



**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
GASTONIA



2027 - 2029

STRATEGIC PLAN

Belonging. Renewing. Transforming.



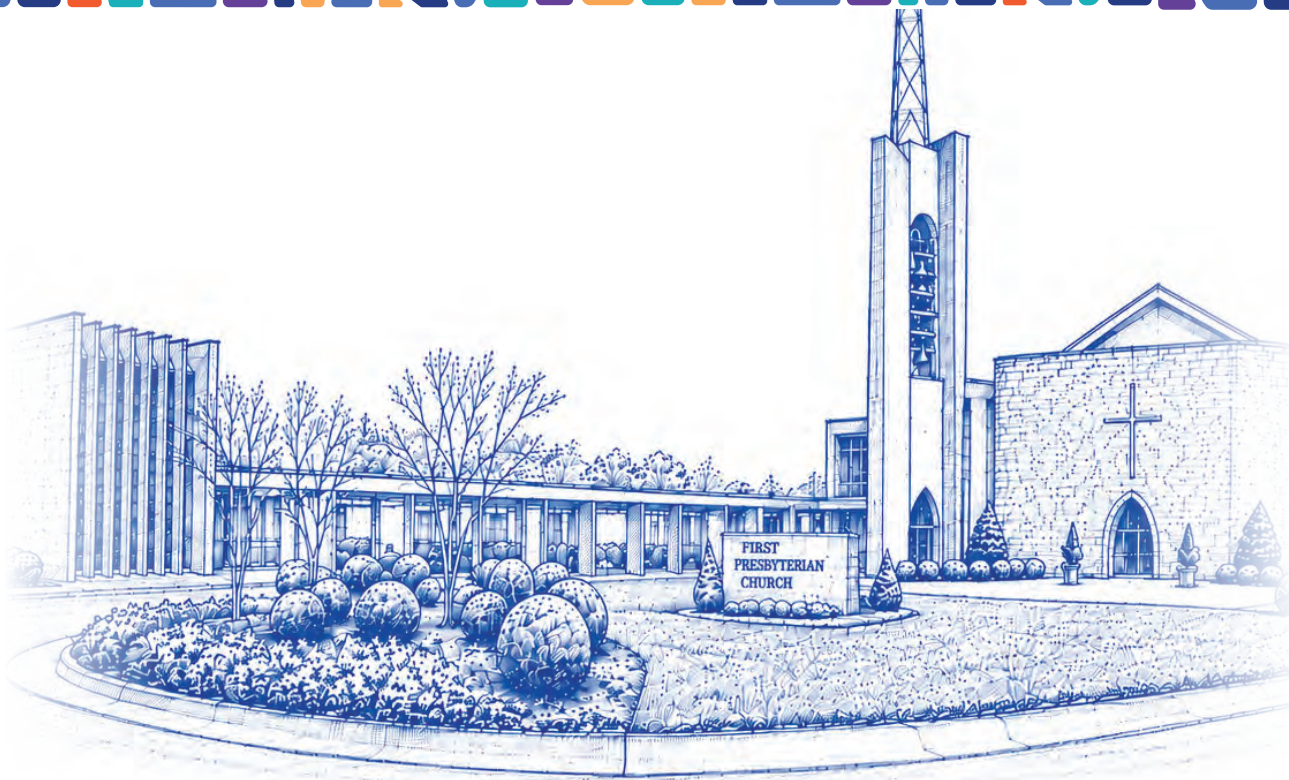


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An Invitation to

OUR CONGREGATION

As we look toward the next three years, the Curiosity and Courage Committee invites each of us to view this Strategic Plan as more than a collection of goals and initiatives. Spanning 2027 through the end of 2029, it provides a shared direction for our church family while allowing us to grow, adapt, and respond faithfully along the way. We hope it will be viewed as an integrated whole—and as an invitation for every member to consider the role each of us can play in the future of First Presbyterian Church (FPC).

The Holy Cow! Survey conducted as a part of the planning process affirmed that our church is healthy, strong, and well-positioned for the future. This plan is not about fixing what's broken but rather building upon the many strengths already present within our congregation and considering where God may be leading us next. A church is ultimately its people and its God, and no plan alone can accomplish what we hope for FPC. It will take all of us, across generations and experiences, moving forward together—strengthening relationships, deepening our faith, welcoming others, serving our neighbors, and growing as disciples of Jesus Christ.

As we begin this three-year journey together, may we see this Strategic Plan not simply as a document, but as an invitation to participate in what comes next. May it help guide our decisions, encourage our involvement, and remind us of the greater purpose we share—bringing us closer to one another, and, most importantly, closer to Christ.

Together in Christ,

The Curiosity and Courage Committee

Cindy Clark

Charles Gallman

John Mudd

Amy Spencer

Jessica Stewart

Coerte Voorhees

Mike Wallace

Craig Whitley

Rev. Dan Commerford



What is a

STRATEGIC PLAN?

A strategic plan provides a shared sense of direction by defining where an organization is today, where it hopes to go, and what priorities will help it move forward. For FPC, our Strategic Plan is a three-year framework (2027 through 2029) that reflects who we are, what we value, and where we believe God is calling us. It brings together our Mission, Vision, Values, Strategic Priorities, and Key Initiatives, along with an organizational structure designed to support the work ahead. Through our Session, Diaconate, and their respective committees, the Strategic Plan connects our leadership with the congregation, helping us work together with purpose while remaining open to new opportunities that present themselves.



PSALM 100:5 *For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Honoring Our Legacy Through CELEBRATING OUR PAST

Our Story: Shaped by Faith, Guided by God's Faithfulness

We cannot define who we are without first reflecting on, and celebrating, where we have been. FPC has been woven into the history of Gastonia from the City's earliest days. Founded in 1882, just a few years after the railroad crossing that gave rise to the town, the church was established through the faith, vision, and perseverance of a small group of believers who recognized an opportunity to create a Presbyterian witness in a growing community.

Within a year of its organization, the congregation dedicated its first sanctuary. As Gastonia evolved from a rural village into a thriving economic center, FPC grew alongside it, becoming both a spiritual home for generations of families and a source of leadership within the community. Through every season of growth and change, FPC has remained committed to proclaiming the gospel and caring for others in the name of Christ.

One of the most significant chapters in the church's history commenced in 1957 when the congregation discerned

God's call to relocate from its downtown campus on Marietta Street to what is now East Garrison Boulevard. This decision required courage, sacrifice, and vision. Church leaders recognized that the opportunities and needs of FPC's ministry were changing. They recognized the congregation needed facilities that could support and sustain that ministry for generations to come.

In the ensuing decades, our church continued to expand its ministry and influence. Our congregation played a key role in launching important community initiatives, including Covenant Village, a sorely needed retirement community. We established lasting resources such as the Presbyterian Endowment Trust to strengthen church and community ministries and missions, for years to come.

Throughout its history, FPC has demonstrated a willingness to adapt its methods while remaining firmly anchored to its mission. Each generation has inherited a strong foundation from those



who came before and has embraced the responsibility of building upon that foundation. Whether constructing new facilities, developing new ministries, responding to community needs, or

engaging emerging generations, church leaders have sought to discern God's direction and to respond with faithful obedience.

Recognizing Where We Are Today

Recent events have shaped FPC and have had an impact on how we fulfill God's calling to serve our members and the broader community. By the advent of the new Millennium, with fewer and fewer Americans attending church, most mainline Protestant churches began to experience stagnating-to-declining membership. We were no exception. Such decline was exacerbated by two extraordinary, but closely timed events: the 2019 retirement of our long-time Senior Pastor, Rev. Dr. John Frye, and the 2020 COVID pandemic. During that two-year period, FPC operated under the leadership of two interim pastors and church staff. Notwithstanding the

valiant efforts of leadership during that period, our overall membership engagement declined.

Despite these challenges, FPC made the bold and faithful step to search for its next Senior Pastor. In June 2021, the congregation called Rev. Dan Commerford as its twelfth Senior Pastor. As Rev. Commerford began his ministry at FPC, he was met with the challenge of rebuilding church membership and staff amidst a health lockdown. While engaged in these tasks, Rev. Commerford concluded in 2024 that the time was right to discern where God was calling our church and to initiate a strategic planning process.

Called to the Future

FPC stands on the broad shoulders of those who came before us. We continue to benefit from a rich heritage of worship, discipleship, leadership development, mission engagement, and community service. Yet, our story is not ultimately about buildings, programs, or accomplishments. It is the story of God's

faithfulness revealed through successive generations of believers who sought to follow Christ in their own time and place. Their legacy continues to shape who we are today and inspires us to pursue God's calling for the future with the same faith, courage, and commitment.



EXODUS 3:4 *When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”*

Our Journey of CURIOSITY AND COURAGE

At the first stated Session meeting in January 2025, Rev. Dan Commerford read Exodus 3:1-14 to the group, highlighting how Moses displayed curiosity concerning God’s presence and courage to follow God’s call. Rev. Commerford expressed his desire that our congregation show that same curiosity and courage by entering into a season of prayerful discernment as to our church’s current identity and purpose. The Session affirmed God’s calling of the congregation into this season and formed the Curiosity and Courage Committee (CCC) to give guidance on this sacred journey.

During the Summer of 2025, the CCC interviewed several organizations

to assist with vision discernment, ultimately retaining Rev. Mark Tidsworth of Pinnacle Leadership Associates. In collaborative fashion, the CCC and Rev. Tidsworth designed a discernment process that led FPC to its strategic direction for the next three years. The process was structured to provide the congregation with opportunities to share our current sense of God’s presence in the life of the church. It also elicited our dreams of where God is leading the congregation to be faithful and vibrant in the future. Below is a description of that visioning journey as created by the CCC and approved by the Session.

A Journey Rooted in Prayer

In the Fall of 2025, FPC began its visioning journey with a season of spiritual cultivation, increasing its openness to God’s guidance. To increase the church’s ability to have the ears to hear, and the eyes to see, what God intends for us, the CCC in conjunction with the Session:

- Invited every person who is part of the church into forty days of personal devotions and prayer, using the book *Sailboat Church* by Rev. Joan Gray;
- Engaged Sunday School curriculum based on *Sailboat Church* content;

- Engaged a sermon series titled Curiosity and Courage that focused on discerning God's presence; and following God's call; and
- Engaged a Leadership Summit with our consultant and later a Retreat, learning principles and perspectives for increasing capacity for congregational growth.

A Journey Traveled Together

The CCC worked diligently and effectively to connect the people of FPC with the following opportunities for collective discernment:

- **Congregational Survey:** FPC contracted with Holy Cow! Consulting to administer a congregational survey, with 215 people participating, yielding additional insight into church health and hopes; and
- **Listening Groups:** The congregation participated in structured Listening Groups with Rev. Tidsworth, wherein our members offered their hopes, dreams, and visions for FPC rising out of the season of spiritual cultivation. The strong participation of 142 people in 17 groups provided clear guidance toward vision formation.

A Journey of Shared Discernment

In January of 2026, members of the Session and Diaconate gathered to hear Rev. Tidsworth report on the synthesized feedback gleaned from the congregational survey and listening groups. Leadership provided its own prayerful feedback on initiatives and priorities shared by the congregation. Through prayer, dialogue, and intensive spiritual discernment, Leadership and the CCC identified a shared sense of spiritual direction. The Strategic Plan is the fruit of this discernment work, yielding a compelling direction for FPC.





MICAH 6:8 *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Defining our

MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

At its core, a strategic plan is a roadmap that guides an organization over a specified period toward achieving its goals and fulfilling its purposes. For FPC, that roadmap is grounded in our mission, vision, and values.

Our Mission Statement defines our purpose, our “why.” Our Vision Statement describes what we aspire to become as a faith community. Our Values are the core principles that guide our behavior and decisions. Together, these elements help leaders discern priorities, allocate resources, and make decisions that are faithful to God’s calling. According to Rev. Mark Tidsworth, a strategic plan is a living framework for our shared ministry – living into God’s calling for FPC.

While a strategic plan establishes a long-term roadmap, it is a living, breathing document. It must be reviewed regularly, evaluated honestly, and adjusted when

circumstances or new opportunities call for course corrections. Effective strategic plans identify key priorities, define measurable outcomes, and outline the actions necessary to achieve them. Throughout this process of discernment, we trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who both sets our destination and serves as our compass along the journey.

FPC’s Strategic Plan is built upon, but not anchored to, our rich history. It recognizes the challenges we face and the areas where growth is needed, while celebrating the many strengths and gifts God has entrusted to our congregation. Guided by these realities and inspired by a hopeful vision for the future, this Strategic Plan serves as a shared covenant, uniting our church in purpose, commitment, and faithful anticipation of what God has yet to accomplish through us.



A mission statement defines who we are and, more importantly, who we want to be. It sets a course for discerning and living into God’s calling for First Presbyterian Church. Our mission statement is the product of prayerful discernment and listening to the congregation.

MISSION

United in Christ, we are a community growing in faith, caring for one another, and serving our neighbors near and far.



A vision statement defines how we live into our mission. It defines who we want to become as a church and the impact the church has on its members and the community. First Presbyterian Church aspires to be a church where people are welcome and belong, where we can experience spiritual renewal, and where we can transform ourselves and others.

VISION

Belonging. Renewing. Transforming.

Values are the core principles that shape who we are. They are the foundation of our Mission and Vision. Our values are the non-negotiables in our journey in fulfilling God’s calling for First Presbyterian Church.



VALUES

Christ Centered

We proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and resurrection reveal God's redeeming love. Everything we do together flows from our commitment to follow Christ and share his Good News through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Authentic Worship

We gather to worship Christ in ways that are meaningful and engaging. God welcomes us as we are and transforms us through hearing and proclaiming God's Word known to us in Jesus Christ.

Growing Faithfully

We strengthen our faith together through the lifelong pursuit of Christ's ways. The Holy Spirit renews us when we gather to ask honest questions as we engage scripture and explore relevant ways to live out our faith.

Real Relationships

We welcome all to experience Christ's love here. God calls us to form intentional and genuine relationships through nurturing, encouraging, and supporting one another in all seasons of life.

Intergenerational Commitment

We are strongest when generations worship, learn, and serve together. Pursuing Christ is a lifelong journey, and every follower of every age is blessed by walking that journey together.

Meaningful Mission

We participate in the restorative work of the Holy Spirit by putting our faith into practice. When we provide hope, comfort, and service to our neighbors, we spread Christ's love in ways that make an impact.

Bold Generosity

We become the congregation God calls us to be through selfless devotion. As Christ gave himself for us, we respond with generosity by offering our time, gifts, and resources to strengthen our community and bless our neighbors.



1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

New Session and Diaconate

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Our Story: Shaped by Faith, Guided by God's Faithfulness

As part of its work to develop the 2027–2029 Strategic Plan, the CCC reviewed the church's existing committee structure with the goal of creating a simpler, more consistent, and more effective leadership model. The CCC recognizes that service to the church establishes connections between members. However, roughly two-thirds of active members serve on committees, with many serving on more than one. The CCC seeks to encourage wider participation by offering additional opportunities for service that do not require a multi-year commitment. A comparison of our current leadership and committee structure with the new 2027 structure is provided in the **Session and Diaconate Committee Structure** (Appendix A).

The CCC considered where responsibilities were best allocated

between the Session and Diaconate, looked for opportunities to reduce overlap and duplication of effort, and sought to create committees with clearly defined responsibilities, right sized for their tasks, and with greater continuity year by year.

The new structure places primary governance, policy, financial oversight, and strategic responsibilities with the Session, while accentuating the Diaconate's role in congregational care, fellowship, hospitality, membership connections, and hands-on service. The structure also incorporates staggered service terms so that experienced members remain on committees as new members rotate into service. Each committee will be assigned a church staff member who will work alongside the committee and provide continuity, expertise, and coordination.



SESSION COMMITTEES

Building & Grounds Committee

Purpose: The Building & Grounds Committee serves as the steward of the church’s physical plant, providing oversight of church buildings, equipment, grounds, maintenance, safety, facility use, and capital improvements. Its work helps ensure that the church’s facilities remain safe, functional, attractive, and welcoming in support of all ministries.

Membership: 6 members. The Committee is comprised of three Elders and three at-large members. Sessional members serve normal three-year rotations. To transition to the new system, at-large members will initially rotate into one-, two- and three-year terms, ultimately establishing three-year staggered terms.

Staff Liaison: Director of Buildings and Grounds

Faith Formation Committee

Purpose: The Faith Formation Committee provides leadership and oversight for Christian education and discipleship across generations. It provides opportunities for children, youth, and adults to grow in faith while also evaluating existing programs and identifying new opportunities for spiritual development.

Membership: 21 members. The Committee includes three Elders and 18 at-large Members across three Subcommittees supporting Adult, Youth and Children’s ministries. At-large membership will initially be staggered to establish an ongoing three-year rotation.

Staff Liaisons: Director of Faith Formation and Director of Youth & Young Adults

Finance Committee

Purpose: The Finance Committee serves as the Session’s primary financial oversight committee. It is responsible for budgeting, financial reporting, policies, internal accounting controls, scholarships, stewardship of financial resources, and long-range financial planning while helping ensure that financial decisions support the mission and priorities of the church.

Membership: 6 members. The Committee includes three Elders, three at-large members, a Presbyterian Weekday School Committee representative serving as an ex officio member, and the Personnel Committee Vice Chair serving ex officio.

Staff Liaisons: Senior Pastor and Business Administrator



Giving Committee: *Subcommittee of Finance*

Purpose: The Giving Committee supports the Finance Committee by leading the church's stewardship and giving efforts, including the annual financial commitment process and efforts to encourage long-term and planned giving. Its work helps connect generosity and stewardship with the church's ministry priorities and future financial strength.

Membership: 9 members. The Committee includes a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and staggered classes of members. Terms of the initial classes will vary too so that membership eventually operates on a regular three-year rotation.

Investment Committee: *Subcommittee of Finance*

Purpose: The Investment Committee provides specialized oversight of the church's invested assets. It monitors investment performance, policies, advisors, and risk. Further, it makes recommendations to the Finance Committee regarding the prudent management of church investments.

Membership: 4 members. The Committee includes a Chair and three at-large members.

Presbyterian Endowment Trust (PET)/ Endowment Committee: *Subcommittee of Finance*

Purpose: PET is a church trust that holds title to endowment assets donated to the church and makes charitable distributions, consistent with donor intent and consistent with purposes of the Trust. The Endowment Committee, a subcommittee of Finance, directs the affairs of the Trust, in accordance with the Trust document. Endowment Committee members serve as trustees of PET and direct its distributions.

Membership: 9 members. The Committee includes a Chair, eight at-large members, and an ex officio liaison from the Missions Committee. The Missions Committee liaison will be the Vice Chair of Missions.

Missions Committee

Purpose: The Missions Committee provides leadership for the church's outreach and mission priorities locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. It identifies and evaluates mission partnerships, directs the use of mission resources, makes recommendations to PET for other mission bequests, and helps connect the congregation with opportunities to share Christ's love beyond the walls of the church.



Membership: 9 members. The Committee includes three Elders, three Deacons, and three at-large members. The initial Deacon and at-large classes will be staggered, ultimately creating regular three-year terms. The Diaconate Moderator will identify the Deacons who serve on the Missions Committee.

Staff Liaison: Associate Pastor

Personnel Committee

Purpose: The Personnel Committee provides sessional oversight of church staffing, personnel policies, compensation and benefits, performance review processes, and workplace practices. The Committee supports the effectiveness and wellbeing of the church staff while helping ensure that personnel decisions align with the mission and priorities of the church.

Membership: 9 members. The Committee includes three Elders, six at-large members, and the Finance Vice Chair serving ex officio for a one-year term. At-large membership will be staggered to provide continuity from year to year.

Staff Liaison: Senior Pastor

Worship & Music Committee

Purpose: The Worship & Music Committee works with the Senior Pastor and music leadership to support and coordinate the worship life of the church. Its responsibilities include worship services, music ministries, sacraments, worship volunteers, and special and seasonal services.

Membership: 9 members. The Committee includes three Elders and six at-large members serving staggered terms that will ultimately establish a regular three-year rotation.

Staff Liaisons: Senior Pastor and Director of Music Ministries

Presbyterian Weekday School Committee

Purpose: The Presbyterian Weekday School Committee is a **new Session committee** that provides dedicated oversight and support for this important ministry of the church. Its inclusion as a Session committee recognizes the Weekday School's significance as a church ministry.

This committee **replaces the former Congregational Life Committee as one of the Session committees**. The responsibilities previously associated with Congregational Life are not being eliminated. Rather, those responsibilities will primarily move to the



Diaconate, where congregational care, fellowship, hospitality, membership connections, and related ministries more naturally and biblically align.

Membership: 9 members. The committee includes three Elders, six at-large members, and the Finance Secretary for a one-year ex officio term. At-large membership will be staggered to establish an ongoing three-year rotation.

Staff Liaison: Presbyterian Weekday School Director

STANDING COMMITTEE

Communications Committee

Purpose: The Communications Committee is a **new standing Committee that reports directly to Session**. It will help develop a church communication strategy with members and the broader community, including church publications, digital communications, website content, live-streaming, audiovisual communication, and promotion of church ministries and activities.

Membership: Initially structured with a Chair and three at-large members, the Committee has the flexibility to expand the communications team to five or six members as needs and responsibilities develop.

Staff Liaison: Director of Communications

DIACONATE COMMITTEES

This new structure gives the Diaconate a larger and more biblically defined role in the ministries of care, connection, hospitality, fellowship, and service. This shift allows the Session to concentrate more intentionally on governance and strategic leadership while allowing the Deacons to carry forward ministries that directly serve and connect members of the congregation.

Staff Liaison for All Diaconate Committees: Associate Pastor

Membership Connections

Purpose: Membership Connections supports church growth by creating a welcoming environment, encouraging outreach, and helping newcomers become connected and involved in the church. Its work will help move people from being visitors to becoming engaged participants in the life of the congregation.

Membership: 6 Deacons representing the Classes of 2027, 2028, and 2029, with two Deacons from each class. This creates staggered three-year terms and ongoing continuity.



Christian Life

Purpose: Christian Life coordinates ministries that provide care and practical support to members of the congregation. It also serves as the Diaconate connection to the Congregational Care Committee.

Membership: 6 Deacons representing the Classes of 2027, 2028, and 2029, with two Deacons from each class.

Congregational Care Committee: *Subcommittee of Christian Life*

The current Pastoral Care Committee will be renamed the **Congregational Care Committee** and will work as a subcommittee under Christian Life rather than reporting to Session. Its fundamental work will not change. The Subcommittee will continue providing prayer, visitation, encouragement, assistance, and support for members experiencing need or navigating challenging seasons.

The renamed subcommittee may vary in number depending on church needs but will typically consist of approximately 30 Deacon and non-Deacon members, providing an established network of volunteers who can continue this important ministry. The Diaconate will provide a direct line of support and assistance to the committee as needed.

Fellowship & Hospitality Committee

Purpose: The Fellowship & Hospitality Committee plans and supports gatherings and events that build relationships and strengthen the sense of community within the church. Exemplar events include church wide fellowship events, seasonal activities, receptions, potlucks, and other opportunities for members and visitors to connect.

Membership: 6 Deacons representing the Classes of 2027, 2028, and 2029, with two Deacons from each class.

Missions Committee

Purpose: The Diaconate Missions Committee is being folded into the Session's Missions Committee. However, three Deacons will serve on the Missions Committee, communicate mission opportunities and needs to the full Diaconate, and help engage Deacons and the congregation in hands-on service and outreach.

Membership: 3 Deacons, with representation from the Classes of 2027, 2028, and 2029.

TASK FORCE

The **Implementation Task Force is not a Session committee**. It will be a task force of approximately **four to six members selected by, and which reports to, the Session for the duration of the three-year Strategic Plan**.

This group's role will be to help guide implementation of the Strategic Plan and committee structure, monitor

progress, identify issues that arise during implementation, and help ensure that the work envisioned through the Curiosity and Courage process moves from planning into action. Because its purpose is implementation rather than ongoing governance, it is intentionally structured as a task force rather than as a permanent Session committee.

Overall Intent of the

NEW COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The new committee structure is intended to provide **greater clarity, consistency, accountability, and continuity** in how the church organizes its leadership. Sessional committees will concentrate on governance, strategy, oversight, and major ministry priorities, while the Diaconate will assume greater responsibility for the ministries of care, connection, fellowship, hospitality, and service.

The use of staggered terms will allow committees to retain experienced members while welcoming new leadership each year. Assigned staff members will provide continuity and help connect committee work with the day-to-day ministries of the church. Together, the Session, Diaconate, staff, and the Implementation Task Force will have

clearly defined but interconnected roles in carrying the church's Strategic Plan forward.

For a visual overview of the organizational structure supporting this Strategic Plan, see the **Session Organizational Structure** chart (Appendix B) and the **Diaconate Organizational Structure** chart (Appendix C).



MATTHEW 4:18-20 *As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him.*

Advancing our

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Strategic Initiatives identify the specific areas of focus that will move First Presbyterian Church from vision to action during the 2027–2029 Strategic Plan. Developed from the congregation’s input, the work of the Curiosity and Courage Committee, and our Mission, Vision, and Values, these initiatives establish clear priorities for where we concentrate our

time, energy, and resources over the next three years. These Initiatives are intended to provide direction without limiting new opportunities, helping Session, the Diaconate, their respective committees, staff, and the congregation to work together on shared goals while measuring our progress along the way.

Loving Children, Youth, and our Families

Though not new, there is a renewed sense of calling toward nurturing and partnering emerging generations--within FPC and in the community. Some of the most consistent feedback received by the congregation was the importance of the foundational opportunities our congregation has provided children, youth, and their families in the past as well as a hope for new opportunities to emerge in the future. Members expressed a desire to be a church that provides relevant and meaningful opportunities for younger persons to discover Christ’s love in a way that encourages deeper growth and participation in the life of the congregation.





CCC Recommendation

- **Focus Our Efforts:** Strategically prioritize our ministries, resources, and ministry framework to serve the needs of children, youth, and families in our congregation and community;
- **Cast the Vision:** Ensure existing ministries that fit within the scope of this initiative are given appropriate resources, examine what ministries may fall outside of this scope, and imagine new ways to love children, youth, and their families through the ministry offerings of the church;
- **Secure Leadership:** Identify needs that are expected to be led by staff and hire effective people to meet those expectations. Additionally, identify needs that can be met by members who have a heart and talents for this initiative, gathering, training, and mobilizing them to serve in applicable ministry settings; and
- **Develop Our Approach:** Design contextually sensitive and sustainable ministries with younger people that can advance this initiative over time.

Responsible Committee(s)

This initiative will require a collaborative effort of our entire congregation. The CCC expects committees of the church to work together to create a congregation that not only attracts younger generations but actively loves them as well.

Serving Families Through Our Preschool

During the Curiosity and Courage journey, the Session discerned a need for quality full-day care for children in our community. That discernment led to the approval of an augmentation of our Presbyterian Weekday School (“PWS”) to offer both half-day and full-day programs. Knowing that this endeavor would require time and resources to successfully launch, necessary adjustments to our staff structure and building have already begun with the goal of expanding PWS in January of 2027. The congregation expressed a call for this new program to be an integrated part of our church identity. We are not a congregation that hosts a Preschool that operates separately from the mission of the church; but rather that School, its students, families, and staff are a part of the mission of our church.



CCC Recommendation

- **Finalize All Preparations:** Invest necessary resources to ensure our building, staff, and systems are prepared for an augmented PWS that opens by January of 2027;
- **Welcome students and their families:** Identify and explore ways for students and families to feel welcome by the church and learn about its ministry offerings; and
- **Integrate PWS into FPC ministries:** Identify tangible ways to include PWS students and families in the existing ministries of our church and explore new avenues to integrate them into the life of the congregation.

Responsible Committee

The Presbyterian Weekday School Committee will carry the primary responsibility of overseeing the formation and growth of the full-day program and will also lead the exploration of opportunities to integrate PWS into the life of the church.

Deepening our Mission Impact

FPC has always been recognized as a congregation that cares deeply about sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ through meaningful mission work. We strive to meet community needs, both corporately and as individuals. On this visioning journey, we discerned a call to a deeper and more focused community engagement, narrowing our focus to make a deeper impact.

CCC Recommendation

- **Narrow Missional Focus:** Examine the totality of congregational mission partnerships and offerings and move from scattered efforts to a single or short list of community needs, maximizing our impact and focusing our energies for serving. Create unified criteria for discerning the viability of both existing and new mission partnerships;

- 
- **Prioritize Surrounding Schools:** Strengthen our ongoing relationships with Sherwood Elementary and Grier Middle Schools, engaging with them to establish more robust outreach to the students, their families, and faculty, serving with them as we move forward;
 - **Cultivate Hands-On Opportunities:** Balance our mission partnerships and offerings to provide a variety of opportunities to not only give financially or in materials, but also to serve with hands-on encounters. Actively establish these opportunities with an intergenerational focus in mind, providing opportunities for different generations to serve together; and
 - **Commit to Increased Missional Capacity:** Increase the Missions Committee's operational budget by 5% every year over the next three years.

Responsible Committee

The Missions Committee will be responsible for leading this initiative, collaborating with relevant groups and committees in our church that provide mission opportunities to centralize strategy and communication regarding our current and future mission partnerships.

Welcoming New and Existing Members

The larger metropolitan region is rapidly growing in population, including the Gastonia area. We recognize the need among current and incoming residents to find connections in local churches. Though always a friendly church, this initiative calls our congregation to maximize its campus hospitality, developing clear pathways toward warm engagement with visitors, new members, and those not currently active and engaged with the congregation. In addition, this initiative also calls FPC towards greater presence in our local community.

CCC Recommendation

- **Adopt an Outward Posture:** Rather than expecting our community to find us, shift our focus outward, intentionally connecting with those in our community who may find a church home at FPC. Develop a strategy



to share FPC's mission and vision with surrounding neighborhoods and invite them to join us on our journey;

- **Open Our Doors and Arms to Visitors:** Develop and implement a strategy for the on-campus experience that intentionally makes visitors and new attenders feel welcome at every worship service and ministry event, including strategies for engagement and follow-up when needed;
- **Create Clear Pathways to Church Membership and Engagement:** Create and implement a formal pathway for integrating visitors and new members, establishing processes for engaging visitors, inviting them to join, and offering opportunities for new relationships and involvement in church ministries; and
- **Prioritize Community Presence:** Find community events in which the congregation may participate, increasing its awareness, engagement, and visibility in the community.

Responsible Committee

The Membership Connections Committee is tasked with forming these processes, coordinating with relevant staff and other Committees of the church to ensure the success of this initiative.

Connecting as a Caring Community

One aspect of congregational life that was communicated both as an existing strength and an aspiration for growth relates to our highly interconnected membership. There is a strong desire for deep relationships spanning across the generations; a desire to be a congregation that doesn't just attend church together, but in which members enjoy fellowship with one another; and even more importantly care for one another, even as our members are being cared for by the installed clergy and ministry staff. Developing and deepening relationships requires intentional efforts to gather for fellowship, to form genuine relationships and friendships, to reach out when in need, and to extend compassionate care to those experiencing hardships. A congregation that develops and maintains strong connections between members will share in joy, with those members experiencing abundant blessings and simultaneously will support those members who are navigating challenging seasons.



CCC Recommendation

- **Mobilize a Network of Congregational Care:** Develop a coordinated, congregation-wide approach to care that equips installed pastors, ministry staff, elders, deacons, the Congregational Care Committee, and members of the congregation to share in the ministry of caring for one another. Recognizing that different circumstances call for different forms of care, this network will help connect members with appropriate pastoral, spiritual, relational, and practical support. Through shared responsibility and intentional coordination, we will cultivate a congregation in which people are known, supported, and cared for throughout every season of life;
- **Clarify Avenues for Requesting and Extending Care:** Implement a communication strategy that enables members to reach out when they are in need and receive an appropriate response from fellow members, ministry staff, and installed pastors, as appropriate. Identify and gather those members with a heart and talent for compassionate ministry and provide necessary orientation and training for the ministry of congregational care;
- **Caring for Our Seniors:** Implement a congregational care plan of regular impactful contact with seniors, keeping them informed and engaged, and as they inevitably age and develop additional needs, provide that care with love and attention; and
- **Pave the Road to Deeper Relationships through Fellowship:** Balance the ministry offerings of the church to incorporate opportunities for the congregation to deepen relationships through fellowship events. Provide for a variety of activities and settings that target both intergenerational fellowship and fellowship within certain demographics;

Responsible Committees

The Congregational Care Committee will be vital in partnering with our installed pastors and relevant staff to care for the congregation. The Fellowship & Hospitality Committee will lead the efforts to provide fellowship opportunities that enable the congregation to grow deeper in relationships.



Deepening Faith Together

The heart of discipleship is the intentional pursuit of learning God's Word as revealed in Jesus Christ and applying it to our lives and our call in the world. This journey of deepening our faith remains a foundational aspect of our sense of purpose and identity. Many members of the congregation expressed the importance of past experiences at FPC that helped shape their faith as well as hopes for future opportunities to continue the journey of discipleship in a real and meaningful way. We sense a need and desire to examine our current faith formation practices, strengthening existing ministries that are viable and exploring new ways for members to deepen their faith in Christ and relationships with one another.

CCC Recommendation

- **Conduct Necessary Discernment:** Examine all existing Faith Formation ministry offerings, including Sunday School, Wednesday Night Alive, existing small groups, and children's and youth ministries, identifying any needed adjustments that allow for a capacity to offer new opportunities for members not currently involved;
- **Commit to Small Group Ministry:** Hearing the clear desire for new opportunities to gather in small groups, prioritize the formation of a ministry that addresses the learning needs of the entire congregation in a way that provides accessible ways to engage in a small group setting;
- **Maximize Participation:** Form and implement faith formation strategies that offer different settings, topics, and modes of learning and teaching that attract wider participation by the congregation; and
- **Open the Doors:** Develop communication strategies that effectively welcome new members to deepen their faith and form relationships in all faith formation ministries.

Responsible Committee

The Faith Formation Committee will be responsible for developing and implementing this strategic initiative.



Aligning our Ministry Structure with our Mission

FPC currently functions with the ministries and organizational complexity of a larger church while retaining many of the expectations and practices of a smaller congregation. As our ministries have expanded, our structures and expectations for how ministry is led have not always grown with them. This has created uncertainty about the appropriate roles of staff, elders and deacons, committees, and members, and about who is responsible for leading and carrying out different areas of ministry. As we look toward the future, we need a ministry structure that reflects our mission and goals for growth, makes effective use of both staff and congregational leadership, and is sustainable within our financial resources.

CCC Recommendation

- **Develop a shared model for ministry.** Clarify how ministry should be led and carried out in a church of our size and complexity, including the appropriate roles and responsibilities of installed pastors, staff, elders and deacons, committees, and members;
- **Align our staffing structure with our mission and resources.** Examine the church's mission, vision, strategic priorities, ministry offerings, and congregational expectations in conjunction with financial capacity and recommend a staff structure that effectively and sustainably supports them;
- **Strengthen congregational ownership of ministry.** Identify opportunities for individual volunteers and committees to meaningfully lead and carry out ministry alongside staff, recognizing that the church's mission is the shared work of the whole congregation; and
- **Clarify responsibility and accountability.** Establish clearer expectations for both staff and the congregation regarding who leads, carries out, supports, and evaluates major areas of ministry so that responsibilities are understood and appropriately shared throughout the church.

Responsible Committee

The Personnel Committee will be responsible for addressing this initiative and propose a structure and strategy for the Session to approve.



Cultivating a Culture of Generous Giving

Generosity is the fruit of a congregation that recognizes the Spirit's ongoing activity and embraces opportunities to respond to God's generosity shown in Jesus Christ. A culture of generous giving is formed when a church is clear in its purpose, engaging in its ministries, and which invites members and visitors to participate in the ongoing story of the Spirit's movement within, amidst, and out of the church. FPC is proud of its long tradition of congregational generosity. For generations, FPC members have explored ways to generously use their gifts and talents to bless the church and participate in its mission. There are countless instances where that generosity has also extended to financial blessings, both for the immediate and long-term life of the church. Standing on such a foundation of generosity, we feel compelled to renew and cultivate a culture that emphasizes the giving of time, talents, and treasures. This renewed commitment not only serves the current mission of the church but also provides a springboard for the future life of FPC and its members.

CCC Recommendation

- **Assembling the Team:** Task the Giving Committee with formulating a comprehensive strategy to create a culture of congregational generosity and to implement that strategy year-round;
- **Integrating Finances and Faith:** Explore curriculum and experiential resources designed to promote deeper financial discipleship and prioritize using our personal talents in service of the church; and
- **Consider Generosity Beyond Finances:** Create an Annual Giving Season that invites members of the congregation to make both financial and service commitments that help provide for the life of the church over the following year.

Responsible Committee

The Finance Committee will be tasked with leading this initiative, guiding the Giving Committee and other relevant committees to help ensure success with this initiative.



Telling our Story

Congregational growth requires clear and consistent communication that informs and invites. With gratitude for the ways the Spirit is already moving at FPC, as well as in joyful anticipation for what is to come, we need to tell our story to one another, to our neighbors, and to our community. Establishing effective communication practices allows the congregation to understand what is happening at FPC and to invite others to join us on our journey.

CCC Recommendation

- **Establish Congregational Leadership:** Entrust the newly formed Communications Committee with the task of developing communication strategies for the church;
- **Spread the Word:** Research best practices and develop plans for congregational communication that incorporate the effective use of email, website, text, physical mail, bulletin announcements, and moments for ministry and mission; and
- **Open the Front Door:** Understanding that the first impression we make on those considering visiting the church is our website, we need to continuously improve that site to vividly convey the character and nature of our church and provide easy methods to contact the church.

Responsible Committee(s)

The newly formed Communications Committee will be tasked with leading this initiative, guiding and overseeing the implementation of this strategic initiative.

PROVERBS 16:9 *The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps.*

From Vision to Action

A THREE-YEAR TIMELINE

The Strategic Plan will guide FPC for three years, beginning in January 2027 and continuing through December 2029. This time frame is both ambitious and doable, allowing the church time to move from discernment to action while maintaining focus and accountability for successful completion. Over these three years, the Session, Diaconate, committees, staff, and our congregation will work together to advance the Plan priorities and initiatives.

During this three-year period, the church will implement its new committee structure, strengthen its ministries, enhance communications, encourage greater member participation, establish baseline metrics, and track progress towards Strategic Plan goals. The intent of the Strategic Plan is not to pursue unduly ambitious goals, but to establish realistic and measurable objectives that demonstrate meaningful progress, while allowing the church to respond to changing needs and new opportunities.

The Implementation Task Force will provide ongoing oversight of the Strategic Plan. Working alongside church

leadership, the Task Force will monitor progress towards meeting Strategic Plan goals, support committees in advancing their assigned initiatives, and regularly report progress, challenges, and accomplishments to the Session. At the conclusion of 2029, the Implementation Task Force will assist the Session in making a comprehensive written evaluation of the Strategic Plan, including our accomplishments, lessons learned, and opportunities that have emerged since the Strategic Plan was adopted. That review will help establish the foundation for FPC's next period of strategic planning.





Staying on Track by

MEASURING OUR PROGRESS

An important part of this Strategic Plan is understanding whether our shared efforts are making a meaningful difference in the life of our church. Measuring our progress will give us a consistent way to recognize growth, celebrate successes, identify areas that may need renewed attention, and make thoughtful adjustments as we move through 2027-2029. These measures are not intended to reduce ministry to numbers; rather, they will help us better understand participation, engagement, giving, and other signs of

a healthy and active congregation. Using 2026 as our baseline, church leadership and the appropriate committees will review our progress regularly with the Implementation Task Force, evaluating results and helping us remain focused on the goals of the Strategic Plan.

The specific areas we will measure, along with our starting points and goals for the next three years, are detailed in the **Measuring Our Progress** section in Appendix D.

EXODUS 3:11-12 *But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”*

With a Clear Path Forward

TOGETHER, WE BEGIN

The presentation of our Strategic Plan to the congregation on September 20, 2026, marks an important transition from planning to implementation. Between then and January 2027, we will begin putting the people and structure in place

to carry out the Strategic Plan. This period gives our church an opportunity to prepare thoughtfully and prayerfully so that we are ready to begin the work of the Strategic Plan together in the new year.

Prepare Our Leadership

With the congregation having elected the new class of Elders and Deacons that will be installed in January 2027, and which will serve during the Strategic Plan period, our attention will turn to preparing our committees for the year ahead. Incoming chairs of Session committees will work

to seat their committees, while incoming Diaconate leadership will do the same for its committees. This will put the leadership and organizational structure in place to begin implementing the Strategic Plan in January.

Prepare for Implementation

The Implementation Task Force will be formed and prepared to begin its work in 2027. The Task Force will help keep the Strategic Plan visible to the congregation and moving forward, support committees

as they undertake their initiatives, monitor Strategic Plan progress, and provide regular updates to the Session throughout the three-year plan period.

Prepare Through Prayer

We ask every member of FPC to pray for our church, its leaders, and the work ahead. As we prepare for 2027, may we seek God's guidance for how each of us can participate as we begin living into our Mission, Vision, and Values. Together,

may we embrace our Vision of **Belonging, Renewing, Transforming**, allowing it to shape how we welcome and care for one another, deepen our lives in Christ, and carry his love beyond the walls of our church.

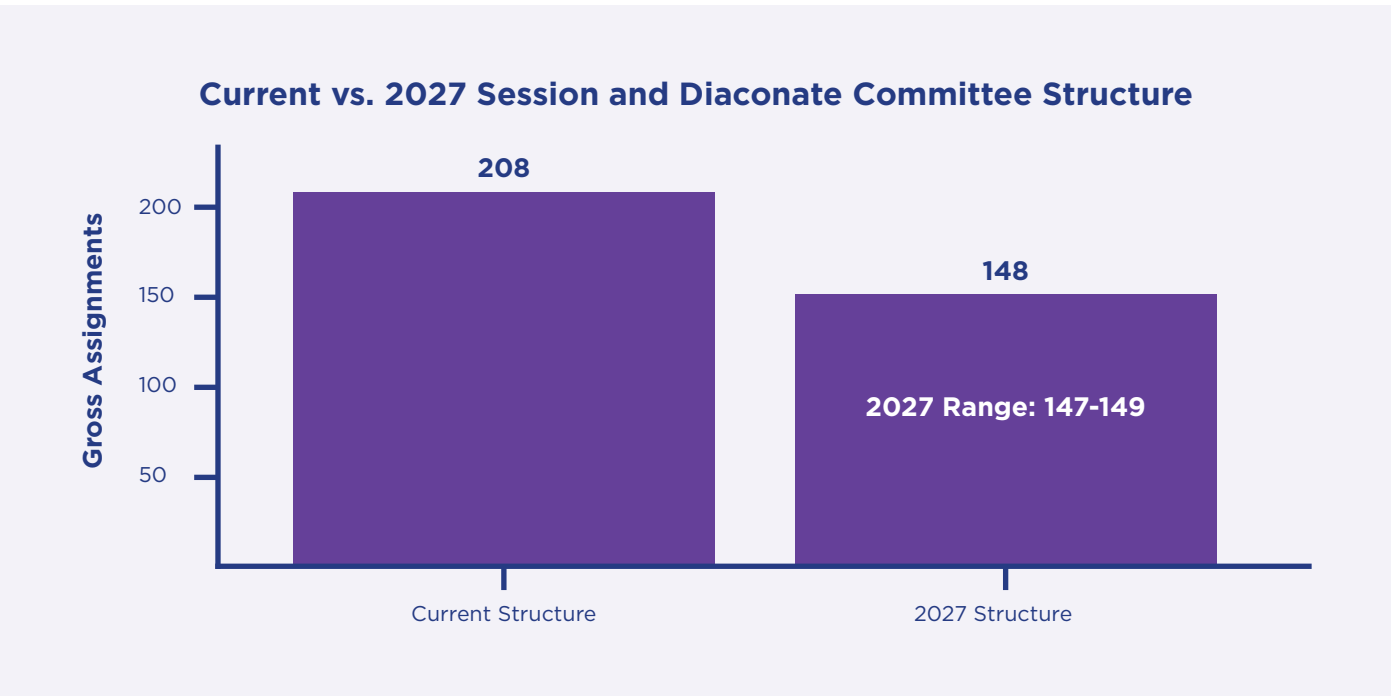




APPENDIX A

Current vs. 2027 Session and Diaconate Committee Structure

For 2027, the new leadership structure provides for 96–98 Sessional committee and subcommittee assignments, 21 primary Deacon assignments, and approximately 30 Congregational Care Committee positions. That produces approximately 147–149 gross assignments, which is about 59–61 fewer than today and represents a reduction of roughly 28%–29%. The separate Implementation Task Force adds 4–6 positions but is not a Sessional committee.



The change is best understood as right-sizing rather than reducing participation. All 21 Elders will have a specific committee assignment. Three Elders will serve on each of seven Sessional committees. All 21 Deacons will also have one primary assignment, with 6 serving on Membership Connections, 6 on Christian Life, 6 on Fellowship/Hospitality, and 3 on Missions. Congregational Life is eliminated as a Sessional committee and replaced by Presbyterian Weekday School (PWS). Pastoral Care is renamed Congregational Care and becomes a subcommittee within the Diaconate under Christian Life. The result is fewer overlapping assignments, clearer accountability, and a more intentional structure for Elder, Deacon, and At-Large participation.

**2027 gross assignment total excludes the separate 4–6 member Implementation Task Force.*

APPENDIX B

Session Organizational Structure

First Presbyterian Church • 2027 Committee Structure

SESSION
Oversight of Sessional Committees

Building & Grounds 3 Elders + 3 At-Large Members 6 voting members Staff Liaison: Director of Buildings and Grounds	Faith Formation 3 Elders Subcommittees: Adult – 1 Elder + 6 At-Large Youth – 1 Elder + 6 At-Large Children – 1 Elder + 6 At-Large 21 voting members Staff Liaisons: Director of Faith Formation Director of Youth & Young Adults	Finance 3 Elders + 3 At-Large Members Ex officio: PWS Liaison Ex officio: Personnel Vice Chair 6 voting members Subcommittees: Giving – 9 members Investment – 4 members PET – 10 members Ex Officio: Missions Liaison Staff Liaisons: Senior Pastor Business Administrator	Missions 3 Elders + 3 Deacons + 3 At-Large 9 voting members Staff Liaison: Associate Pastor	Personnel 3 Elders + 6 At-Large Members Ex officio: Finance Vice Chair 9 voting members Staff Liaison: Senior Pastor	Worship & Music 3 Elders + 6 At-Large Members 9 voting members Staff Liaisons: Senior Pastor Director of Music Ministries	Presbyteri-an Weekday School 3 Elders + 6 At-Large Members Ex officio: Finance Secretary 9 voting members Staff Liaison: PWS Director
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Standing Committee: Communications Committee 4-6 members Reports directly to Session Staff Liaison: Director of Communications
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Implementation Task Force 4-6 members Reports directly to Session Not a Sessional Committee
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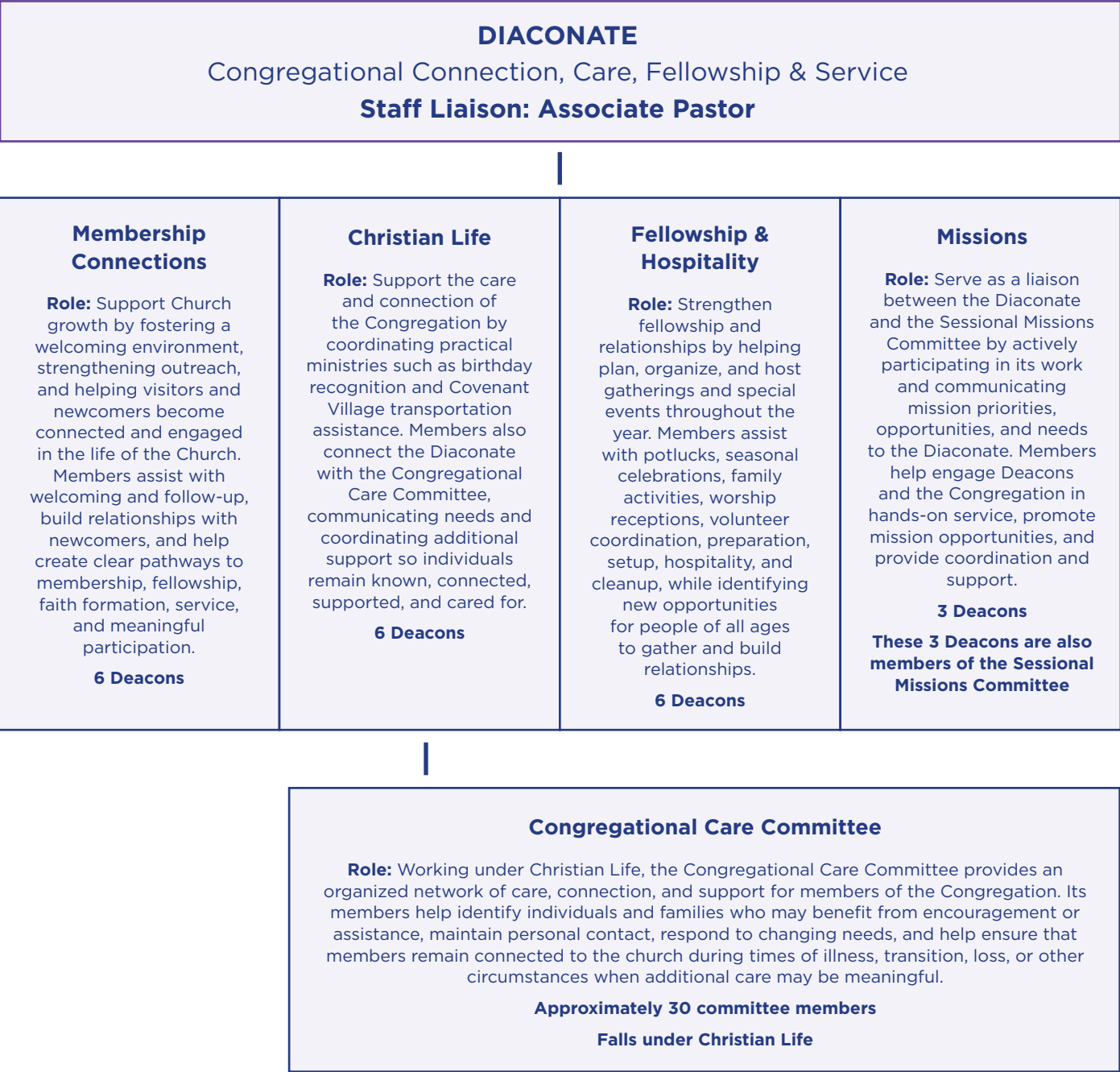
To establish the new committee structure, At-Large members will initially be staggered across 1-, 2-, and 3-year terms. As those initial classes rotate off, new At-Large members will join for full 3-year terms, eventually creating three rotating classes with all At-Large members serving 3-year terms. Committee terms operate on a calendar-year basis beginning January 2027.



APPENDIX C

Diaconate Organizational Structure

First Presbyterian Church • 2027 Ministry Structure



APPENDIX D

Measuring Our Progress

The following provides the specific areas we will use to measure our progress throughout the 2027–2029 Strategic Plan. Beginning with our 2026 baseline, these measures will help us recognize growth, understand trends, and remain focused on the areas we have identified as important to the life and future of our church.

Area of Focus	Primary Responsibility	Why We Will Follow It	Direction for 2027–2029
Worship Attendance	Worship & Music	Worship is at the heart of our lives together. Following average attendance for Thrive, Traditional, and combined summer worship will help us understand participation patterns across services and seasons.	The 2026 averages are 87 for Thrive, 130 for Traditional, and 114 for summer combined worship. Goals are Thrive: 93 in 2027, 97 in 2028, and 100 in 2029; Traditional: 135, 138, and 140; and Summer Combined: 122, 126, and 130.
Sunday School / Faith Formation	Faith Formation	Faith formation helps children, youth, and adults deepen relationships and grow in faith. We will follow participation collectively and by age group to see where engagement is growing or needs attention.	The 2026 baseline is 105 participants. At approximately 5% annual growth, the collective goals are about 110 in 2027, 116 in 2028, and 122 in 2029, while also watching participation by age group.
New Members	Membership Connections	Welcoming new members is an important sign of connection and vitality. We will follow not only how many join, but how effectively visitors are welcomed, connected, and invited into the life of the church.	From a 2026 baseline of 15 new members, our goals are 20 in 2027, 22 in 2028, and 25 in 2029 - a total of 67 new members during the three-year plan.
Giving Families	Finance – Giving Committee	The number of giving families reflects participation in supporting our shared ministry. We will compare giving households with potential giving families to see whether participation broadens over time.	Beginning with 186 giving families in 2026, our goals are 191 in 2027, 199 in 2028, and 207 in 2029. We will also follow the percentage of potential giving families who participate.
Congregational Giving	Finance – Giving Committee	Giving tells us more than total dollars received. We will follow overall giving, average and median gifts, and changes in pledges to better understand both generosity and participation.	The 2026 median gift is \$3,300 and average gift is \$8,137. Goals are median: \$3,432 in 2027, \$3,569 in 2028, and \$3,712 in 2029; average: \$8,462, \$8,800, and \$9,152. Overall congregational giving will also be reviewed against budget and prior year.
Children & Youth Participation	Faith Formation	We want to understand engagement beyond Sunday School. We will follow unique children and youth participating in worship, mission, fellowship, trips, learning, and intergenerational activities.	A reliable 2026 participation baseline will first be established. The plan calls for 10% annual growth in active participation in 2027, 2028, and 2029, with the Implementation Task Force helping establish a consistent method for tracking involvement.
Presbyterian Weekday School	Presbyterian Weekday School	The Weekday School is an important ministry and connection with young families. We will follow enrollment, capacity and utilization, full-day participation, and connections between PWS families and FPC.	Because the full-day program is planned to begin in January 2027 and capacity is still being established, 2027, 2028, and 2029 goals will be based on actual licensed/program capacity, utilization, and launch-year demand rather than an arbitrary growth percentage.



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