

A Night to Remember!

FPC members ate dinner and swapped stories about our history at the annual meeting of the congregation on January 27. Rev. Woody Berry of First Presbyterian Church in Mexico facilitated our conversation, and dinner was provided by our Member Involvement Team. Here is a brief summary of how we remember our past:

2016–Present

- Accomplishments include becoming an Earth Care congregation, hosting Room at the Inn for the homeless, making major repairs to the facilities, successfully concluding our capital campaign, hosting the Agape African Christian Fellowship, instituting a small group ministry, and maintaining a strong music ministry at both services.
- Challenges include the changing nature of our surrounding community, staff turnover and transitions, tensions over worship styles and disruptions in corporate worship, declining worship attendance, and controversial speakers at certain events.

2014–2015

- This transition period was remembered as a time when the congregation's structure was overhauled. It was also remembered as a time of polarization, division, and lack of transparency. Some members recall that changes were made in a manner that did not agree with Presbyterian polity or were made without adequate buy-in from the congregation.

2000–2014

- Participants cited the renovation of the facilities and the beginning of The Offering, our contemporary worship service, as major accomplishments. We remembered these years as a time when the church was growing, had a stable staff and strong youth and

Presbyterian Women's programs, and became more open and hospitable to the community. During this period the church began the Saturday Café ministry and welcomed MOPS and the True/False Film Festival to our facilities. The Senior Pastor, Dick Ramsey, was remembered as a good worship leader and good representative of the congregation in the community.

- Members also recalled that the death of the long-time FPC choir director Harry Morrison was a blow to the congregation. Successive capital campaigns during this period were also stressful for the congregation.

1980–2000

- We remembered that the planning for the eventual remodeling of our facilities began during this period. In the late 1990s, FPC opened its facilities to the Korean Presbyterian Church of Columbia. During this stage in FPC's life, there was a strong Sunday school program and young adult ministry. Wilkie O'Brien, the Senior Pastor for much of this period, was remembered for his funny children's sermons. We recalled that both our men's ministry and Presbyterian Woman were strong at this time. There was also an active Boy Scout troop at FPC.

1969–1979

- This decade was notable for a series of short-term pastorates and interim ministers. Members speculated that some of this turnover was due to the fact that the ministers were following a beloved pastor who served the congregation for 15 years—a tough act to follow! Also, the 1970s were a decade of turmoil in U.S. society. Maybe the turnover in pastoral leadership reflected the upheavals in the nation. Some allusions were made to personal challenges that some of the pastors in this decade experienced.

1953–1968

- Members recalled that the tenure of Rev. John McMullen was marked by several significant facility and programming developments. The present sanctuary was built during this time. Our present-day campus ministry has its roots in programs that were developed in the 1950s and housed in the student center, a building which has since been integrated into the FPC physical plant. The student center featured the Chez, a coffee shop staffed by college students who lived in the student center. Indeed, much of the conversation about this period revolved around campus ministry. Stephens College students were required to register their attendance at FPC upon entering! Also, the seeds of what blossomed into Voluntary Action Center were sown by FPC and other parties at this time. Members recalled conflict in the congregation about how involved the church should be in the Civil Rights movement.

1828–1952

- We have few first-hand memories of the times prior to Rev. McMullen's tenure, but we have heard stories about our past! One story is that MU classes were held at First Presbyterian after the great fire destroyed Mizzou's Academic Hall in 1892. The Female Sewing Society raised \$50 to buy land on Broadway for a church to be built. FPC's bell was rung to announce news to the community. We also noticed a three year gap in ministry during the Civil War. Perhaps ministers were hard to come by in a time in which demand for soldiers and chaplains was so high.

After we finished sharing memories, we pondered what our past means to us. In small groups at tables, we developed meaning statements based on our history. These statements were

written down and posted on the Ramsey Center walls. Then we voted for which meaning statements were most meaningful to us. Here are our meaning statements with votes:

1. Campus (students), youth, and children are part of the energy of our whole church and should be on the Session (29 votes).
2. Change is inevitable; don't dwell on the past (24 votes).
3. We need to continue to improve communication (24 votes).
4. There's a tendency to look internally for factors causing loss of membership, but we need to look at factors across the board as well (18 votes).
5. Second-guessing and not accepting decisions made by the Session—how do we get unanimity? (18 votes)
6. We need to be more accepting of change and adaptable to new forms of worship (16 votes).
7. Women have been important in support and leadership roles (14 votes).
8. Social ties and fellowship outside the church has been important (9 votes).
9. External factors affect the life of the church (9 votes).
10. Longevity of pastors yields strength and dedication to move forward (4 votes).
11. The congregation is getting older. We have fewer young members (4 votes).
12. Some interim ministry periods have been difficult (4 votes).
13. The community's use of the building has been important for growth (3 votes).
14. We tend to be a pastor-driven church (2 votes).
15. We need a men's group (1 vote).
16. When we start new things, at what point do we ask how to sustain them, or should we? (1 vote)

17. Long term leadership brings memorable times, but they're hard to follow, often change follows a period of growth and stability (1 vote).

What next?

The Planning and Evaluation Team will evaluate these memories and meaning statements and propose tentative goals and objectives based on them for the Session to consider. Our discernment process continues with a series of home meetings in which we will discuss our hopes and dreams for the future in small groups. To sign up to attend a home meeting, go here:

<http://bit.ly/2FLS1Ef>