

## REPORT OF THE PASTORS AND SESSION 2022

*January 2023*

The past year has been an exciting and eventful time in the life of our congregation as we more fully came out of the disruptions of 2020 and 2021, experienced the fourth year of the senior pastor transition, and saw growth in our congregation.

Over the course of 2022, we saw about a 10% increase in attendance in both morning and evening worship, which has been very encouraging, as long-time members and adherents returned to more regular involvement in the church, and as new families and individuals discovered and got involved with the life and worship of our congregation.

The preaching of the Word of God continues to be central to the health and vitality of our church. This year, we continued to follow a “rotating trimester” pattern for our morning sermon series: spending approximately a third of the year in a gospel, a third of the year in an epistle, and a third of the year in a book from the Old Testament. We heard from the Gospel of Mark through February, we returned to Colossians (which we began in 2021) in June through August, and we came back to Deuteronomy (which we also started in 2021) in September through December. The one interruption in this cycle this past year is that from March through May we had a rare topical series in our morning service, on our theological vision as a congregation. This was a time for us to focus on our core purpose and core values as a congregation, as well as our aspirational values going forward. This series grew out of the extended focus of the session in 2021 to clarify our theological vision and strategic plans going forward as a congregation. Our hope in focusing on these themes together in the form of a sermon series was for it both to serve as a refresher to long-term members of our congregation, and to help new members and adherents to better understand our church.

Pastor Nicoletti’s evening sermons in 2022 were often an extension of his morning series (with one set focused on additional thoughts on our theological vision, and another set focused on additional thoughts on the Ten Commandments). Over the course of the year, Pastor Gutierrez continued his series on the Gospel of Matthew. Our evening worship was also blessed by other guest preachers, as we intentionally sought to bring in gifted ministers from our presbytery and beyond to minister God’s word to our congregation. We were especially blessed over the past year to hear sermons from our Pastor Emeritus Rob Rayburn, and from our elder, the Rev. Jeff David.

Though attendance has grown, financial giving in 2022 declined. This has not been a continuous drop, but rather an initial drop at the beginning of the year which then leveled off and has been stable at about 15% below giving in 2021. As a session, we have taken this drop seriously and have made some adjustments to our plans going forward as a result. That said, our hope and prayer is that the Lord continues to provide for the ministry of the church as needed, through the generosity of our congregation.

In the fall of 2022, the session met again to review our theological vision together, to consider our aspirational goals, and to discuss the best concrete steps for us to take going forward in order to continue to be faithful to that vision and pursue those goals in the life of our congregation.

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As should be expected, our core purpose and values remain unchanged. Faith Presbyterian Church exists to be God's instrument in making, maintaining, and maturing disciples for Jesus Christ. Central to our ministry as we do this is the deep exposition of the Holy Scriptures, our engagement in thoughtful & robust liturgical worship, the cultivation of a culture of Reformed catholicity, and the nurture & equipping of covenant children.

Our aspirational values (those things we value in theory, but believe we need to improve on in practice) remain the same as well: 1) the need for deeper community and relationships, 2) the need for more shepherding, discipleship, and pastoral counseling for our congregants, and 3) the need to grow in evangelism, outreach, and missions.

At the start of 2022 we introduced six concrete steps we intended to pursue as ways to pursue those aspirational goals. Three have been accomplished, three we continue to work on, and one new item has been added to our list this past fall.

The three steps that have been accomplished are related to staff changes. At the end of 2021, we moved Pastor Gutierrez's position from being a 3-5 year position to being a long-term position. In 2022 we made two part-time hires. We hired a part-time bookkeeper in the office (as we had prior to 2018), in order to free up time for Mr. Whaley to provide more direct administrative support to the ministers (thus freeing them to more efficiently use their time for the work of ministry). We also brought Evan Kvale on staff as a part-time ministry intern for one year, with the goal of mentoring him towards a possible future calling in full-time ministry.

There are then the three concrete steps that we introduced at the beginning of 2022, and which we are continuing to work on.

First, our session has engaged in a focused discussion on the best role for our ruling elders in the shepherding of our congregation. Through our conversations, we have outlined what we believe is a realistic way forward that clarifies the oversight expectations for elders in shepherding. In the year ahead we plan to communicate and implement this vision further in the life of the congregation.

Second, we have moved forward with a search for a additional assistant pastor for our congregation who will focus on pastoral counseling and leading/supporting our new small group ministry. Earlier this year a search committee was formed and has been at work for several months. When they have a final recommendation, they will communicate that to the session. Since this will be an assistant pastor position, it will be the session who votes on whether or not to call a man to this work.

One change that we have introduced to this position has to do with its timetable. While this role was initially introduced as being open-ended, the session is mindful (as noted above) of the drop in financial giving in the past year. While we hope that this may be a long-term position, at this point we are making a three-year commitment to the role. As we approach the date on which the third pastor will have been here for three years, the session will make a decision on the best path going forward, taking budget, fit, and the needs of the church into account. We are proceeding this

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way in an attempt to balance two realities: The first is our commitment to our aspirational values, and our belief that an additional assistant pastor is the best way to pursue them at this time. The second is the reality of our financial giving levels right now. We have, for several years, put funds into cash reserves, anticipating a future situation where our financial need may exceed our giving. We believe that this is such a situation, and that while we cannot draw from those cash reserves indefinitely, it is a responsible way forward for us to decide now to spend a certain amount of those reserves over a limited period of time (three years) in order to move forward, for the health of our congregation. Our prayer is for giving to rise to match this need beyond the initial three-year period.

The third concrete step that has carried over from 2021 is to begin the process of developing a centrally directed and supported small-group ministry in our church. This step is on hold right now, as we wait for the additional pastor who will help execute it.

The new concrete step that the session decided to add to our strategic plan for the year ahead is to seek to revitalize our Wednesday night prayer meeting. Like most of our events, prayer meeting took a serious hit in attendance after the events in 2020. Unlike our other weekly events (morning worship, evening worship, and Sunday school), it has not grown over the past year, but it has continued to decline. The session has formed a committee to investigate and consider how we might revitalize this ministry of our church (many of you recently received and completed a survey to that end), and we will continue to work on that in the year ahead.

There is a lot to be excited about for our congregation in 2023. There is also much to be in prayer about. As we seek the Lord's wisdom on how best to move our congregation forward, we once again give thanks that Christ is the Head of his Church. He is the one who gives life, and health, and growth to his Body.

And so, relying on his grace, we entrust the year ahead to our Lord, as we seek to fulfill his calling on us as a congregation, and trust in his provision and grace.

Warmly in Christ,  
The Pastors and Session of Faith Presbyterian Church