

# **Future Story for First Christian Church**

## **Preface**

In 2009, the people of First Christian Church embraced a wonderful opportunity to discern God's will for our congregation. Through the prayers of many members gathered in Prayer Triads, the Holy Spirit revealed God's plan for the future of our church. We learned that God is calling us to work together to create a Christ-centered environment that nurtures and fulfills the spiritual needs of the congregation so that all people feel welcome. We saw that God is calling us to rediscover the core values of our denomination. We realized that God is asking us to serve the needs of the community, especially the neediest, and to do a better job of communicating who we are to the general public so that they might hear God's message of Eternal Life.

With continued prayer, together we will discover new and creative ways of celebrating God's love, worshipping God and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. We are on a *Strategic Spiritual Journey* that will revitalize our members, attract new people, and lead us to the future God has planned for First Christian Church.

## **First Christian Church in 2017**

In 2017, First Christian Church is a thriving congregation doing God's work. During a typical week, 450 people of all ages gather for worship and Christian fellowship. Whether you're young or old, married, single, divorced or widowed, First Christian Church is a friendly, welcoming place. Visitors often tell us that we're the friendliest church in town. While long-term friendships are important, there's always room at the table for more of God's children. We make visitors feel welcome, and we tell them about our Disciples 101 class, which connects visitors and members. Mentors invite visitors to activities and events, and introduce them to others.

It's clear to those who drive past First Christian Church that this is an active, vibrant congregation. The well-maintained facilities support the many programs we offer and are uplifting to everyone who walks in the door. The beautifully landscaped grounds, convenient parking areas and inviting entrance welcome visitors and members. Modern, versatile spaces accommodate many different activities and groups. The facilities are a wonderful resource meant to be shared and fully used in service of God's will for First Christian Church.

Several years ago we launched an outreach ministry that targets local colleges and universities, including international scholars and students. We recognize that our church is not limited to a building. We try to lower walls and meet people where they are, whether it's a campus, coffee shop, bookstore or someplace else. Our church has developed an increasing presence in the neighborhood, and has reached out to the thousands of busy people who drive past the church every day. We assist community organizations that serve people in need. We're involved in efforts to help others beyond

our local area. We offer different types of worship, so whether someone wants a traditional service, contemporary worship with contemporary music, or to listen to a sermon streamed from our website; First Christian has worship opportunities for everyone.

Our church is a wonderful place for families with children. While we have wonderful youth and children's ministries and a high quality curriculum, what stands out most about our programs is the enthusiasm of our adult volunteers. We never have a problem recruiting adults to help. Everyone agrees that our children are a top priority, so people look for opportunities to get involved. When new families start coming to our church, they're surprised at how quickly their children feel at home. Most of the time, the kids are having so much fun they don't want to leave!

Our youth groups have grown significantly in the last few years, and it's no wonder. Youth visitors feel welcome right away, and they want to come back. Our youth often invite new people to join them for worship, activities, service projects, mission trips, camps and other get-togethers. Youth from our church play a leadership role among the Disciples youth of our region, and they are involved in Disciples activities at a national level. Our Youth Choir meets regularly and often performs at our Sunday services and for church wide events. Many of our youth participate in our Handbell Choir or other ministries of the church. Our youth are serving as Deacons, Board representatives and committee chairs. They are active in planning services and activities that allow them to use their unique talents and gifts to share the love of Christ.

New families often join the church because of their connection to our weekday education program: Early Childhood Ministry (ECM). ECM parents hear about church

activities through information that's sent home with the kids, and through the teachers. Church members volunteer their support to ECM, and at the same time serve as wonderful evangelists and recruiters for our church. Members often invite ECM families to church services and activities. We offer special support and services to these families and their children. Once a family gives our church a try, they just seem to keep coming back.

There are many ways for people of all ages to be part of the church. Spiritual gift inventories are offered regularly to help each of us recognize how we can better use our strengths in service of the Lord. As we seek to use our gifts as He would have us use them, we find that we are more connected with our church and each other, and more welcoming to those who may be seeking a church home. We have Bible study groups, groups for women, for men, the choir and other opportunities for musicians, and many other small groups that focus on service projects, interests and activities.

Communication within the congregation is a top priority. Committee leaders and members understand the connection of the committee to the whole church, and lay leaders work in cooperation with the staff and other leaders. Improved systems help people stay informed. Our website is updated frequently. PowerPoint and other media presentations are provided in our Commons Area and other areas of the church where people gather to visit with each other on Sunday mornings. We have a members-only password accessible section on our website that provides easy access to Board meeting minutes and other news. Events, information, issues, activities and opportunities to volunteer or get involved are communicated in multiple ways so people have many opportunities to stay informed. Our newsletter is distributed through the regular mail and

through email. Information is also provided through oral announcements during worship and presented at Board meetings.

People in leadership positions understand the importance of clarifying roles and expectations. The roles of our Board, committees and other groups are defined in simple language, so people can easily see how our church operates.

Leadership development is a key component of communication in our church. We provide leadership training in these areas: (1) role-specific training; (2) training about the structure and function of the church; and (3) leadership skills helpful in leading church groups.

The leadership development program revolves around building trusting relationships with each other, based on our faith in the Lord. Leaders receive handbooks designed to help them understand the roles of the Board, committees, mission families and other groups. The handbook is available to other members through our website and in hard copy format. Proactive communication assures that we maintain healthy, productive teams to accomplish the tasks of the church. We encourage each other to use our gifts and talents in service of the Lord. We've learned to trust in God and each other, and have created a culture in which we look to God for guidance in our decisions and planning.

The governance system of our church, along with the culture of trust we've created, assures that power struggles are a thing of the past. We handle differences of opinion in a productive manner. We understand the importance of trust in maintaining successful programs that serve the Lord, our members and the community. We trust each other's motives, so when there's a problem to be solved, we focus on the issues and quickly find ways to address the situation. We're solution-oriented and optimistic.

One of our challenges as a congregation is to be an integral part of the life that is going on around us—to be part of the community. First Christian Church strives to be a meaningful presence in the lives of those who are part of our congregation, those who do not know us, and those who may be literally passing by us every day. We have added programs and services that reach out to the many people who drive by our church every day that may not have a church home or may not know about God’s message of love and eternal life. First Christian Church is in the right place at the right time to serve the needs of those around us.

We do an outstanding job of communicating about who we are and what we do. All of our communication conveys a consistent message about the image we want to project in the community and how we want to be perceived by members, visitors and others. Our website is a tool to showcase the ways we serve our Lord, grow in our faith, and welcome others to join us. Our newsletter provides updates about coming events and information about what’s happening in the church. We tell people early and often about upcoming events, and we effectively use our on-street sign, website, email and newsletter to convey information. Our digital media is up-to-date, including our interactive website and our successful use of online social media.

We have a strategic public relations plan and a marketing plan, developed in consultation with public relations and marketing experts. The public relations plan provides the overall message architecture that helps guide decisions about proactively shaping public perception of our church. A major focus of the marketing plan is to highlight our church’s programs for families with children, along with our many community outreach activities. Traditional local media (newspaper, television and radio),

along with our website and online social media serve as tools to tell the community about what we're doing and to invite others to join us.

Several of our members with expertise in public relations, marketing and advertising are involved in leading the ongoing implementation of the strategic public relations and marketing plans. As part of the implementation of these plans, we developed a special signature event that is becoming quite well known in the community.

First Christian Church has a diverse, experienced staff that projects a unified core vision. They realize that the success of our church depends to a large degree on their ability to overcome challenges together. Each of these individuals has made it his or her personal mission to be a shining example of teamwork. Each of them values the experiences and unique skills of the other members of our staff. They trust each other, and work together as a very effective team to advance God's mission for our church.

In 2009 we embarked on a *Strategic Spiritual Journey* to help us discern God's will for First Christian Church. To move into the bright future He planned for our church, we have made significant changes to improve communication, to re-establish our identity in the community, to become more inviting to visitors and to engage new members. Along the way, we are celebrating the good things that God has set in motion in our church. The work is ongoing and we pray for His guidance as our journey continues. We can't wait to see what wonderful things God has in store for First Christian Church.