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First Presbyterian Church of Houston Selects “Project Flourish” Semi-Finalists

Pitching phase and final judging of gospel-minded social enterprise initiative begins February 26; Nearly \$250,000 set aside for award recipients

HOUSTON, Feb. 12, 2018 – First Presbyterian Church of Houston (fpchouston.org) has selected 19 semi-finalists for Project Flourish, the church's innovative gospel-minded start up program that is offering nearly \$250,000 in seed money to support local social entrepreneurship ventures. These semi-finalists are listed at <http://projectflourish.org/semifinalists/>. The semi-finalists will pitch to a panel of judges February 26th through March 1st. Award recipients will be announced at a “Congregational Celebration” on Sunday, March 18th.

“We are thrilled to welcome these entrepreneurs all seeking the good of our city,” said Rev. Dr. Jim Birchfield, Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church. “It is our deep hope that their passions can connect and engage with our community in unexpected ways to help inspire and progress solutions to difficult ongoing social challenges.”

Project Flourish received 80 applications to participate in the competition which allowed entries from both for-profit and not-for-profit social ventures. These 80 were winnowed down by half following one round of scoring. These 40 remaining applications then entered a unique pairing process involving the active selection by mentors and “Navigators” from the congregation of FPC, leading to a final tally of 19 semi-finalists.

The semi-finalists' social ventures propose a diverse range of programs and solutions to chronic social challenges faced by the Houston community; however several broad themes came into focus:

- Human trafficking solutions across the spectrum of the issue, from interdiction and extracting victims, to providing support for aftercare, employment and stabilization
- Education initiatives targeting children in under-served communities, to address chronic lack of resources and systemic education issues
- Refugee services, including products designed to alleviate suffering in poor living conditions and support for employment access to organizations that can benefit from hiring refugees

Semi-finalists are now engaged in further developing their business plans and pitch presentations.

“The semi-finalists are now immersed in the 'Navigation Phase' of Project Flourish, where they are being plugged into the social and intellectual capital of First Presbyterian,” said Austin Hermann, FPC's Director of Ministry Empowerment. “They are paired with 'Navigators' with whom they meet weekly for 1-2 hours. These Navigators are wise listening mentors, and leaders drawn from our congregation, each of whom is the designated advocate for the applicant within the FPC community.”

“Navigators provide support beyond simply reviewing the pitches,” said Mr. Hermann. “Semi-finalists can also leverage their Navigator's internal church and work networks to connect with specific 'Skills coaches.' These include professional accountants, lawyers, patent attorneys--you name it. We want every semi-finalist to enjoy a full range of support to successfully explore and develop their vision.”

The competition culminates in "Shark Tank - style" pitches before a panel of six judges composed of three men and three women-- members of the First Presbyterian congregation who have distinguished themselves as successful business and community leaders. The judges will then choose award recipients and how much of the nearly \$250,000 prize pool each will receive.

“The most encouraging takeaway I have from Project Flourish is that people want to help,” said Mr. Hermann. “Most of our applicants don't go to our church. They are residents of Houston who have responded to the call and want to share their social entrepreneurial vision and be faithful to the work God has called them to. It has been very moving to witness new connections being forged within our community and to see just how much we share. It is our fundamental conviction that in the Kingdom of God, even a competition can be done redemptively.”

To learn more please visit www.projectflourish.org.

About First Presbyterian Church Houston

Established in 1839, First Presbyterian Church of Houston was the first church to organize and build in Houston. Today its congregation continues to worship and serve from its location in the heart of the city's museum district. Committed to providing opportunities to Gather, Grow and Go, the FPC Houston community continues to impact Houston and beyond through multiple worship styles, biblical teaching and strategic opportunities to serve through both local and global mission ministry opportunities. Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, FPC Houston is committed to carry the gospel to Houston and to the world. For more information visit <http://fpchouston.org>.

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