted on said cross ([Lev. 17:10-11](#), [Matt. 26:26-28](#), [Rom. 3:24-26](#), [Col. 1:19-20](#), [1 Pet. 1:17-19](#)). We all must be “born again” ([Jn. 3:3](#), [Acts 2:38](#), [Rom. 6:4](#), [2 Cor. 5:17-18](#), [Eph. 2:8-10](#)).

This orthodoxy has been believed and expressed by all Christian churches in many shapes and forms for thousands of years. Nothing that has changed here has had any effect on God’s constancy ([Ps. 102:27](#), [Mal. 3:6](#), [James 1:17](#)). With this understanding, nothing should change in our communion mantra “Open to All.”

NEW PASTOR DELIVERABLES

Around half believe a new pastor should be a “Role Model & Leader” (53%) and “Available and Approachable” (47%). Around a third believe a new pastor should have a “Strong Personal Faith” (36%), be “Inspiring” (36%), be “Ethical & Moral” (33%) and a “Good Teacher” (31%). 23% feel he/she should be “Compassionate”. The lesser were in “Listening” (14%) and a “Mentor” (2%) along with write-in “Others.”

Of the “Others,” 25 opinions were registered in 19 subject areas. Most cited was “Charismatic” (5), “Versatile” (4), and “Bible Based” (3). These and the others fewer in numbers all fit well into the confines of the above attributes (P1).

The preaching style most sought is a “Storyteller” at nearly 40%, followed by “Teacher” at 18%, “Textural” at 16%, “Topical” at 12%, “Thematic” at 9%, and “Others” at 8%.

These “Others” totaled 15 in 10 subject areas. The most were “Bible Based” (6), “Applicable” (4), and “Inspiring” (3) (P2).

Looking forward, 84% feel the need most to attract “New Members & Retain Current Members.” 64% feel that “Youth Groups & Programs” need improvements, 31% want improvement in “Small Groups & Discipleship.” Right behind is “Caring for the Community” (25%) and Senior Care (21%). After these, is “Outreach & Evangelism” (18%), “Inspiring Generosity & Stewardship” (16%), “Professional Development & Continuing Education” (9%), “Singles Ministry” (7%), and 9% to the “Others.”

The 18 “Other” comments were on a dozen subjects. The leaders – “Caring for FPJ” (4), “Small Groups” (3), “Spiritual Maturity” (2), “Caring for Joliet” (2), and different “Worship Times” (2) for worship fit right in with the above (P3).

The final open fill-in box (B7) on the final questionnaire was an opportunity for all to voice their opinion(s) on whatever the Spirit moved them to pen. Since this query is completely without guidance, one would expect commentary to be on a wide range of subjects. Indeed, that is what was found in 59 responses on 63 enumerated subjects. Those leading “Caring for FPJ” (10), “Healing” (9), “Growth” (6), and “Youth Movement” (5) have come to our attention often elsewhere in this report.

Ten Requirements from the 2019-2021 PC(USA) Book of Order

The idea of the Presbyterian Church is to implement God's Mission (F-1.01), that is to be the means for the spread of the Gospel under the direction of Jesus as our head (F-1.02). Our Church is equipped (Eph. 4:11-16) to fulfill its calling (F-1.03) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (F-1.04), to continually improve ([Rom. 12:2](#)), and to be open to all ([Gal. 3:26-29](#)) to engage with us in this struggle.

The roles of an ordained pastor in this struggle are numerous and varied, the highlights of which follow...

1. Adhere to the PC(USA) Principles of Order and & Governance (F-3.01, 3.02, 3.03, 3.04).
2. Shepherd and facilitate the congregation (G-1.01,1.02,1.03,1.04, 1.05).
3. Be fully equipped, prepared, and ordained for ministry (G-2.06, 2.07, 2.08) to administer the Word and Sacrament (G-2.05).
4. Shepherd and facilitate the councils of the Church (G-3.01, 3.02, 3.09) by maintaining continually their order ([1 Cor. 14:40](#)).
5. Keep current with the activities of the presbytery (G-3.03), the synod (G-3.04), and the general assembly (G-3.05).
6. Be capable of guiding the church through financial transactions, governmental and private, that may occur (G-4.01, 4.02, 4.03).
7. Lead and facilitate ecumenical relations with other denominations (G-5.01, 5.02) and unions with our own (G-5.03, 5.04, 5.05).
8. Facilitate the Worship on the LORD's Day (W-3.01) in its Gathering (W-3.02), Word proclaimed (W-3.05), Sacraments (W-3.04), and Sending (W-3.05).
9. Administrate and participate in baptismal (W-4.01, 4.02), marriage ceremonies (W-4.06), and funerals (W-4.07).
10. All the above activities are related to Worship and Living the Christian Life (W-5.01) with FPJ's walk (W-5.02), in the world (W-5.03), and in the furtherance of God's Kingdom (W-5.04).

Inferred Attributes

- Have an appreciation, a liking, for the diversities that exist inside FPJ and within the Joliet, IL community.
- Foster an environment of happiness and contentment within the FPJ staff and laity for the progress God is accomplishing through each daily.
- Be mindful of the generally moderate to conservative theological and political positions most of FPJ has.
- Apply the Bible in exemplifying to FPJ, both corporately and personally, how similar problematic situations were successfully, that is “God’s best,” handled.
- Be flexible in leadership style, be it for a pastor or program sized church.
- Be a problem solver, not a “finger pointer” or complainer. After all, you took this job knowing full well, as complete as we the PNC could inform, what you were getting yourself into.
- Have a heart for children and youth ministries either in leading them, as needed, or in the creative fostering of their leadership.

CONCLUSIONS

We have arrived at the close of this audit. Its most glaring aspects are numbered below...

1. There is no doubt that our combined powers far exceed our individual, that is we are one in Christ ([Ex.18:7-21](#), [Prov. 27:17](#), [Eccl. 4:9-12](#), [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#), [Gal. 3:26-28](#)).
2. The committee is under no delusions that any one person, no matter who it is, will solve all the issues confronting our church. The best that can be hoped for is, with God's guidance, said person will work with us, as servants of Christ, towards improvements.
3. If it is to survive in any significance, the demographics of FPJ will have to trend younger, more ethnic, with more children/youth, much like the Joliet area.
4. With the loss of attendance to worship service has come losses in ministries and programs. The programs and ministries will have to innovatively grow to near the levels approaching those in 1992, the 125th anniversary of FPJ.
5. It needs to be made plain the differences between Reformed and the rest of Protestantism beliefs, and why they are different.
6. All of us at FPJ could benefit from a healthy amount of spiritual growth and maturity ([Rom. 3:23](#)) . This internal strengthening will manifest itself in many ways – participation, giving, evangelism, and in local missionary works.
7. As pews fill, and spirits satisfied, participation in the ministries/programs and monetary giving will increase naturally. The results will yield more typical budgetary levels in staffing (40–60%), programming (10–30%) including 10% for all mission's work, and for facilities (20–40%).
8. Under the leadership of Dr. Craig Herr, the established culture at FPJ was collaborative, that of a program sized church. The culture he instilled was not too terribly surprising as he leads college courses at Lewis University in negotiating, cooperating, and conflict resolution. He was a master at maintaining civility in FPJ's discourse. Our more recent experiences with "Interim/Head" pastors are more under the leadership style of a pastor sized church.
9. The bad news is FPJ has been in decline in many ways for many years. The data was clear before COVID. The internment of COVID simply accelerated this process. The good news is we've been blessed with some time ([2 Pet. 3:8-9](#)) to turn things around. We need to employ ideas much like the secular business world does when it faces a daunting situations ([Luke 16:1-13](#)). We aren't alone in our struggles. Others have pulled themselves out of similar circumstances. We must learn from the experiences (read: acclaimed books!) of those wiser than ourselves and add/subtract/innovate on these to suit our situation(s).
10. Our church has established itself as a force for good in the Joliet community. The subject, "Caring for Joliet" (79) was the mission most often cited in all open responses combined.

A way to reinvent ourselves might be to become a local mission style church. This approach has the advantage of increasing local visibility, possibly leading to higher worship attendance, and, at the same time feeding our desire in “Caring for Joliet.” While on earth, Jesus improved the situations around himself ([Eccl. 9:10](#), [Matt. 5:13-16](#), [Jn. 2:1-11](#), [6:1-14](#), [Eph. 2:8-10](#), [Titus 3:8](#), [Heb. 10:19-25](#), [James 2:14-26](#)). We can do likewise.

The “de facto” MSR committee has been working since the start of the year gathering, analyzing, and discussing feedback from the congregation of FPJ. We humbly pray that the findings of this report will be used as a starting point to foster improvement to all areas of ministry (see Appendix D) and that they might be a guiding light to the Pastor Nominating Committee in calling a new pastor.

What is done from here can positively impact FPJ for the next 20 years and beyond. Now is truly an opportunity for leaders and officers of the Session to create a culture of improvement. This action will promote a sense of belonging to something bigger and more important than ourselves, as our LORD’s Kingdom certainly is. The side benefits of activities related to these attempts and hopeful successes will be the promotion of the congregation’s spiritual life, relationships between us enhanced, and impacting Joliet, IL for the better.

Solo Deo Gloria.