

**First Presbyterian Church of Houston
Session Agenda – November 21, 2017
5:30 PM LC 181**

Devotional and Opening Prayer Read Chapters 10,11&12, <i>If You Will Ask</i>	Cindy Cook	45 min.
Omnibus Resolution Approve Minutes of Oct. Session Meeting Approve Membership Reports Additional Consent Motions (listed in packet)	Jim Birchfield	5 min.
Committee/Task Force Reports Operations Committee/Finance Report PS/FPC Strategic Ministry Committee Worship Schedule Discussion	Chris Herbold Jim Birchfield Jim Birchfield	5 min. 5 min. 60 min.
Old Business Adaptive Conversation - Homelessness	Jim B./David C.	60 min.
Pastor's Report Staff/Personnel Update Birchfield Sabbatical Proposal	Jim Birchfield	5 min.
Clerks' Report Nominating Committee Working Group Synod Meeting Delegate Election Elder Training Volunteers Session Christmas Party	David Calkins	5 min.
Prayer and Praise	Jim Birchfield	10 min.
Communion and Doxology	Jim Birchfield	10 min.
Motion to Adjourn		

Important Dates:

December 5, 2017 – Session Meeting (Worship Schedule Decision)

December 12, 2017 – AC Meeting

December 6, 2017 – Christmas Party (Rustay Home)

January 9, 2018 – AC Meeting

January 16, 2018 – Session Meeting

January 23-25, 2017 – ECO National Gathering

February 13, 2018 – AC Meeting

February 20, 2018 – Session Meeting – Adaptive Conversation – Refugees/Immigrants

March 13, 2018 – AC Meeting

March 20, 2018 – Session Meeting

April 10, 2018 – AC Meeting

April 17, 2018 – Session Meeting – Adaptive Conversation –
Mental Health/Substance Abuse

May 8, 2018 – AC Meeting

May 15, 2018 – Session Meeting

MINUTES OF THE SESSION
THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOUSTON, TEXAS
OCTOBER 17, 2017

The October Stated Meeting of the Session began at 5:40 pm in LC181 with a quorum present. Cindy Cook led a discussion of Chapters seven, eight, and nine of "If You Will Ask" by Oswald Chambers. Cindy Cook closed the discussion with a prayer. Dr. Jim Birchfield called the meeting to order and opened the meeting with a prayer.

Attendance: See the attached Session Attendance Record for attendance to date this year.

Omnibus motions:

The following omnibus motions, provided to Session in advance of the meeting, were passed unanimously without discussion.

- The minutes of the September 19, 2017 Stated Meeting of the Session were approved without change.

Committee/Task Force Reports

Operations Committee: Chris Herbold reported that fiscal year to date that there is an approximately \$700,000 deficit, which is largely in line with budget expectations. Giving is down with a decline in giving noted in October. Overall, spending is being kept in line with giving and liquidity is in good shape. Typically November and December are the largest giving months and it was suggested that special communications to the congregation might be of value. Also it was suggested that we do some benchmarking with other churches to better determine the impact of Hurricane Harvey on giving.

Stewardship Campaign Update: Chris Herbold and Jim Birchfield announced that the Stewardship campaign will kick-off in January, 2018, with Mark Strange serving as the Stewardship chair. Other team members include Henry Wyche and John Watson.

Worship Schedule Revisions and Planning: Jim Birchfield reported that the staff is collecting feedback about the revised worship schedule and the impact of eliminating the 9:30 worship service. The Worship Committee and staff will present their findings and specific recommendations regarding the worship schedule and the 9:40 Equipping hour for discussion at the November Session meeting. The Session will hold a special meeting on December 5th for the sole purpose of further discussion about this important topic and deciding if the revised worship schedule should be made permanent.

Jim Birchfield called upon the Session and staff to be in prayer and fasting given the importance and implications of this decision. The Staff will have regular periods of prayer and fasting starting Wednesday morning.

Presbytery Meeting Report: Jim Birchfield and David Calkins reported on the recent Presbytery meeting in San Antonio, stating that the meeting was a joyful time of worship, reflection, and sharing with a sense of camaraderie among the participants. The sessions focused on thoughtful theology and discipleship in the church. There was a dinner meeting with representatives of our Ministry Affinity Group, Grace Presbyterian and MDPC.

Harvey Recovery Update: Jim Birchfield and Andrew Stepp provided an update on Hurricane Harvey relief efforts. The Harvey Relief Fund has received about \$250,000 and to date has dispersed about half to multiple organizations including Main Street Ministries, Attack Poverty, and the Nehemiah Center. In addition, it was reported that Main Street Ministries has received a grant from the city of

Houston of \$250,000. Megan Stidham continues to serve as coordinator for relief efforts, reporting to the Equipping and Sending team under Bill Heston and Andrew Stepp.

Andrew Stepp reported that FPC will be hosting a relief team from First Presbyterian Church, Amarillo in November and that a group from Pennsylvania has reached out to FPC to serve as a host for their team in late October. Megan Stidham and Mary Floye Federer will be helping to connect them in the community and we will be making the Youth House available for their use.

ECO National Gathering Planning: Andrew Stepp reported that Susan Miclette will be organizing volunteers and Michael Homan will be assisting in worship for the upcoming National ECO gathering to be held in Houston in January, 2018.

OLD BUSINESS:

David Calkins led a discussion of the recent Session retreat and the Session was asked to select three action items to focus on this year. The three areas are Prayer, becoming a more safe and welcoming place, and intentional discipleship.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mission Affinity Group Leadership: Jim Birchfield presented the levels of organization of the Ministry Affinity Group with Grace and Memorial Drive Presbyterian Churches. The staffs of the three churches will be meeting in November to discuss and share best practices within each church. The Sessions will be gathering at least once yearly and Sabrina Espinoza offered to serve as the liaison for FPC.

November Adaptive Planning: David Calkins and Jim Birchfield announced that the November Session meeting will include an adaptive conversation focusing on homelessness. Gordon Marcum volunteered to participate in the planning.

PASTOR'S REPORT:

- There were no new staff updates to report.
- Jim Birchfield provided a report on the recent trip to London by a team from FPC to learn more about how to successfully implement the Alpha course in the US. The attendees of the Experiencing Alpha event came away with a sense that Alpha can serve as a central evangelistic tool for the church and is being used successfully to bring in the "unchurched" in London. Of note, about 900 were participating in Alpha at the Holy Trinity Church, Brompton.
- Jim Birchfield reported that FPC has begun its inaugural Bayou City Fellows program, a seminary level applied theology class. There are 12 in the first class, which will meet weekly and is led by Jim Birchfield and Doug Miekle. The purpose of the program will be to develop leaders in the church and community and to help these leaders integrate work and faith.
- Jim Birchfield informed the Session that he will be participating in a silent retreat in November and taking a vacation with family in Boston at the end of December.
- Jim Birchfield reported that he was contacted recently by the leadership of a local church plant with around 200 members to determine if FPC is willing to serve as their sponsor as they seek to join ECO. This church has been vetted by ECO leadership (Dana Allin) and is serving the unchurched in the downtown area. A motion was made, seconded, and approved that FPC agree to serve as sponsor of this church in joining ECO.

CLERK'S REPORT:

- David Calkins reported on recent problems with having enough elders to serve communion, especially at the 10:45 service. David reminded the Session that serving communion is both a responsibility and privilege of serving on Session. Susan Miclette and Bev Olmsted are serving as coordinators for communion.
- FPC will need to submit by October 27th the names of five delegates to the Synod meeting to be held in January, 2018. David Calkins, Cindy Cook, George Mallory, and Brent Dorsey volunteered to serve with one more to be selected.
- Elder training for the class of 2021 will begin in January and will be led by the Clerks and organized by Robert Moore.
- The Session Christmas party will be hosted by Jenn Rustay and tentatively is scheduled for December 6.

Prayers were raised for the church, member concerns, ministry partners, the city and neighbors. Communion was served by intinction officiated by Rev. Jim Birchfield and assisted by Clerk David Calkins.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM with prayer and the singing of the Doxology.

Rev. Jim Birchfield, Moderator

David Calkins, Clerk of Session

Consent Motions

Consent Motions for Session (\$10,000 or more)

- Request from Attack Poverty for \$20,000 for start-up funding: Friends of Northside, two computers, one year rent and part-time volunteer coordinator (affected by Hurricane Harvey).
- Request from Cho-Yeh for \$10,000 towards funding the conversion of a maintenance barn to a large meeting space.
- Request from Generation One for \$20,000 to assist G1 Academy & Step It Up expenses (large number percentage of donors affected by Hurricane Harvey).
- Request from Interface-Samaritan for \$10,000 to assist expenses of providing critically needed behavioral healthcare services for those (affected by Hurricane Harvey).

Motions for Session regarding Luther and Loraine Trammell bequest:

- Luther and Loraine Trammell created a Charitable Remainder Unitrust for the benefit of FPC Houston in 1994 at Texas Presbyterian Foundation. The trust designated that the income be distributed annually to the Nehemiah Center or its successor in accordance to the agreement dated February 22, 2007. The trust stated that a permanent endowment (Luther and Loraine Trammell Fund) be established with the remaining amount following the deaths of Luther and Loraine. Note: Luther Trammell passed away 9-27-2011 and Loraine Trammell passed away 9-23-2017. Value of gift \$117,950.95 as of 9-23-17. Support documents are available on request.
- Motion that the Luther and Loraine Trammell Fund of First Presbyterian Church Houston be administered by the Permanent Funds Ministry Team under Operations Committee. It is to be administered on behalf of the Sr. Pastor and Clerk by the same standards as the other Session restricted benevolence funds where the corpus will be held in perpetuity and the annual earnings made available for distribution each year to Nehemiah Center of Houston or its successor.

Reports

Operations

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

Members present: Bob Shimp, Chris Hill, Debbie Hanna, Martha Barnes, Merry Davis, Henry Humphries and Chris Herbold.

Members absent: Mark Strange and Russ Schulze

Staff present: Jennifer Boubel and Stephen Burns

- I. **Call to Order and Prayer** - Chris Herbold called the meeting to order at 6:45AM and Debbie Hanna opened with a prayer.
- II. **Finance Report and other Finance and Accounting Matters**
 - A. **October Financials** - An overview of the October 2017 Financial Packet was given by Stephen Burns. Highlights of the financial report included:

- Giving for October exceeded budget and prior year, while year-to-date giving is below prior year and budget
- Expenses are unfavorable to budget for the month primarily related to a ~\$100,000 expenditure that should not impact the General Fund and will be corrected in November. Year to date expenditures are relatively in line with budgeted amounts.

Summary financial information is included below (in 000's):

1. Current Year (CY) Comparison to Budget and Prior Year (PY) for October:

	CY		Budget	PY	PY
	Actual	Budget	Var	Actual	Var
Income	\$ 537	\$ 508	\$ 29	\$ 488	\$ 49
Expenses	(790)	(639)	(151)	(848)	58
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ (253)	\$ (131)	\$ (122)	\$ (360)	\$ 107

2. Current Year (CY) Comparison to Budget and Prior Year (PY) for Year-To-Date October (June 2017 – October 2017):

	CY		Budget	PY	PY
	Actual	Budget	Var	Actual	Var
Income	\$ 2,311	\$2,386	\$ (75)	\$2,862	\$ (551)
Expenses	(3,277)	(3,322)	45	(3,208)	(69)
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ (966)	\$ (936)	\$ (30)	\$ (346)	\$ (620)

3. Liquidity - Cash Balances –

General Fund Balance	\$ 1,994
Designated/Temporarily Restricted Accounts	(1,759)
Unrestricted General Fund Balance	<u>\$ 235</u>
Capital Fund Cash Balance	<u>\$ 258</u>

- B. **Temporary Restricted Accounts** – Stephen Burns reviewed the current balance of the “Youth Scholarship Fund” Temporary Restricted Account and provided a summary of historical activity and balances for the last several years. The committee discussed the purpose of the temporary restrictions and what type of expenditures would be an appropriate use of the funds. Jennifer Boubel and Merry Davis agreed to meet with the youth staff to discuss the fund balance and plans for the future use of the funds.
- C. **Stewardship Campaign** – Jennifer Boubel provided an update on the progress of the Stewardship Campaign team that is chaired by Mark Strange and includes Henry Wyche, John Watson and Fred Robertson. The team is developing a plan for a campaign that begins in January 2018.
- D. **Year End Giving** – Chris Herbold and Jennifer Boubel discussed the need to communicate to the congregation the importance of year-end giving to our annual

budget and solicited feedback regarding a communications strategy for November and December. Various ideas were discussed including a possible communication from the Operations Committee and a report from the Treasurer.

III. Facilities Ministry Report – Debbie Hanna provided an update on facilities related matters.

IV. Permanent Funds Report – Martha Barnes reviewed the November Permanent Funds Ministry team meeting including the decisions reached (see attached Permanent Fund Team meeting minutes) and the following motions.

The following motion was submitted by the Permanent Fund Team and approved by the Operations Committee:

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The meeting was closed in a prayer by Merry Davis.

Permanent Funds

Monday, November 6, 2017

Members present: Martha Barnes, Jane Champion, Rebecca Herbold, Gracie McClure, David Miclette, Sam Murray, and Carol Shimp. Members absent: Susan Pokorny Egolf and Chris Athon. Staff present: Bill Heston, Nancy Purcell.

Items Discussed/Action:

- The Committee approved the PFM Team minutes of September 11, 2017 meeting (motion Gracie McClure and second by Sam Murray).
- The Committee reviewed the 2017-2018 Commitment/Disbursement Excel sheet for available funds.
- Bill Heston presented a review of a bequest from Luther and Loraine Trammell and General Endowment: Presbyterian School Fund. Motion by Carol Shimp and second by David Miclette
 - 1) send motions to Operations regarding Trammell bequest to have Session approve the directive to establish the Luther and Loraine Trammell Fund at Texas Presbyterian Foundation with income to be distributed annually to Nehemiah Center of Houston. (**See motions below**).
 - 2) refer to Operations the need to clarify where Cornerstones, FPC giving society, gifts/bequests are to be deposited at Texas Presbyterian Foundation.
- Two seminary scholarship requests and two undergraduate scholarship requests.
- Undergraduate students' scholarships are sent to University/Colleges in two payments for tuition/books. A student requested we send an e-mail to college to give permission for them to release some of the funds for commuting expenses, tax for special program, and/or reimburse him from the second half of scholarship not yet sent. The policy for handling scholarships by sending them directly to school for tuition/books was affirmed, therefore the request of a release is denied (motion by Martha Barnes and second by Gracie McClure).
- Review eight grant requests (Human Resources Dev withdrew their request) that were tabled in September. These applicants were given an opportunity to revise the purpose of their grant request to one of more immediate need in light of Hurricane Harvey. Three (Attack Poverty, Generation One and Inter-face Samaritan did provide an update). *Note: Special consideration was given for "Harvey impacted Ministries." Some requests were not within the ordinary guidelines but received a one-time variance. Two (Cho-Yeh and Open Door) response was for PFM to review their original request). Three (Camp Aranzazu, Crossroads at Park Place, and Houston Pregnancy Help Center) did not respond to update their request.

Action Taken on Scholarships:

One seminary scholarship and one undergraduate scholarship were approved - motion by Martha Barnes, and second by Sam Murray. **See table below.**

Seminary Ryan Born	Gordon Conwell Theological (preaching student)	\$2,410	Grant-\$2,410	Bentsen
Kepha Mwangi	Kenya Methodist University	\$2,100	Grant-denied	Did not fit criteria
Undergraduate Olvin Funez	Texas State University	\$5,000	Grant-\$5,000	Lancaster - \$693 Bene-Other - \$4,307
Pedro Rafael Pavon Ramos	Universidad Catolica De Honduras	\$2,100	Grant-denied	Did not fit criteria

Action Taken on Grants:

Grants approved or denied and voted as a slate; motion by Martha Barnes and second by Rebecca Herbold. **See table below.**

Attack Poverty	Start-up funding: Friends of Northside - 2 computers/ rent/part-time Volunteer Coordinator due to Hurricane Harvey	\$69,000	Grant-\$20,000	Bonner Fund
Camp Aranzazu	Donation to cover cost to campers	\$10,000	Grant-denied	Can apply again in August 2018
Cho-Yeh	Convert barn to large meeting area	\$50,000	Grant-\$10,000	Benevolence-Other
Crossroads at Park Place	Web site design, food, misc.	\$40,000	Grant-denied	Can apply again in August 2018
Generation One	Assist with programming cost: donors affected by (HH)	\$25,000	Grant-\$20,000	Benevolence-Other
Houston Pregnancy Help Center	Upgrade counseling rooms & CBNOS	\$25,000	Grant-denied	Can apply again in August 2018
Interface-Samaritan	Provide programs for critically needed behavioral health (HH)	\$10,000	Grant-\$10,000	Benevolence-Other
Open Door	Replacement of existing video Surveillance system	\$26,395	Tabled	

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Next Meeting, TBD February for TPF update of funds
Martha Barnes, chair

Mission Innovation

Wednesday, November 1, 2017

Members present: Matt Offenbacher, Chris Wolfe

Members absent: Edet Okon, Gordon Marcum

Staff present: Jonathan Ramsay, Daniel Stidham, Austin Hermann, Jim Birchfield

1 **Call to Order and Prayer** – The meeting was called to order at 6:08 and opened with prayer

2 **Church Planting (Ramsay)**

Resident Update (Jonathan Ramsay)

Harrisons still looking for a permanent location post-Harvey. Attended boot camp. Mosaic gathering. Need rest after so much activity (planned)
Emmanuel connecting on staff and through his teaching becoming more well known in the congregation and effective as a leader.

Church Planting Vision Sunday

Still work to do in the hearts of others in the congregation regarding church planting
Define the role of FPC for the future as a hub and example with proper reflection

Church Planter Gathering

30 church planters hosted by FPC families. Great feedback and experiences between planters and host families
Desire to share information with Presbytery on what's been learned thus far to aid other churches

3 **Ministry Empowerment (Austin Hermann)**

Project Flourish

Encouraging training weekend with screeners, navigators and judges (50 ppl). Good feedback on defining roles and expectation
Applications due Nov 19th
Evaluating timeline to facilitate sufficient amount of time for leaders and mentees to build relationships

Bayou City Fellows

4th week. 11 participants. Encouraging thus far.
Planning retreat for January

MET

Looking forward to refine current programs

4 Evangelism (Daniel Stidham)

Alpha

Conference - prayer, dependence on the Holy Spirit were major takeaways. Discussion on benchmarking alpha outreach relative to other churches (participation, percentage of nonbelievers) What is not working with Alpha is becoming clear, helping to consider how to address those issues. Few non-Christians attending. Retreat had low participation and leader ownership is a challenge. Spring alpha timeline a work in progress

Outreach

Does Science Need God? November 9th at Rice.

5 **Close** – the meeting closed in prayer at 7:15

Prayer Requests for ongoing initiatives

- Please pray for applicants to have the courage to apply by 11/19
 - Please pray for discernment and wisdom of screening team as they will review and push forward the first cycle of applications
 - Please pray for Bayou City Fellows: that they remain engaged and encouraged, and grow in love for god and each other and grow in vocational discernment.
 - That Alpha would create genuine community
 - The Lord to raise up laborers for the harvest
- The Lord to help our laborers to meet Persons of Peace

Equipping & Sending

11/13/17

Minutes: Submitted by Cindy Marion

Agenda:

1. Prayer
2. Report by Jimmy Myers (Young Adult Pastor)
3. Report by Mary Floye (Harvey Fund Update)
4. Andrew Stepp – Discipleship Discussion Intro
5. Catie/Bill Presentation
 - a. How equipping and sending seminars have gone & recommendations going forward
 - b. New Discipleship Initiative
6. Prayer

ATTENDING:

George Mallory

Andrew Stepp

Bill Heston

Catie Smith

Mary Floye Federer

Cindy Marion

Jimmy Myers opened in prayer.

Jimmy Myers Report:

Young adult retreat this past weekend
16 attended, -pulse and feedback taken
4 S's to focus on:

Sunday School (entry way for those who walk in)
Small Groups
Service
Social

Mary Floye Report:

Harvey Benevolence \$290,542 contributed to date as or last week (11/10)

Allocation of \$148,465 has been made so far

Ministries to early response organizations (Salvation Army, Attack Poverty, Free Indeed Ministries (northeast Houston)

Main Street Ministries, Lead (serves at Cullen Middle School)

First Presbyterian staff, ministers, members and close affiliated partners

(Main Street Ministries vetted needs to interview needs recipients)

Had 46 homes flooded – funds provided to smaller number of applicants)

FPC will reimburse Main Street Ministries as needed knowing that Main Street Ministries is also sending out funds from their City Fund dollars after Harvey.

Have a request from Texas Medical Center apartment ministry.

Were at the No Need Among You Conference to hear about needs as well.

Interfaith Samaritan Counseling was awarded a grant to help individuals in need.

Volunteers use our properties when they come in from out of town to help with Harvey recovery - Suggestion was made to identify a volunteer group that would be able to assist with hospitality provided to those groups to bolster the current efforts of staff.

Andrew Stepp – Discipleship Discussion Intro

Goal: To build our Sunday School program in two ways:

Ensuring Strong Teaching

Expanding Welcoming Environment

Catie Smith – Report on equipping seminars –

Fellowship One is still being evolved and put in place.

Approx. 250-350 coming to SS

250 – 300 are coming to Small Groups

Equipping Seminars didn't seem to affect attendance for SS classes.

Have had some concerns expressed from SS class leadership about the timing (Sunday 9:30) of the equipping seminars and the potential that they would draw class members out of the SS classes.

Get a Grip on the Bible (cap was 70 and we had 140 total attend at least one class)- averaged approx. 85 people – many who likely came from 9:30 worship attendance.

APEST – had around 10 people attend.

Catie Smith presented her proposed Discipleship plan for 2017/18. This will be to take the equipping and sending teachers to the SS classes and to add training for SS leadership that focuses on strength of teaching and welcoming newcomers more intentionally.

Catie then presented a proposed D-Groups idea/plan. Committee was excited about the new plan and the committee was in support of the plan.

Next Meeting First half of January.

Meeting was closed in prayer.

LGBTQ Committee Meeting #1

Date: November 12, 2017 Time: 8:30-9:30 a.m. CT Location: FPC, Jon Crantz's office In attendance: Jon Crantz, George Mallory, Matt Offenbacher, Paul Seifert, Jan Smith

MINUTES The meeting was convened at 8:30 a.m. Paul opened in prayer and served as secretary.

Impressions of the July LGBTQ Adaptive Conversation

Paul asked the committee to share their impressions of Session's LGBTQ Adaptive Conversation that was held in July (the "July AC").

George began by saying he has been thinking about the following points since the July AC: (i) the LGBTQ conversation has to start from the premise that we are all sinners; (ii) that there is no hierarchy of sin—no one sexual or other category of sin is worse than any other sin; (iii) FPC's geographic location in the museum district adjacent to Montrose gives this church a unique opportunity and obligation to love our LGBTQ neighbors; and (iv) we need to stay focused on the "main thing" of being imitators of Christ's love to those around us instead of getting bogged down in theological debate on homosexuality.

Jon said he was discouraged by the way Edet was interrogated in the July AC. Jon also said he is curious about the degree to which the broader FPC congregation wants to engage with the topic of the church's relationship with LGBTQ people.

Jan said she was surprised by the number and depth of experiences shared in the July AC. Matt was also struck by all of the personal experiences shared in the July AC.

Paul was encouraged by Session's engagement with the materials provided in advance of the July AC. He felt the atmosphere was open as opposed to judgmental and allowed people to speak honestly and be transparent and vulnerable. Paul noted he has heard mixed reactions from several other Session members and it would be worth understanding their impressions.

Purpose of the LGBTQ Committee

In approaching the topic of LGBTQ people and the church, George and Matt emphasized the need to start with the individuals involved. Paul echoed this and said we cannot start with the theology on either side of the debate. The theology is where the conversation has started historically and has led to walls going up between LGBTQ people and the church. In thinking through the purpose of this committee, Paul noted that the overall purpose of Session's Adaptive

Conversations as stated by David Calkins is to become a more loving and welcoming church towards all people, particularly those who are different than the average FPC covenant partner. The purpose of the July AC was to start the work of how we can become more loving and welcoming towards LGBTQ people. The July AC planning committee focused on the importance of getting to know individuals who are LGBTQ—hearing their personal stories, their experiences with Christianity, their experiences with FPC. Paul said he sees the purpose of this committee as continuing this work of "how" that was started in July. In a sentence, the purpose in his mind is to provide outlets and take action to help FPC become a more loving and welcoming church towards LGBTQ people.

Jon agreed that the theology is not a productive place to start the conversation but he feels that we have to have a theological position.

How to Achieve this Purpose

George said that before this committee rolls out any congregation-wide conversations, forums, etc., we as a committee need to connect with more LGBTQ individuals. We will enrich ourselves and the rest of the Session through these relationships and the stories that flow from them.

Jon said he would like to understand why gay FPC covenant partners come to this church as opposed to any other church. Jon suggested that we will want to broaden the conversation to the gay community outside of FPC. Several years ago Bill Henson tried to organize dialogue between leaders in the Houston gay community and local churches but the conversation never materialized. We could invite Bill Henson to share his experience with this committee—who he was in communication with and why the conversation did not ultimately take place.

George suggested inviting LGBTQ people in our community to dinner at FPC. Others affirmed the idea but thought an off campus location such as a restaurant in Montrose may be more conducive to making everyone feel comfortable.

Matt asked whether there are any local LGBTQ-focused publications. Subscribing to these would be a way for us to become more familiar with what is happening in the LGBTQ community. Several committee members suggested that FPC could partner with local LGBTQ organizations such as Tony's Place and Bering Omega. Paul said Bill Henson published a document listing 40 ways to support the LGBTQ community in Houston, including through several local charities, which Paul would circulate to the committee.

Jon related how the topic of FPC's position on homosexuality typically comes up in the new covenant partners classes. In the past, Jon has directly answered questions on FPC's theological position as to whether homosexuality a sin, whether FPC would marry a gay couple, etc. But in the last class, when someone asked about FPC's stance, Jon assumed the new posture

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we want to develop as a church and answered that we love and welcome all people, regardless of sexual orientation.

Paul made the point that, in terms of immediate next steps following this meeting, we should focus on connecting with LGBTQ people at FPC, hearing their stories and understanding their experiences. This should be our starting place as a committee before organizing community dinners or congregation-wide events. People who left FPC over the church's position on homosexuality when we moved to ECO will be a valuable resource as well—to understand why they left, how they experienced FPC's attitude towards LGBTQ people.

Jan said she knows at least several former choir members who left for this reason and can get in touch with them.

Jon summarized four overall actions that we had settled on through today's meeting. First, to make more personal connections with LGBTQ people at FPC. Second, to consult with Bill Henson on his experience in bringing gay leaders in Houston together with churches. Third, to reach out to LGBTQ people outside of FPC—possibly through organized dinners and by partnering with local LGBTQ-focused charities and other organizations. Fourth, to involve the FPC congregation in the conversation—perhaps through a forum like the July AC but open to the whole congregation, perhaps by focusing on the church's relationship with LGBTQ people in the August 2018 All Church Sunday School series. Paul also suggested inviting gay Christian speakers to FPC to share their experiences. The July AC materials include several good options (e.g., Matthew Vines, J.J. Peterson).

Next Meeting

Paul asked the group to think about finding a willing LGBTQ person to serve on the committee, and the committee would discuss further at the next meeting. Paul said he would email the committee to schedule the next meeting and then closed in prayer. The meeting concluded at 9:32 a.m.

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Birchfield Sabbatical Proposal

Key Dates:

May 14 to June 1 (Holy Land Trip – Ministry Away)

June 2 to September 2 (Sabbatical)

September 4 (First day back in the office due to Labor Day)

Notes: All dates “synched” with Bill Heston to assure pastoral coverage
Andrew & pastoral team to set summer/fall preaching series and schedule of events
Andrew Stepp as Acting Head of Staff

Proposed Approach:

Essential Question: Discerning my “call” for the next stage of life & ministry

Rubric: Serve, Stretch, Reflect and Renew

Serve: Cairo, Egypt from June 2 to June 22

- Will include time at the Monastery of Saint Macarius (including spiritual direction)
- Opportunities for one-on-one time with Mama Maggie Groban (a spiritual mentor)
- Serving the poor in the “Garbage Cities” with Stephen’s Children

Stretch: Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania from June 23 to June 29

- Week-long climb in partnership with Lifewater a non-profit that raises funds to build wells in Uganda. A commitment to raise \$6,000 for the cost of the well is included.

Reflect: Orange County, California and Maui, Hawaii from July 9 to July 22

- Three day silent retreat at the Prince of Peace Abbey in Oceanside, CA. Will include spiritual direction. Will begin Terry Walling’s “*Leader Breakthru*” materials to discern God’s call for the next season of my life.
- Time with Marta at a friend’s condo in Maui.

Renew: July 23 to September 2

- This is time that will be spent primarily with family in Boston, Westport CT, Northern Michigan and Charleston, SC. I will take time during this portion of the sabbatical to complete the “*Leader Breakthru*” process, but mostly it will be a time spent with both family of origin and my immediate family.

Note: No classes or conferences. Time at monasteries will include spiritual direction. All travel and expenses will be taken care of through existing study leave and sabbatical budgets. All additional expenses outside of those approved budgets will be born personally.