

# First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell

## MISSION STUDY 2025

### Mission Statement

To reflect Christ's love as we worship God, love one another, and serve our community.

### Introduction

In November 2023, the First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell Session appointed members Cindy Burr, Amanda Eney, Taylor Ferda, Doug Nelson, Tom Possin, and Pastor Brenna Stanfield to the Transition Team. The Transition Team's work began with overseeing the organizational aspects of Sunday morning worship. In June 2024, Session approved the Transition Team to carry out the Congregational Mission Study. The goal of this Mission Study is to prayerfully look inward at our church, look outward at our community, and utilize the collected information to ascertain FPC Kalispell's identity, priorities, and purpose as we work to faithfully follow God.

The following elements were the basis for the Mission Study report:

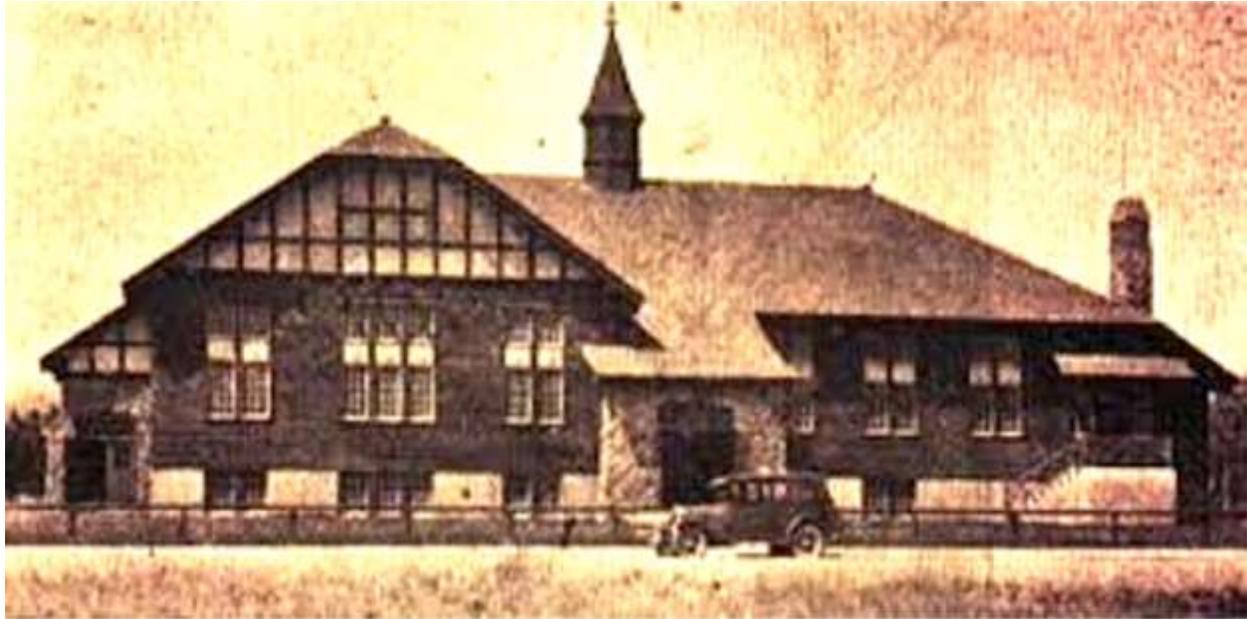
- First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell's unique history
- Congregational demographics
- Congregational Survey with approximately [55] responses
- Guided conversations during and after church services
- Interviews with community organizations

### History

The history of the First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell goes back to the founding of Kalispell, MT. On September 12, 1886, the first sermon was preached in the Ashley schoolhouse by Rev George McVey Fisher. The first church was organized in 1889 with a membership of seven individuals. In 1892, the First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell was built by a membership of seventeen. It was organized just 130 days after the first house was built in Kalispell, thus giving it the distinction of being the first church in the city of Kalispell.\*

"As Kalispell boomed, so did the need for a larger church. Fortunately, in retrospect, the church did not follow through with its original plan to rebuild in 1904. It did, however, follow through in 1925, along with tremendous community support and a bold new source of inspiration. In the time between 1904 and 1925, railroad tycoon James J. Hill and his Great Northern Railway established and built 'an architecturally cohesive' railroad tourist destination nearby: Glacier National Park... This Swiss-Chalet-meets-massive-pioneer-log-style of the buildings in Glacier National Park were the source of inspiration for architect Fred Brinkman, who designed this landmark church, and other homes in a similar Tudor-Revival style in Kalispell... Brinkman's designs were realized in 1925 – with many similarities to the hotels and chalets in Glacier National Park – including the log rafters, decorative half-timbering, river rock masonry, clapboard siding, and other elements, better seen than written about. And perhaps in marking

the end of one era, and the beginning of another, Reverend Fisher dedicated this church and center to the community in 1927 – a place that has since provided inspiration, in more ways than one.” \*\*



The church has remembered and celebrated with the congregation and the people of the Flathead Valley throughout the years. The 50th anniversary was held in 1941, a time when many families were separated due to World War II. The 75th anniversary was marked by the mounting of the “Old Church Bell” (brought by Rev. Fisher from Philadelphia in 1892) in the front lawn of the church. The 100th Year Anniversary was marked by work and celebration as the congregation was challenged to match a \$150,000 organ donation with a “funds involving the congregation in projects of Christian faith and witness.” 19 projects were selected and included remodelling the sanctuary, participating in Committee 10 (bringing one Protestant and one Catholic from Northern Ireland), serving with Habitat for Humanity by sending 3 teams to Guatemala, funding scholarships, Stephen Ministries, Volunteers in Mission, Heifer Project International, and sponsoring a family to America.\*

Through the first centennial, First Presbyterian Church served alongside many faithful pastors, including the founding pastor George McVey Fisher (1886), George Van Leuven (1951), Odin Baugh (1968), Barry Dawson (1985), and Larry Gaylord (1990). The Reverend Glenn Burfiend was installed in 1998 and served for twenty-five years. As Pastor Glenn prepared to retire in 2024, Session took on Reverend Brenna Stanfield as a part-time parish pastor to help provide stability and continuity through the transition. Before his retirement, the Transition Team was formed by Session to help smooth the interim period, and Pastor Brenna transitioned to the part-time interim head of staff. David Lillard was added at 1/3 time to help carry the load, and Brenna and David have been faithfully carrying these duties ever since. Their service has been supplemented by various pastors and teachers to fill the remainder of the preaching role. The Transition Team was tasked with creating a Mission Study as the first stage of calling a new pastor for First Presbyterian Church. The following document is the result of our Mission Study.

Over the years, the building itself has moved and been remodeled and the church's ministries have grown and changed. However, FPC has been invested in this community from the beginning through its weekly services, radio broadcasts, and a myriad of practical ministries to the community. In short, First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell has been serving Kalispell with the love of Jesus from the start, and that calling remains to this day.

*\*From the "History of the First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell" Centennial Directory.*

*\*\*From the Flathead Beacon article, "First Presbyterian Church," written by Beacon staff and dated Dec 12, 2013 <https://flatheadbeacon.com/2013/12/12/first-presbyterian-church/>*

*\*\*\*Photo from church archives, taken in 1927*

## **Church and Community Demographics**

### **Community demographics:**

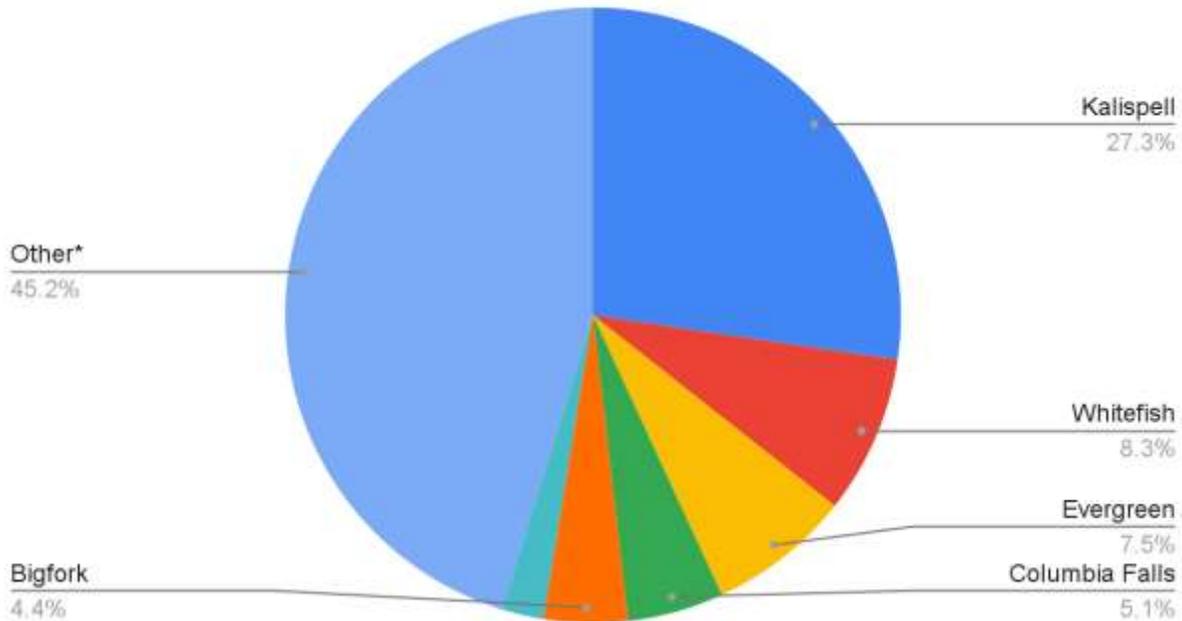
Kalispell is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest city in Montana and the county seat for Flathead County. The healthcare industry employs 6,300 people and is the largest employer in the valley.

Flathead County's estimated population in 2010 was 90,863, and in 2024, it was about 115,473, which is a growth of about 27%. The COVID-19 pandemic spurred rapid change in resort community housing markets as people flocked to the state. As a result, there has been a substantial rise in housing prices, as reported by the Urban Land Institute's Terwilliger Center for Housing. The World Population Review for Flathead County estimates a 1.5% future growth rate per year.

Kalispell is located in the northwest part of the state of Montana, near the gateway to Glacier National Park. The valley is surrounded by mountains and is set in a lush valley. You can drive your car in any direction, and within 30 minutes, you will find stunning scenic drives, sweeping views, lush farmlands, and snow-fed rivers and lakes. The rivers and lakes offer a vast array of activities for summer or winter. Kalispell is a trail lover's dream, and many of Northwest Montana's trails are multi-use, which means they can be used for hiking, trail running, horseback riding, mountain biking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing, depending on the season. The valley also boasts two ski resorts that offer winter and summer activities, as well as many public golf courses. Kalispell is the home to Flathead Valley Community College, which has a beautiful and active performing arts center.

Within 30 minutes of Kalispell are the cities of Whitefish, Bigfork, Columbia Falls, Somers, and Lakeside, which are all tourist destinations due to their recreational opportunities, shopping, and restaurants. We have members who live in these cities and throughout the valley.

## Flathead County Population 115,473 in 2024

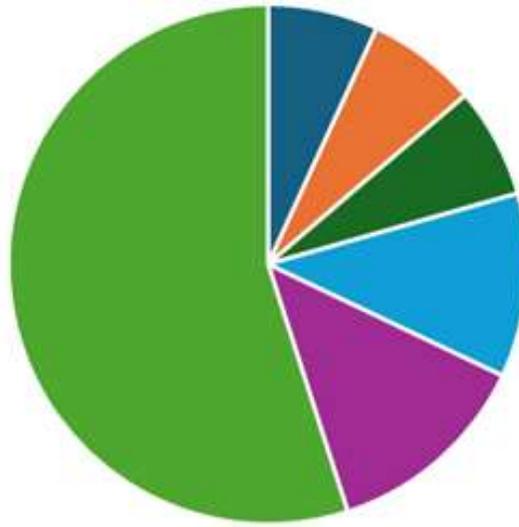


\*Greater Flathead Valley rural communities

### Church demographics:

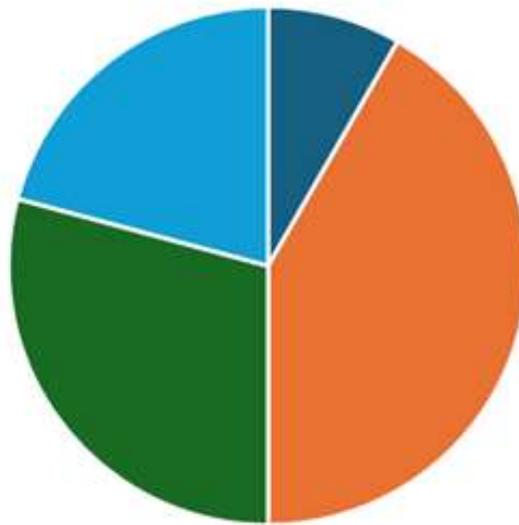
As of December 31, 2024, the First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell had 122 active members, 73 women and 49 men. We lost three members last year due to death and other reasons and gained 10 members by profession of faith or reaffirmation for a net gain of 7. Average Weekly attendance is around 65.

FPC Age Distribution of 122 Active Members



■ 17 and Under ■ 18 - 25 ■ 26 - 40 ■ 41 - 55 ■ 56 - 70 ■ Over 70 ■

Youth in Congregation



■ Age 4 and Under ■ Grade K - 5 ■ Grade 6 - 8 ■ Grade 9 - 12

# Congregational Survey and Conversations

Through a structured electronic/paper survey on October 3, 2024, and subsequent in-person congregational conversations on October 20, November 3, November 17, and December 1, 2024, the Transition Team has sought, through the Mission Study, to discern God's leading for our church through a series of questions. The answers to these questions have shown many areas of consistent agreement that demonstrate the unity of our congregation as well as some areas of disagreement that demonstrate our diversity.

1. What are the main reasons you attend FPC, and what do you love the most about our church?
  - Church is friendly/welcoming/open/warm/instant relationships
  - The sense of community/fellowship with family and friends
  - Community involvement and service to others, helping those in need
  - To praise and worship God and grow in faith
  - Love the children
  - PCUSA beliefs, liberal theology, emphasis on love rather than power/judgment
  - Other less frequent responses: grew up Presbyterian, sermons, music, positive and inclusive, learning and growing, diversity of opinion/belief, women lead and serve
  
2. If you could change or add one thing to FPC, what would it be?
  - Upbeat songs, expanded music ministry, more hymns, more contemporary music
  - Have a choir
  - More activities for teens and older youth, including more activities and educational efforts, possible community service events, confirmation classes, and possibly joint activities with youth of other churches
  - Change/move 3rd Sunday worship from the lower level (hard to hear or see, feel isolated when table not full, less community, attendance lower)
  - Other less frequent responses: nothing, more people involved, ongoing community service project, joint services with Comunidad Cristiana de Kalispell Church, partner with other churches, better communication with leaders, more Bible studies/small groups, later service time, more people helping, more focus on the Apostle's Creed
  
3. What do you hope our church will be like in 10 years? What challenges do you think we will face?
  - Hopes:
    - More young people and families (by far the most common hope)
    - Growing
    - Reaching out to the community and those in need
    - Welcoming and open
    - Faith-filled, Bible-based
    - Multiple uses for the building
    - More diverse
  
  - Challenges:
    - Finances
    - Aging congregation, declining membership
    - Finding activities that work for all ages

- Aging church building
  - Church becoming irrelevant to young people
  - The inflexibility of some members
4. What do you think is God's purpose for our church?
    - Worship God
    - Serve those in need in our community and share God's love
    - Love one another, provide support to others in the congregation
    - Be a welcoming and safe place
    - Work faithfully for the Kingdom of God
    - Spread the Word
  5. How do you think FPC is fulfilling God's mission in our community?
    - Church facilities available for the community, including Feeding the Flathead, Scouting of America, school choirs, and other musical performances
    - Community outreach via the PW bazaar, Christmas outreach, Christmas stroll, Abbie Shelter meals, and support of organizations such as Cowboy Up Auction, Samaritan House, and Warming Center
    - Prayer chain
    - Meals for church members in times of need
    - The work of the Presbyterian Women
    - Supporting the Flathead Food Bank
    - Trivia night as a ministry to young families
  6. If a guest visited FPC for a month, what do you think they would like best?
    - Friendly, welcoming, and open congregation
    - Young people participating in the service
    - Community spirit
  7. Anything you wanted to share that wasn't addressed in the survey?
    - Appreciation of no politics in church
    - Food is great
    - Would like more programming for teens/older youth
    - Would like more fellowship activities
    - Wish more people would step up to help
    - Some really don't like the service in the basement, some really do
  8. With regard to our 2016 mission statement, "Called by Christ to joyfully serve and expand the Kingdom of God," we should:
    - Preference to not change the mission statement during the transition process
    - Preference for previous mission statements
    - Display the mission statement more at church
    - Consider changing the mission statement to include the words "love" and "peacemaker"
  9. What are your thoughts regarding a full-time pastor versus splitting the pastoral role into several part-time positions?
    - Many prefer a single full-time pastor
    - Many prefer several part-time pastors

- Many are very supportive of the current work of Brenna and David (and others), “love it as it is now”
  - Several desire one full-time and one part-time, two or even three full-time pastors
10. What attributes would you like a new pastor to have?
- Open, friendly, good listener, calm, sense of humor, humble, trustworthy, caring, kind
  - Thoughtful messages, good preacher, knowledgeable, sincere faith
  - Good with kids
  - Good leader
  - Comfortable making hospital and home visits
  - Collegial with other staff members

## Community Questions Summary

While conducting the Mission Study, the Transition Team connected with a variety of businesses and organizations in Kalispell. These conversations broadly addressed the varying missions of these community partners, essential services provided to the community, Kalispell’s greatest assets and needs, and specifically, how local churches can help support these organizations.

The mission and vision of various organizations within the Kalispell community emphasize the empowerment and support of students and families. Many school leaders emphasized the fostering of students' academic and social development to prepare them for future success as adults. At the same time, its vision aims to create lifelong learners equipped for college, careers, and civic engagement. Comunidad Cristiana de Kalispell Church seeks to impact the Hispanic population through spiritual formation, and Logan Heath Medical Center is dedicated to improving health and quality of life with compassionate care. Other businesses, such as Bias Brewing, aim to build community through collaborating with nonprofits. Head Start focuses on enhancing families' well-being, particularly regarding school readiness. Feed the Flathead aims to provide healthy, nutritious food to Kalispell residents. The Flathead Food Bank addresses food insecurity for those in need. Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) seeks to be a leader in education by promoting lifelong learning that is accessible to all and meets the needs of the community.

The community services provided in Kalispell address a variety of areas, including education and support for families and individuals. Schools play a critical role in nurturing students, emphasizing academic and social growth, while engaging with families and local organizations to coordinate necessary support. Other community services include bilingual worship opportunities, English as a Second Language classes, health care through outpatient and inpatient services, and fundraising efforts to benefit local initiatives. Businesses like Bias Brewing contribute significantly to community welfare by raising funds and volunteering, while Head Start connects families with essential resources, ensuring a whole-child support system for success. Feed the Flathead “stands in the gap” to help those who lack the income to afford housing, medical care, and food.

When asked about Kalispell's greatest assets, community members referenced its people and their commitment to one another. Community members were characterized as giving, kind, and thoughtful, with a strong desire to support their neighbors. Many residents share common

values and demonstrate resilience, caring deeply for their families and the well-being of others. Children are viewed as vital to the community's future, and there is a strong emphasis on nurturing their potential. According to some residents, education is a priority with community members actively supporting local schools through funding and over 200 business partnerships. These funds and partnerships provide students with valuable experiences and opportunities for growth. Feeding the Flathead expressed their gratitude for a warm and welcoming place to serve meals and meet the needs of handicapped guests.

Along with these assets, several needs were identified as well. The rising cost of housing has placed a large financial burden on many families living in the Flathead Valley. Multiple organizations addressed the need for more mental health and chemical dependency support. Schools are facing significant challenges in meeting the needs of families, particularly those experiencing housing instability and a lack of basic necessities. Funding is a rising critical issue. The last high school mill levy was passed in 2007. Subsequent failures to pass levies have resulted in cuts to staff and course offerings in the present. One school leader identified Kalispell's overarching needs as sustainable funding, community involvement, and access to mental health resources. Many organizations, including churches, provide food, clothing, and gifts, but the need surpasses the amount of support. Childcare continues to be a significant need, along with financial resources for various social services, including Head Start programs. Feeding the Flathead identified prayer as a significant need, as well as people to work behind the scenes serving food, cleaning up, and stocking.

At the heart lies an opportunity for local churches to play a role in supporting the Kalispell community. Some respondents identified that local churches play a key role in fostering collaboration and providing essential resources. They can assist by volunteering in schools, mentoring students, and promoting initiatives like the Heart Locker and school funding measures. By serving as ambassadors, churches can help communicate the specific needs of schools and rally their members to contribute time and effort, either through tutoring or participating in extracurricular activities. However, while some potential barriers might hinder local churches from supporting local organizations, on the whole people reported being open to support from local churches.

## **Concluding Overview of Existing Ministries, Strengths, and Future Growth Points**

First Presbyterian Church has a long history of ministry in the Flathead Valley. This rich history serves as one of FPC's strengths, as both the congregation and the building itself are deeply involved in serving the community. Over the past few years, church leadership has decided to be more intentional in opening its doors to additional organizations and individuals who share the building mission, "to serve God and the Flathead Valley in a way that is life-giving for the church and surrounding community." Depending on what service is being provided, people are invited to use the facility either for free or for below-market rent. The goal is that this will provide more opportunities for the community to be in the church building, will continue the historic connection between the congregation and the community, and will provide an additional revenue stream to help pay for building maintenance. In this last year service organizations such as Scouting of America, Feeding the Flathead, My Glacier Village, and Alcoholics Anonymous all use our space for free to serve the community. Local yoga instructors, therapists, and musicians have used the space (either for free or for a small fee) to provide workshops, concerts, and charity events to benefit local non-profits. FPC is nesting Comunidad

Cristiana de Kalispell, a Spanish-speaking congregation planted by Comunidad Cristiana de Spokane, and they are growing, serving, and spreading the gospel to a very underrepresented population. We had our first joint worship service in February 2025 and it was very joyful. Finally, four offices in the church are being rented out to local professionals who fit within the building's mission. This community support and involvement hasn't been without growing pains but is a strength that hopefully will continue into the future.

Of course, a building is just a shell without the people inside, and the greatest strength of First Presbyterian Church of Kalispell is our people. Throughout the many ups and downs of the last century, people have remained committed to loving God and serving others at FPC. The last two decades have shown significant loss and growth, with membership being as high as 350 and as low as 115 in 2023. Around 2018, the church's governing bodies were restructured and "right sized", moving from an Elder/Deacon model to an Elder-led team model. At this point, the congregation is growing as new folks of (almost) all ages have been attending and most congregants who come report feeling genuinely welcome and at home. This is both a strength and a growth point, as ministries grow and expand.

Strengths include:

- Involvement of new families within the last five years with widespread church involvement to welcome them "into the fold"
- Sunday school ministry for preschool and elementary-aged children with middle school-aged youth serving as helpers
- Consistent outreach ministry and community involvement stretching back to the church's founding. Groups from FPC are currently providing meals for the Abbie shelter, caring for the community through the Christmas fund, inviting community and congregation alike to enjoy the Artwalk, hosting Scouting of America and Feeding the Flathead, etc
- Weekly opportunities for adult fellowship and learning include weekly book study, a quilting group, monthly Women Who Read and Men's Breakfast, Presbyterian Women, Tuesday Trivia for young families, and Sunday morning worship services

Growth points center around:

- Continuing to serve and be served by an aging congregation
- Meaningful ministry for youth (in the past five years, there has been an increased youth presence but not an increased youth ministry...needs identified by the Worship & Education Team include a confirmation experience, a chance to learn how to study the Bible, and stand-alone service and fun events specifically for the youth)
- Continued integration of older, newer, younger, and elder congregants into a cohesive congregation
- Rebuilding the music-based aspects of worship (FPC used to have a strong music program including adult and youth choirs, special music, etc....that has changed as numbers dwindled, so while the music ministry probably won't be rebuilt in the same way a renewed focus on music in worship would be beneficial)

Financially, First Presbyterian Church is in a strong position as the building is owned outright, and the Perpetual Endowment Fund is healthy. Giving has remained consistent throughout this period of transition. At the same time, much of the weekly tithing (which supports the day-to-day ministries of the church) is disproportionately given by older members, so the rest of the congregation will need to continue to (or begin to) give in meaningful ways to sustain the church in the future.

In summary, this mission study leaves us hopeful about the future of First Presbyterian Church and looks forward to discovering how God will continue to work in and through this congregation.

## Mission Study Recommendations

The Transition Team spent eight months praying, interviewing, reading, researching, and engaging with our congregation and our community to put together this Mission Study. As a result, these are our recommendations:

Five things that we desire in our next called pastor:

1. **Personality:** We are looking for someone who is open, friendly, and caring. We hope to call someone who is a good listener with a good sense of humor, who is humble, empathetic, kind, and sincere; an excellent communicator who is comfortable with conflict resolution, delegation, and fundraising; a person who lives with integrity and possesses a commitment to spiritual growth.
2. **Relationships:** We are looking for someone who has the ability to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds, welcome children and young families, include people from all walks of life with diverse political and theological perspectives, minister to those in need, and lead outreach to our community. Good time management skills will be important.
3. **Worship:** We are looking for someone who can provide intentional worship leadership and be willing to blend traditional worship with new forms of worship, music, and study so as to engage worshipers with a wide range of backgrounds. Our congregation appreciates thoughtful, engaging sermons which reflect biblical knowledge and sincere faith.
4. **Head of Staff/Leadership:** We are looking for someone with a collegial leadership style who leads by example when engaging with employees, staff, and all church members. We value a personal commitment to continuing education, connection with PCUSA, and ties to the local community to discern and initiate ministry opportunities.
5. **Church Family:** We are looking for someone who wants to be a part of our church body, actively working to build and enhance the sense of family and community within our congregation. Home and hospital visits are appreciated by our members.

Five things that we believe are key to the missional life of our church...essentially, these are the key areas to which we feel God is calling our congregation:

1. Worship God
2. Serve those in need in our community
3. Love one another and provide support to others in the congregation
4. Be a welcoming and safe place
5. Work faithfully for the Kingdom of God, spread the gospel, and share Christ's message of love locally and globally