

Focus Forward

In order to take a journey, you must have a destination in mind. You need resources to get you there and must have a general idea of how you will make the trip. A solid ministry plan casts a vision and describes the initial steps for that new reality. It is compelling in its style and creates energy so the church can move ahead....

We have worked to understand our **REALITY**.

We are presenting a refreshed **VISION** to be shared.

We pray that we can use this as a roadmap for the **JOURNEY** of First Christian Church to lead us toward our **DESTINATION** as an increasingly vital and growing church that makes a difference while sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.



Focus Forward: A Ministry Plan for the First Christian Church of Bloomington

I. Executive Summary

The effort to prepare this plan has been the work of the following persons: Gary Arvik, Kelley Becker, Corin Chapman, Kathie Chapman, Randy Crill, Beverly Leight, Jim Warren, and Don Mahannah, chairman. The team used *From our Doorsteps* (Rick Morse, 2010) as framework for the discussions. The committee met for a total of ten meetings to discuss, outline, and review the document in its present form.

As a basis for understanding previous efforts, the team used our congregation's past plans, goals and reports developed in 1991, 1993, 1995, and 2000. The constitution and bylaws were referenced. Financial and attendance records were reviewed. Demographic and city information was gathered from public sources.

The Approach of *From Our Doorsteps* as Modified for Our Use

Phase I: Conduct a series of interview with church participants.

This project was initiated by conversations with members of PPR, board leadership and the Senior Minister. The committee established was intended to be a proxy for a full congregation process as it was originally intended to be a refresh, not a full rewrite of the church's ministry plan.

Phase II: Research the community.

(Chapter 2) We did this via desktop research and discussion. What we learned is that we do NOT know enough as a congregation about our neighborhood and community. This should lead us to consider ways in which we can do this more effectively both in total as a congregation and more specifically as a church leadership team via the board.

Phase III: Assess the congregation and its ministry delivery systems.

(Chapter 3) The Focus Forward Team has attempted to do this via our discussions, supported by information and personal experiences. Each of us has expressed our insights and the resulting impressions. These discussions amongst the team have shaped the recommendations in this report.

Phase IV: Assess the congregation's decision-making process and its use of volunteers.

Same process as Phase III...

Phase V: Evaluate the congregation's financial capacity

Same process as Phase III...

Phase VI: Take a private retreat for prayer, reflection and writing of the plan.

We met on July 30th as a capstone meeting to enable a draft to be written on behalf of the team by Don Mahannah. The team has reviewed and shaped the final report.

Phase VII: Get a ministry plan adopted by the congregation.

We recommend this plan be shared with the congregation and adopted by the official board.

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This plan attempts to outline where we've been, where we are and what is needed to maintain our vitality as a congregation going forward. The congregational history recognizes the rich tradition of First Christian Church. A purposeful focus is then given to the demographics of the community compared to the adjacent neighborhood to better understand many of the financial and membership challenges facing the church.

The Congregational Assessment attempts to highlight what we, as a committee, feels differentiates our church while also outlining both advantages and disadvantages associated with our financial resources, our leadership, and our facilities. Based on the given assessment and the corresponding discussions within the committee, specific recommendations have been determined and a timeline for implementing changes has been established. In particular, a recommended staffing plan is provided, as this was seen as a fundamental result of the Focus Forward group.

II. Congregational History

The First Christian Church of Bloomington has a rich history. The congregation was organized by William T. Major in 1837, thirteen years before Bloomington was incorporated as a city and when the total population of the city was less than 500 people.

The congregation had its first building in 1840 on the west side of East Street between Grove and Front. In 1857, the congregation purchased the site at West Jefferson and Roosevelt and constructed a new building. In 1889, the 1857 sanctuary was razed and a new one built to replace it. In 1931, the existing Fellowship Hall and education wing was built as one of the finest in the community. In 1959, the current sanctuary, Major Hall, and narthex were constructed. In 1987, the current configuration of the church was finalized with the office and nursery addition and the configuration of the current centrum.

The church was born in the midst of the pioneer movement and has carried that spirit throughout its history. The church – its leaders and members have sought God's will for themselves and God's purpose as a congregation. Over the past 177 years, the church has been known for its many excellent pastors, a strong conviction to make a difference via ministries such as the Children's Corner Daycare, Habitat for Humanity, and refugee relocation, the ordination of both men and women, the support of missionaries and youth missions to both foreign and domestic purpose, the education of youth and adults to strengthen their faith, and its worship both in preaching and in music to praise the name of Jesus Christ.

For the past twenty years, First Christian Church experienced a modest decline in membership and a corresponding decline in financial support. As a result, it has been difficult to address the cost of living in compensation to staff and adequately maintain the building and grounds. The composition of the church's membership has remained relatively unchanged, drawing members

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from across Bloomington-Normal and the surrounding communities and maintaining its history as a nurturing and caring community of faith.

III. Community Analysis

Bloomington-Normal

According to the Chamber of Commerce,

“The Bloomington-Normal area is a vibrant community, home to 167,699 people who exemplify the values of the Midwest and our remarkable quality of life. Our location in the heart of Illinois at the intersection of Interstates 39, 55 and 74 makes getting here easy; we’re just a few hours from Chicago, St. Louis and Indianapolis. Bloomington-Normal boasts a bustling airport as well as frequent Amtrak service.

Our community is the proud home of the headquarters for State Farm Insurance, Mitsubishi Motors North America, Inc. and COUNTRY Financial. Our institutions of higher education include Illinois State University, Illinois Wesleyan University, Heartland Community College and Lincoln College-Normal.

...We are proud to be the home of ... world-class healthcare institutions including Advocate BroMenn Medical Center and OSF St. Joseph.

The stability of our major employers, healthcare professionals, locally owned businesses, numerous media providers and our central location in the state make Bloomington-Normal an exceptional place to call home.”

- The median household income in McLean County was \$61,049.
- The percentage of persons other than white alone is 15.4%.
- 94.2% of residents have a high school degree or higher.
- 41.8% have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

(2008-2012 data)

The Neighborhood Surrounding First Christian Church

First Christian Church is situated on the west side of Bloomington. The neighborhood surrounding the church has a lower median income, is more racially diverse, has a higher unemployment rate, and has a higher percentage of persons who have not completed post secondary education as compared to the averages for Bloomington-Normal or McLean County.

The west side of Bloomington is experiencing revitalization under the efforts of the West Bloomington Revitalization Project. First Christian Church is immediately adjacent to the project area.

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Over the coming years, there will be a considerable effort on the part of the residents, supported by the community and interested partners, to provide care and services for fellow residents. Due to the Revitalization Project, additional financial and human resources will be available to execute projects to improve the neighborhood both within the project area and the surrounding area. Given its close proximity to the project area, First Christian Church stands to benefit from any increased community presence and economic success afforded by these efforts.

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IV. Congregational Assessment

First Christian Church enjoys the benefit of having members of slightly longer tenure than most other vital congregations, which means the average age of members within the congregation tends to be older than in other churches. However, given the activeness of our senior population, these individuals are seen as a major asset to our church.

While there are active families with young children, the consensus was that additional growth in this demographic is important for the long-term health of the church. Post college singles represent a gap in the demographics and program of the church. First Christian is blessed with gifted and talented people with much to offer Christ and the Church.

Despite being a welcoming congregation, the church is not as racially diverse as the neighborhood setting and few members come from the immediate neighborhood.

A. The Congregation's Passion and Strengths

First Christian excels at being a caring and nurturing faith community. Love and support for members and friends in times of difficulty and crisis is a hallmark of the congregation. Meaningful worship that is welcoming to all persons and relevant to daily life has been a continued focus. Music ministry has a long tradition of being diverse in style yet beautifully executed whether with a pipe organ, piano, guitar, drum, bell choir, wind instruments, or voices lifted in song.

The church has a passion for service to the West Side neighborhood in such actions as our annual block party, association with Bent School, and Jesus House. These ministries are important and impactful, but they lend themselves to intermittent participation and often fail to give members the opportunity to build lasting relationships within the neighborhood.

B. Resources Available for Ministry

Financial: Despite the decline in participating membership and attendance, giving has remained strong. Since 2000, the church's total income has remained fairly consistent, averaging around \$520,000. If previous years' incomes are adjusted to constant 2013 dollars, the average total income is around \$600,000. The church experienced peaks in income in 2000 and 2003 with the total income exceeding \$650,000 in constant 2013 dollars. The church has been well managed financially with few deficit budgets and only modest long term debt.

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Budget Analysis				
Spending Category	Amount	Percentage	Vital Congregation	Struggling Congregation
All Salaries and Benefits	377,360	65%	50%	>50%
Building and Administration	110,700	19%	25%	>25%
Program Expenses	65,565	11%	15%	<15%
Mission Giving	31,350	5%	10%	<10%
Total	584,975			

Above are the recommended percentages associated with various spending categories. Based on these recommendations, First Christian Church should direct an increased amount to building administration, program, and mission. A budget using approximately the same salaries and benefits as we have now recalculated to the recommended distribution is shown below. This budget would represent a 30% increase from the current 2014 budget.

Spending Category	Amount	Percentage
All Salaries and Benefits	380,000	50%
Building and Administration	190,000	25%
Program Expenses	114,000	15%
Mission Giving	76,000	10%
Total	760,000	

For reference, the 1992 budget was \$514,000 or \$845,000 if adjusted for inflation

Leadership and Volunteers: The church has been blessed throughout its history to have capable leaders. However, since the reorganization under the current bylaws and driven by changes in societal pressures, leadership development, transition from one leader to the next, and participation of leaders in meetings has suffered. The current governance system can be effective, but a systematic process of leader development and engagement, as well as an exploration of new methods of meeting and sharing information is necessary to increase participation in the process.

An analysis of the percentage of volunteer hours spent in meetings vs. in ministry showed that we should strive to have a higher percentage of volunteer hours committed to service as opposed to the administration of church business and programs.

Facilities: First Christian is blessed with an historic facility nestled in the downtown. The sanctuary and 1987 additions are in acceptable condition. The 1931 Fellowship Hall and education wing are in need of an evaluation and targeted renovation. The roof on the 1931 structure is a slate tile roof in poor condition and will likely need to be replaced before 2020.

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The recent capital campaign is fully pledged and on track to complete in 2015. The renovations and repairs resulting from the capital campaign have made a difference in the appearance and functionality of many of the common spaces and selected classrooms and meeting spaces.

Using the process of calculation outlined in “From our Doorsteps,” which is based on average worship attendance, the building is slightly larger than what is needed by a congregation of our current size. This makes it difficult to afford the maintenance required to fully maintain the building and grounds today.

V. A Vision for the Future

A.Identity Statement

We are the First Christian Church, (Disciples of Christ) of Bloomington, Illinois, McLean County’s oldest continuing congregation. As a part of the community and of the body of Christ, we reach out to and welcome ALL to know the joy of living in the light of God’s love and welcome ALL to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.

B.Vision Statement

To be a faithful, growing church that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice. We are a people who confess our faith in Christ and commit to serving in love.

C.Mission Statement

To be and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, witnessing, loving and serving.

Caring as Jesus CARES...

- Connecting with one another during fellowship, study, and acts of outreach
- Affirming our faith through meaningful worship
- Reaching out to the community and beyond in a spirit of service and evangelism
- Engaging our youth to experience the joy of being a Christian and to develop spiritual maturity
- Serving God in all things by being good stewards of our time, talents, and finances

D.Values Statement

As members of the First Christian Church, (Disciples of Christ) of Bloomington,
We confess that Jesus is the Christ,

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the Son of the living God,
and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world.
In Christ's name and by his grace
we accept our mission of witness
and service to all people.
We rejoice in God,
maker of heaven and earth,
and in God's covenant of love
which binds us to God and to one another.
Through baptism into Christ
we enter into newness of life
and are made one with the whole people of God.
In the communion of the Holy Spirit
we are joined together in discipleship
and in obedience to Christ.
At the Table of the Lord
we celebrate with thanksgiving
the saving acts and presence of Christ.
Within the universal church
we receive the gift of ministry
and the light of scripture.
In the bonds of Christian faith
we yield ourselves to God
that we may serve the One
whose kingdom has no end.
Blessing, glory, and honor
be to God forever. Amen.

This is based on the Preamble for The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), July 2013, the vision and mission of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), First Christian's current (2014) mission statement, and the 2006 Proposed Vision and Ministry Plan of the First Christian Church of Bloomington.

VI. Specific Recommendations

Our Ministry Priorities - God calls us to: Worship, Reach out, Use our gifts, Care for each Other, Be Faithful Stewards, Grow Spiritually Each Day, Minister to and With Children and Youth

Evangelism: The Reach Out ministry should immediately begin a program of targeted marketing of First Christian Church by the word of mouth of the congregation, flyer, direct mail, and/or by whatever means are determined effective by the committee with a goal of increasing membership while also increasing membership participation in

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evangelism. To support this, the 2015 budget item for “Other Evangelism” should be increased to \$8,500 from the 2014 plan amount of \$3,500.

Specific plans should include: re-introducing ourselves to the neighborhood around us, and inviting those across Bloomington-Normal who would want to join us.

Within a year, the Reach Out Ministry should engage the West Side Revitalization Project, other churches, and community leaders to begin to understand the needs of the neighborhood around us and determine if and how First Christian Church could have a role in providing active service and ministry to the identified needs. It is recommended that we strive to work alongside those in need rather than to only provide financial or material support to further build a spirit of community.

Technology: Within two years, the Worship Ministry should make First Christian’s services available via the internet both as live streaming and as archived past services to enable participation for shut-ins and others beyond the four walls of the church building. Additionally, focus should be given to maintaining the church website and any associated presence on social media.

Children and Youth: Within a year, the Ministering to and with Children and Youth Ministry should

- Survey all children and parents to determine their expectation for ministry objectives.
- Re-evaluate curriculum, plan for appropriate class configurations, and revisit youth group process.
- Experiment with ways to improve visibility of youth programs and highlight the benefits of being a youth coach or Sunday school teacher.

Stewardship: The Be Faithful Stewards ministry should establish a goal of a 5% increase in total giving of all gifts (not just monetary) for each of the next five years.

- The 2015 budget should include an increase in the “Other Faithful Stewards Expense” item from \$0 to \$5,000 to support increased fundraising and stewardship education activity.
- Use Disciples of Christ resources for stewardship education and campaigns.
- Consider the use of Financial Peace tools and resources.
- The pastoral staff, teachers, and youth coaches should support this activity with appropriate inclusion of stewardship topics in worship, classes, meetings, and communications.

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Committee Formation: Ministry stewards should be encouraged to form committees or task forces to accomplish recommendations outlined above. Board leadership should be leveraged to assist stewards in recruiting for and assembling teams.

Administration and Trustees

Building Evaluation: By August, 2015, the Trustees should evaluate the 1931 addition and determine a recommended plan for building modification, renovation, and repair and the funding mechanism to accomplish it.

Building Usage: A task force should be formed to determine the potential for income from the use of the church's building and grounds with a report to the official board by July, 2015.

VII. Organization and Management Recommendations

- The current constitution and bylaws should continue to be used for the foreseeable future.
- The board should review and make recommendations whether to adjust the governance process and the goals of the congregation annually. To improve transparency, these recommendations will be compiled into a progress report and presented to the congregation as a part of the annual meeting.
- The board should consider returning to monthly meetings to improve communication and support among Ministry Stewards.
- Within a year, the nomination process should be altered to begin earlier in the board year, become more personal in its approach, be annually explained to the congregation, and evaluate and implement improved ways to identify the strengths and gifts of members being considered for nomination.
- By July 2015, the board, trustees, and elders and deacons should act to identify, develop, refine, and deliver consistent documentation and training for each of the leadership positions. Training should focus on improving knowledge, assist in the formation of task level committees, and aid in succession planning.

VIII. Staffing Plan and Target Budgets

To accomplish the mission to which we believe Christ is calling First Christian Church, it will be necessary to be fully staffed. The recommended full time positions in priority order are: Associate Minister, Building Maintenance, and Youth Director. Approximate budget increases to support the staff additions and appropriate adjustment for all staff are \$13,500, \$29,500, and \$50,000 respectively.

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Following are target budgets using All Salaries and Benefits as the basis and guideline percentages to calculate the other line items:

Associate Minister and Building Maintenance Additions

Spending Category	Amount	Percentage
All Salaries and Benefits	420,050	50%
Building and Administration	210,025	25%
Program Expenses	126,015	15%
Mission Giving	84,010	10%
Total	840,100	

Associate Minister, Building Maintenance and Youth Director Additions

Spending Category	Amount	Percentage
All Salaries and Benefits	470,250	50%
Building and Administration	235,125	25%
Program Expenses	141,075	15%
Mission Giving	94,050	10%
Total	940,500	

Notes:

The 2014 budget was \$584,975.

All scenarios assume that an adjustment to all staff compensation will be made.

It is recommended to pursue the Associate and Building Maintenance staffing additions for 2015. With the items for stewardship and evangelism included, this would require an increase of approximately \$53,000 (9%) from the current 2014 budget.

The youth director position could be filled in 2017 with successive 5% year on year increases.

The full target budget (3) could be achieved via successive 5% increases by 2023.

IX. Next Steps

- The Identity, Vision, Mission and Values should be adopted by the Official Board and congregation.
- The specific recommendations should be assigned to the appropriate Ministry Team as indicated.