

Feedback Highlights from FCC Small Group Gatherings 2023

1. What keeps you connected?
2. What is FCC good at that others might be attracted to?
3. Where are some areas that you would like to see us grow and develop?
4. What are things that are essential to who we are as FCC of Minneapolis?
5. What other things haven't been named yet?

1. What keeps you connected?

Relationships – What keeps me coming back is the people! People are generous, kind, and respectful. I am welcomed and accepted as I am. Grateful for Zoom connections for Coffee and Happy Hours, and meetings.

Worship – Live-streamed worship services allowing for both online and on-demand participation. Shared worship and fellowship experiences as a part of SpringHouse.

Core Disciples traditions – Weekly communion, radical welcome, freedom of expression, open to everyone. Where the Bible speaks, we speak. Where the Bible is silent, we are silent. Inclusive language. Strength and depth of lay leadership.

SpringHouse – Importance of our connection to the other two churches.

Outreach Opportunities – Connects us to the wider community and world through giving back. Offer the opportunity to serve and to give in ways that are helpful, not insulting or demeaning. Impressed by the amount of our budget that goes to outreach.

Love and Acceptance – God is love and Jesus calls us to social justice. Appreciative of being stretched and challenged to think about people who are different from me.

Additional things that keep us connected – We hold space for future planning and connection. Belonging to a community of faith connected in and through the People, Rituals, Traditions, and Service of our Church. Strong affirmations of Women's Fellowship and Book Group.

2. What is FCC good at that others might be attracted to?

Overall Spirit – We are good at being open; we invite thoughtful and heartfelt faith with life and community application. The church has helped people greatly when someone close has died. We're good at gathering and around and loving.

Technology – Makes church accessible and keeps us connected. Brought me back to active membership. Grateful to do this long-distance. Being able to stay connected remotely keeps us as a family connected to the church. "Our online presence has grown wonderfully in quality. Mike has done wonders in our ability to share our worship experience online." How can we better advertise our worship services streaming online?

Push boundaries – Social justice requires it, to dive deep and struggle. Bring Christ's message of radical love to the world.

Sermons – Authority, depth of preaching; social engagement and applications to our lives. We learn about the background and context of the scripture. The variety in preachers – different people during sabbatical was good. Disciples’ theology invites thoughtful reflection and space for people as they grow in their faith and beliefs.

Music – Most moving part of the worship service. Tim is a wonderful asset; Caroline is a wonderful resource. Innovations in music in worship are a hallmark. Music opportunities such as handbells and choir.

Bible – We take the Bible seriously and interpret it broadly. We don’t keep it simple, it’s worth wrestling with. It’s an invitation, not a recruitment tool. Enjoy Bible study together and is a source of growth.

Tapping into our strengths – People’s gifts: devoted, caring, very giving, educated. Open and progressive nature of faith; ecumenical; women have a strong voice. Open communion and welcoming diversity.

Outreach – Hands-on outreach opportunities put our faith into practice. Working to make systemic change is a Christian thing to do. We put our money where our mouth is, actively doing ministry. Our church has always been mission oriented. Consider not only outreach as vital, but “in-reach” as vital too (ways we reach out to each other).

Community – Food, we’re good at food. Strong community that is rarely face to face. Need to be with other humans. Solid online community. Inclusiveness, strong message of welcome to LGBTQ+ people; “love our diversity”. Online groups allow for easy, authentic connection near and far. Small groups that connect people are essential.

Growth – New challenges and new opportunities. Struggle is necessary for strength. FCC’s involvement in so many things has allowed me to discover strengths and talents that I didn’t know I have. Internal and communal growth are essential, and so is numbers growth.

3. What are some areas that you would like to see us grow and develop?

Communication – If more people were aware of our values and theology, more people would be attracted (this was named frequently). Focus the E-blasts, things can get buried, put newest content first. Our website could be improved for easier navigation. What other ways can we communicate what’s happening? How can we promote the quality of our sermons?

Technology – For those having trouble hearing during worship, technology is needed to fix that. Can we figure out a way for people in the sanctuary to interact with those online? Some suggestions: 5-minute Zoom at end of the service; have the “chat” visible in the sanctuary. Computer literacy may be a barrier to participation – can we offer tech help? Online worship seems linked to potential for member growth.

Youth Ministries – Fellowship opportunities. Focus on young families – create connections for the youth. Create a safe space for youth to explore, develop their talents, and learn about their faith by drawing upon scripture and prayer. Kids need to be invited.

Squiggle Space / Sunday School – Hybrid squiggle space makes it harder to connect. Include remote kids in programming more, work to create engagement between in-person and remote kids and would welcome more instruction. Sunday school online worked well.

Children – A messy art table is welcoming to kids, but we wish we had more of a community for the kids. Age-appropriate faith formation for the kids in worship. We need families with children to join us! We need to strengthen our children's program!

Music – Modern music that connects to the service. Hearing what the music is about, especially when in another language, helps appreciate the message. The organ: expensive investment and not being played.

Short-term Bible study – Love Bible studies and would welcome more, such as a study on Romans. Pastor Laurie did a good study on Leviticus. Are our children learning the Bible? Teaching the Bible to children would draw families and children.

Worship – Services that promote community and participation. "Themes" seem to be missing tradition. Perhaps traditional songs and prayers could be scattered throughout the year (Doxology, Lord's Prayer). A functioning worship committee that has input into worship services and invites lay participation in worship service planning.

Ritual – Ritual is satisfying, reaches deep, and can have a centering impact in a chaotic world. There is power in ritual, in the sense of familiarity, but it doesn't have to be routine if focused on the meaning.

Community – As social beings, we need opportunities to connect with one another. In-home spirituality groups/meetings in people's homes for prayers. Small "watch groups" to gather and watch live-stream worship together. We need a community on-site – a consistent member presence, especially for visitors. Online community is great but can keep people from coming to the physical church. Reaching out with personal invitations and reminders about activities and fellowship. Reach out to members and those who are homebound – bring them out for coffee or church events. Maybe more gatherings outside of church. Online visits can work and can sometimes be better. Find ways to increase membership and participation – bring friends.

Getting our message out – Raising awareness of the range and scope of where FCC is involved in the community. Advertise Mardi Gras Sunday and other special services. Invite wider community to outreach events. Neighborhood integration: Lyndale Neighborhood Association, Southwest Voices, Whittier Alliance, Whittier Solidarity Network. How do we help members spread the word about what's going on at FCC. How do we get known by people who are younger who want to be able to question things?

Outreach – We need projects that fit the size of our church, and projects with multiple levels of ability such as small things people could do at home. Get back to pre-pandemic Mission at Our Doorstep model of a week of working together during the summer. Transportation (carpool) to events like Pride, or anything after dark. Keep growing outreach and service. "Church trips have been huge for me!"

Parking – Parking was named by several folks as a highly significant barrier to personal access and church growth. Credit Union parking lot is very doable; announcements, communication about where to park needed, and search for other solutions as well.

Additional suggestions for growth and development – We don't have enough hands to keep doing what we have been doing, we need more people! Events scheduled during weekdays usually do not allow for participation of working folks. Revive traditions that gave us a sense of identity such as celebrating Anniversary Sundays with a meal (long-time members, new members, baptisms). Staying connected to parishioners' needs and expectations as a pastoral care concern. A community to grow into new learnings and awarenesses without feeling judged or for landing differently in one's positions. We need to work on the ability to work through conflict and disagreement.

4. What are things that are essential to who we are as FCC of Minneapolis?

Outreach (giving back to the community) – Local outreach, doing the work of Jesus where we are and where our people are. Also, bringing examples of Christ's love to the world.

Disciples' values – Saying "all are welcome" at the Table and offering Open Communion every Sunday thereby telling and portraying the essence of Disciples of Christ. People are encouraged to seek out their beliefs for themselves.

Inclusivity – Make the message clear that ALL ARE WELCOME, no strings attached and no expectation of conformity. The extravagant welcome piece is critical for people to know. Wherever you are in your faith is okay, it's okay to have questions. Invite others one-on-one to get people involved. Resounding YES! to inclusivity.

Additional essentials – Nurture and investment in our children and youth. Historical significance in the city. History (past) implies future. Families that go way back with new folks weaving in, yes! Opportunities for lay leadership.

5. What other things haven't been named yet?

We need to be talking about/need awareness of our financial situation.

- We want to do everything, but we can't – we need to pick and choose what we can do.
- Too many paid professionals – can we afford them all?
- Money: we have to address it and be realistic about what we spend our money on, and how many people we are down to.
- It's time to choose again: do we want to live or die as a church? (with several expressing concerns about our moving toward death without talking about it; if we don't talk about it, it appears we may die) We've decided we want to live as a church. What does that mean now with shrinking numbers (people) and shrinking finances?

First Christian is a very pretentious sounding name – First as in “best” or “priority.” Perhaps we should change it to something that truly reflects our identity.

We don't do a good job of presenting who we are or who we are not.

Identity – a humility that comes with giving up a long-treasured building – there's something core to our identity that allowed that to happen.

We should check in with people we haven't seen in a while.

SpringHouse has changed

- Disconnected to the other congregations
- Maybe we should invite them to Aliveness Project cookie baking
- Inter-church communication could be better
- Collaboration and reflecting through our diverse traditions is a gift

Political involvement is a positive and a potential negative for some, including for some parents who may or may not want the political being so much apart of their children's education

Lost leadership – talented people getting older, not able to be so active

I feel like we are a hidden gem. And we need people. How can we get word out about who we are? (radio bits?)

One final quote:

“Be in a framework or habit that we are enough as we are – don't focus on what we had and what we did, but who we are right now – or even what do we want to be out there instead of just accepting who we are. I'm not interested in going back there.”

If you would like to see the full small group discussion summary, contact Martha Harris (harrismartha@mac.com).