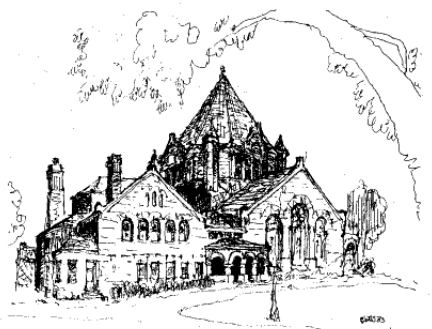


---

First United Methodist Church  
**Vision & Strategic Plan**  
**2005-2009**



**First Church Vision Statement:** We are a faith community which seeks to embody the Living Christ and to be expressions and agents of God's gracious love to each other and to all the world. We are called to be faithful stewards who reflect the God who is at work in our lives.

**Goals & Objectives:** Listed below, in priority order within each section, are the guiding goals of this strategic plan, the goals and objectives for each of the Leadership Council NOW ministry teams (Nurture, Outreach, Witness), and the goals and objectives regarding church resources.

**I. GUIDING GOALS. In implementing this plan we will make every effort to:**

- A.** Promote and embody the United Methodist principle of “*Open hearts, open minds, open doors*”, as well as our congregation's hospitality statement:

*“First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh affirms that God's grace is available to all. We prayerfully seek to openly welcome all of God's children regardless of Christian perspective, education, economic condition, race, gender, national origin, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientation, age, or marital status. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons, independent of society's regard. God blesses us all so that together we can be God's instruments of blessing to the world.”*

- B.** Foster a Christian community that provides a loving church family experience in an urban setting and that nurtures its members so that they may grow in all aspects of their faith experience, discipleship, and commitment to outreach and witness.
- C.** Invite and engage prospective new members.
- D.** Significantly expand the role of music in our celebration of God.
- E.** Prayerfully select and focus on specific, vital ministries and quality programs that reflect the congregation's commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, intellectually informed theology, spiritual development, and social justice.
- F.** Commit sufficient time, talent, and resources to ensure that the ministries and programs can be sustained and bear fruit.
- G.** Provide strong pastoral and lay leadership, engage the congregation, and value the efforts of everyone who is involved in our ministries and programs.
- H.** Better utilize lay members' skills, passions, and spiritual gifts in all aspects of the church.
- I.** Evaluate and prioritize ministries and programs on an annual basis. Those that are not viable or of high priority should be discontinued. Ministries and programs should establish criteria for their ongoing assessment.

**II. NURTURE. We seek to build a faith community in which each individual is engaged and well nurtured by:**

- A. Ensuring that Sunday morning worship, which is the central experience of the church community, is relevant and reverent, includes informed and inspired preaching, offers music that is varied and spiritually uplifting, is well organized and integrated as a whole, and challenges those present to live according to the Gospel.**
1. Enable ministerial staff to devote sufficient time for developing sermons and overseeing all aspects of the service.

2. Provide the necessary resources to sustain a quality, faith-filled music program and to expand this vital part of our worship. Increase participation of children and youth, the bell choir, and member instrumentalists.
3. Celebrate two Sunday morning worship services in the summer.
4. Emphasize the importance of an active worship committee working closely with the ministerial staff to help coordinate communion, ushering, etc. and to plan special services. Ensure that those participating in music ministry are included in worship planning activities both on an ad hoc basis and through ongoing representation on the committee.
5. Involve laity in more aspects of the worship service (e.g., prayers, communion liturgy, children's sermons). Seek opportunities to involve children and youth as appropriate for their age and spiritual maturity.

**B. Offering a variety of opportunities for individuals to interact in viable and meaningful “small groups” that support their spiritual development and enhance a sense of belonging and connectedness.**

1. Sustain and strengthen current groups that have been successfully playing this role (e.g., Disciple Bible study, choir and bells, the prayer chain, youth group, and young adults group). Renew a vibrant college age group each year.
2. Facilitate the formation of additional small groups that respond to the needs and interests of members or prospective members of the church community. These might include, for example, service/outreach, Bible study, faith sharing, issue-oriented discussion groups, and mutual support / fellowship opportunities (e.g., neighborhood groups). Only those groups that are sufficiently viable should be sustained.
3. Establish a lay position to systematically coordinate small groups for the church community in order to ensure that no member who wants to participate is left out, to publicize the groups (including information in visitor packets, during membership class, etc.), to evaluate ongoing efficacy of specific groups, and to identify needs and interests for new small groups and assist in their start-up.

**C. Providing educational and spiritual-growth opportunities that meet the needs of our diverse membership.**

1. Designate responsibilities for implementing and coordinating a comprehensive Christian education program for all age groups to a paid staff member.
2. Demonstrate our commitment to the children and youth of the church by increasing the support for their teachers, resources, and spaces. This includes celebrating our gifted teachers, having broader member participation in children and youth activities (including musical and drama programs), and ensuring quality programs for all ages.
3. Organize an annual all-church retreat, an annual women's retreat, and special retreats for other groups as needed.
4. Encourage all members to learn more about spiritual gifts and to discover their own spiritual gifts. Offer learning opportunities related to this topic (e.g., Sunday morning classes, workshops, materials on the church web page) so that interested members can participate in at least one such opportunity over the next five years.
5. Establish a long-term plan to evaluate and improve spaces used for educational activities. These spaces should be clean, safe and appealing to members. Consider refurbishing one room each year, using church member labor whenever possible, starting with the Promise Land room.
6. Intentionally provide educational opportunities specific to various groups within the community (including parents, singles, couples, sexual orientation minorities, racial/ethnic

minorities, women, men, children, youth, college students, young adults, adults, seniors, etc.). Make use of a variety of learning formats (lecture, discussion, experience, etc.) in order to appeal to individual learning styles.

**D. Making music central to our celebration of God.**

1. Explore fundamentally new uses of music in all aspects of our faith, as a means for praising God, for celebration, for inspiration, for spiritual enrichment, and for engaging members and newcomers alike. Assign a task force, appointed by the Leadership Council and including the music director, to flesh out this expanded music ministry.
2. Recognize that this expanded ministry will involve significant costs that may include facilities changes, instruments, electronic support systems, musicians and other personnel, and seek to find means to support these expenditures.

**E. Organizing social and musical events that foster a sense of community and provide venues for attracting non-church members to participate in church activities.**

1. Offer social events like all-church dinners, retreats, spring fun fests, progressive dinners, and square dances.
2. Organize special musical events like Christmas candlelight services, spring concerts, and special musicals. Through these events, expand the number of people involved in music ministries and programs at First Church.
3. Budget for the cost of the events or charge admission and actively advertise. In addition to nurturing our members, these events are great witness opportunities. Encourage church members to invite their non-church member friends to these events.

**F. Supporting and encouraging one another as members of our church family through visiting, supporting, and praying for those in need, providing effective church communications, and recognizing individuals involved in ministry or celebrating important life events.**

1. Visit members and friends of the church who are in need and follow up on church members who have not attended for some time. Develop a lay ministry group which will identify these needs and coordinate visitation and support efforts. Encourage small groups to be attentive to member needs and provide support as possible. Record sermons, special services and musical events to send to members who were unable to attend and for people to purchase. Senior citizens and shut-ins are to be given special attention.
2. Provide quality, informative member communications using various media, including the monthly *First Word* newsletter, Sunday worship bulletins and announcements, church bulletin boards and free-standing posters, and the church website. Identify and empower individual(s) in charge of efforts to create, evaluate, and update bulletin boards and the website. Ensure that communications are designed with both members and visitors in mind (e.g., bulletin boards can also inform the many outside groups that use our building, and the website should include a strong focus on attracting and informing non-members).
3. Create and support regular opportunities for members to share prayer concerns, thanksgivings, and words of encouragement and support. Examples include the email prayer chain, lifting up prayer concerns and thanksgivings at all church meetings (not just worship services), providing easels outside fellowship hall where individuals can express prayer concerns and thanksgivings, and identifying members interested in sending short personal notes to individuals on behalf of the congregation. Continue to recognize/honor in Sunday morning worship or fellowship hour persons actively involved in our ministries and programs and to recognize special events in the lives of individual members (birthdays, anniversaries, births and adoptions, weddings and holy unions, etc.).

**III. OUTREACH. We believe service to the world is a key part of discipleship and therefore are committed to:**

**A. Financially supporting missions.**

1. Fully fund our United Methodist “fair share” apportionments through which we underwrite our conference, national, and international United Methodist missions.
2. Continue to financially support EECM (East End Cooperative Ministries) and Church Union.
3. Become a mission partner to financially support a mission project and/or working missionary that we collectively select.

**B. Participating in hands-on missions.**

1. Work through First Charities to continue to champion our First Food and Friends ministry and to explore ways to better serve those who come for that meal (e.g., distribute clothing on Saturday mornings, provide check-ups for certain medical conditions like diabetes, make referrals to other local service providers).
2. Each year the Outreach Team should initiate or join at least one local mission project in the east end of Pittsburgh.
3. Highlight individual volunteer ministry opportunities at EECM and other local ministries (e.g., Shepherd Wellness, Bethlehem Haven, CROP Walk).
4. Sponsor an annual summer mission camp for youth.
5. Participate in or lead annual VIM (Volunteers in Mission) missions both here and abroad as a congregation or as a cluster.

**C. Creating opportunities for learning about issues of social justice. Encourage and empower our Social Justice Action Team to educate and mobilize the congregation on these public issues.**

1. Give ongoing attention to national and international social justice issues.
2. Encourage participation in interfaith events and dialogue, especially when our pastors or other members of the congregation are featured speakers.

**IV. WITNESS. We seek to share the Good News of God’s love and the open congregation God has developed in our midst by:**

**A. Ensuring that visitors to our church feel welcomed and included.**

1. Remind greeters that making visitors feel welcome is their primary focus, and hence extra effort is needed to ensure that visitors are warmly greeted (even if they arrive late), receive bulletins, and know what to do before, during, and after the service (e.g., if they have children). Engage visitors after the service. Have additional greeters on the steps of the church or in the parking lots, and before Sunday School.
2. Continue to recognize visitors during Sunday morning worship and distribute visitor packets. Ensure that these packets are informative, engaging and up-to-date. Remind ushers to pay special attention to making visitors feel comfortable participating or not-participating in offerings and communion. Continue to encourage signing the attendance pads. Follow up on visitors with a pastoral or laity contact the same week.
3. Emphasize the importance of an active welcoming team to initiate and support efforts to improve our hospitality to visitors, working with the worship committee as needed.

4. Regularly encourage all members to seek out and greet visitors before and after the service, to introduce visitors to other members, to invite visitors to fellowship hour and other church events, to wear name tags, and to support the initiatives of the welcoming team.

**B. Getting the word out about who we are and what we offer.**

1. Advertise church activities in free media and targeted non-free media. Determine groups likely to be receptive to what we offer (e.g., students, faculty, and staff at local universities and colleges), and ensure that they know about us. Continue to improve the website so that it is current, informative, interactive, and attractive to potential visitors, with various levels of web savvy. Explore adding chat rooms. Distribute flyers and CDs advertising church activities. Continue to place announcements at bus stops. Have ministerial staff members attend CMU and Pitt orientation venues. Place brochures in local service providers like the Family House and the Hillman Cancer Center.
2. Emphasize our hospitality statement in our communications as representative of who we are. Periodically review outdoor signage and update as needed. Improve signage inside the church so that it looks professional and is clearly understandable to visitors.

**C. Using an expanded music ministry as a means to call new people to worship - a pleasant evangelism - where everyone is engaged in the music.**

**D. Creating various activities that afford opportunities for members to engage with and witness to each other and visitors.**

1. Sustain and expand the number of church activities taking place outside on the church property such as lemonade on the lawn, summertime worship, marathon day assistance, and strawberry festivals. During these events the Witness Team would have the opportunity to pass out information about the church and to track those who have attended our events with materials that record their name (such as prize drawings), etc.
2. Produce an annual Lenten devotional and look for other venues for members to share their faith. Encourage laity to take courses that help improve their ability to witness.
3. Initiate and sustain witnessing activities to the community near the church (including our sister churches and outside persons already using the building) such as Vacation Bible School, Lenten dinners with sister churches, notes of affirmation and invitation given to groups using our church (Shepherd Wellness, Toy Lending Library, AA, NA, scouts, etc.), and programs for doctors and nurses in the institutions in the area (perhaps they are looking for bible studies, prayer groups, or simply meeting space).
4. Offer special events that by their nature appeal to the broader community such as the social and musical events discussed in the Nurture section, educational events on gay/lesbian issues or cross-cultural dialog, and interfaith worship services.

**D. Providing a non-traditional worship service that is relevant and reverent, includes informed and inspired messages, offers music that is varied and spiritually uplifting, is well organized and integrated as a whole, and challenges those present to live according to the Gospel.**

1. Continue to offer a non-traditional worship service, supported by an active praise team, as resources and staffing allows. Currently this service provides a mid-week worship opportunity, a venue for variety in worship styles, a creative outlet for the praise team (e.g., music, dance, drama), and an opportunity for laity to share their faith by presenting the message.
2. Investigate on an annual basis whether to expand the non-traditional service. Identify what is needed to develop a non-traditional service that would expand the congregation (including location, day and time, commitment of staff and praise team members, purchasing instruments

and equipment, advertising, etc.) and determine whether the church has the resources to support this endeavor to the extent needed for its success. Proceed with an expanded non-traditional service if the ministerial staff and the majority of the members are supportive of this new ministry.

**V. RESOURCES. We are committed to:**

**A. Revitalizing church leadership and committees by filling open positions with appropriately gifted individuals in a timely manner.**

1. Designate responsibility for completing this task by September 2004 to a task force comprised of the Nominating Committee, the pastors, the Ministries Coordinator, and the NOW chairpersons.
2. Create and maintain a database that matches members' skills, spiritual gifts, and interests with ministry and program needs. Explore additional ways to facilitate the matching of members to these service opportunities (e.g., creating an ombudsmen team, expanding the role of the nominating committee, having ministry leaders stand at tables in fellowship hall after church).
3. Establish a standard of designating a "champion" for each initiative.

**B. Enhancing the church website and providing the necessary hardware, software, and personnel to support it. Strengthening the church's ministries by identifying, acquiring, and/or developing web-based tools which:**

1. Assist individuals in discerning their spiritual gifts and matching their gifts to open roles.
2. List open positions and opportunities for ministry within First Church, within the community, and across United Methodism.
3. Provides links to United Methodist and mission websites.
4. Support interactive opportunities such as chat rooms.

**C. Affirming our commitment to maintaining the church building and other property to the best of our abilities, within limited financial resources.**

1. Prepare a prioritized plan for building improvements for the next five years, to be reviewed and adjusted annually by the Property Committee.
2. Consider a capital improvements fund campaign to fund the five to ten most significant building needs (e.g., stained glass windows, organ, front steps, fellowship hall).

**D. Stressing the importance of annual stewardship and identifying special projects for fundraising initiatives, including grant applications. Establishing an intentional program to encourage bequests and planned giving.**

**Approved by the Leadership Council on September 20, 2004 for submission to the Congregation.**

*We acknowledge the efforts of the visioning team who helped craft this plan -- Phil Gibbons, Marcia Gruver, Sabrina Haskell, Rev. David Keller, Tracy Merrick, Rev. Patricia Mollick, Ammon Ripple and Lynn Schreiber – and all who provided input and feedback.*