

Transformative Community Priority Strategic Overview:

Building transformative community in the Name of Jesus Christ
through Personal Invitation

Session Presentation on April 19, 2022



Building Transformative Community

Table of Contents

Transformative Community Strategies

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: Personal Invitation.....	2
Strategy 1: Hospitality.....	3
Strategy 2: Prayer.....	3
Strategy 3: Service.....	4
Strategy 4: Mental Health.....	4
Strategy 5: All Church Fellowship.....	5

Appendix

Appendix A: Christian Community.....	7
--------------------------------------	---

GUIDING PRINCIPLE: Leadership will message and model a culture of personal invitation

Leadership will reinforce and model a ***culture of personal invitation***. Extending a personal invitation to a new person or longtime friend, and greeting the stranger all may seem small, but they play a crucial role in cultivating a culture of invitation and hospitality.

Personal invitations are necessary for the health of our congregation. Questions we must wrestle with as leaders and as a congregation are:

- When was the last time I personally invited someone into any area of my life?
- When was the last time I personally invited someone into any ministry or event connected with FPC?

Research has shown that friends are likely to accept an invitation to attend church (or events connected to a church) if asked. 82% of all unchurched people stated that they would attend church if invited. The problem: only 2% of church members have invited someone to attend in the last year (2018).

Personal invitations are twofold:

1. To invite FPC covenant partners back into the life of our congregation, and
2. To invite non-believing friends, neighbors, and co-workers into our own lives and into the life of our congregation.

The following is an important caveat for these strategies to work:

Dr. Charles King, former senior pastor at FPC, once quoted a favorite phrase from our founding pastor, William Y. Allen. Pastor Allen asked the question, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Dr. King remarked,

"A church whose people despise the day of small things can never be a great church. It is the aggregate sum of many small deeds of kindness that makes a great church. Many of you have said to yourselves and to others that you cannot do anything great for your church. How long has it been since you have done something small?" (FPC History book, pg. 136).

Mother Teresa once noted that we should endeavor to do, "small things with great love."

It is a small action and time commitment to personally invite someone. A phone call can take 5 minutes. But the lasting fruit can be more than we can imagine. The renewed culture of personal invitation focuses on every aspect of the life of our congregation: church events, location/vocational spaces, neighborhood spaces, local and global mission, and worship.

Strategy 1: Hospitality

We need to create a culture of ***Christian hospitality***.

While hospitality includes friendliness and kindness, Christian hospitality goes far beyond. Practicing Christian hospitality is practicing servanthood, especially how it relates to the *stranger*. Romans 12:13 Encourages us all to practice hospitality, whether it is our spiritual gift or not. The word literally means, “affection for the stranger.”

A key passage that exemplifies Christian hospitality is found in Luke 10. The parable of the Good Samaritan captures many themes associated with Christian hospitality, the major them being looking for and welcoming the stranger into one’s life.

While this text is instructive, it is also radical. Where can we reasonably start?

“Looking” for the stranger in our midst. The onus CANNOT be on the newcomer or guest to “find their way” into transformative community. We must be the ones to look for, welcome, and invite into the life of our congregation.

Further, Christian hospitality is always costly. If we choose to look for and engage the stranger, that will inevitably prevent us from a conversation with others, especially those we already know.

Strategy 2: Prayer Ministry

Prayer is foundational to our congregation’s spiritual growth and faithfulness to God, both corporate and individual. The renewal conference in February 2022 demonstrated our need to promote prayer as a consistent practice both as individuals and as a community.

“In order to engage in the church’s mission, prioritize prayer as a central discipline in worship, discipleship, and mission. Prayer is the primary act of gratitude to which God calls us.” (Vision 2020 pg. 5). It goes on to admonish us to elevate the existing prayer ministries to great visibility in the congregation.

We will elevate prayer in our congregation. “More people, praying more” is the mantra that we will use. This will include education, practices, testimonies, and more exposure. The following is a summary of the Worship and Prayer Committee’s report approved on December 10, 2020:

1. Education- To motivate prayer by providing teaching on 1) Why to pray and 2) How to pray. The first goal would be to encourage congregants to view prayer as energizing and powerful as opposed to boring and non-productive. The second goal is to share specific “how to” teaching that will enrich the prayer experience.

2. Resources- To provide books, videos, and conferences to reinforce and activate the teaching.
3. Testimonies- To magnify the power of the Lord through stories; therefore, encouraging covenant partners to seek the Lord in prayer. Communicating that we are all broken and sinful with our only hope in the redeeming grace and love of Our Heavenly Father can be effectively accomplished through testimonies that highlight the faithfulness and power of the Lord. Hearing the stories of how the Lord has worked in a believer's life motivates others to trust God, pray, and humble themselves before the Lord. Seeing how others have weathered difficulties and experienced God's faithfulness encourages those who are struggling to be honest and seek help from God (prayer) and others (community).
4. Modeling with Opportunity- To provide exposure to and personal experience in corporate prayer. Many have commented that they feel uncomfortable praying out loud. Believing that the best way to learn to pray is to pray, the above structure will present opportunities for covenant partners to practice prayer.

Strategy 3: Service

We will cultivate a theology of service as a core practice of believers. This will include consistent reminders that to be a Christian is to display servanthood in all aspects of a believer's life and practice.

We will specifically focus our efforts on ***inviting, developing, and sending out a new core of dedicated servant leaders in every ministry***. For this priority to be successful and for these strategies to be enacted, we need more people serving in everything that we do. We will create a structure in which servant leaders are chosen, contacted, and sent out with clear metrics included.

Further, we will alter our language from "volunteers" to "servant leaders." This subtle change will, over time, remind our congregation of the importance of living into their identity as servants.

Strategy 4: Create mental health awareness and offer resources

The caring ministry will work alongside children's, youth, and adult ministries to ***develop appropriate mental health resources across generations***.

The pandemic has created threats to our mental health, especially in the areas of depression and anxiety. Assessment and implementation will run simultaneously.

As part of our discipleship pathway, striving for emotional health is a mark of a growing disciple.

We will highlight our current mental health resources which are:

- Existing support groups: Grief share, divorce care,
- Counseling services: We have an amazing array of counselors as referrals,
- Pastoral care: Pastors are available to meet with covenant partners.

Future Mental Health resources:

- Teaching – Mental health awareness to adults in core classes and small groups. A class is already scheduled for the month of May.
- Volunteer Opportunity: Lay led mental health coach – someone who can be a liaison between the caring ministry and the congregation. Crisis intervention techniques. Available as another resource in our Caring Ministries. 40 hours of training.
- Stephen Ministry: We are ready to deploy this new group of Stephen Ministers.
- New Support groups will emerge as needs are discerned.

Strategy 5: Church Wide Fellowship

We will develop and plan for ***multiple all church gatherings each year***. A large church such as ours generally has challenges in bring everyone together in meaningful and significant ways. While in larger churches, members find their “church within the church,” we long for more time together as a multi-generational congregation.

Existing opportunities include: Mo Ranch, Fall Kick off, and Renewal Conference. Future gatherings will include frequent events after worship on Sunday morning.

HOW WILL THIS PRIORITY INTEGRATE WITH THE OTHER PRIORITIES?

- Worship – A culture of invitation will include what happens on Sunday morning. Inviting people to “come back” to in person worship will be paramount in this priority.

Further, we will 1. Invite preaching pastors to be available after worship for questions, 2. Have preaching pastors call first time guests the next day/elders call the following Friday, and 3. Promote stories of transformative community during worship.

We will also encourage more congregational prayer during worship.

- Formation – As new people come into our community, we will encourage their participation in the discipleship ministries of FPC. The pipeline of integration begins at a person’s first interaction with FPC then moves into the discipleship pathway and service. We will highlight and articulate the pipeline of integration for guests and new covenant partners.

We will also identify key learning modules on prayer and hospitality to be given to Sunday school classes and small groups.

- Outreach – “We will rethink how we enable connection inside and outside the walls of the church.” The new session Community Life Committee (CLC) will be forming neighborhood groups. Staff members will work together to connect covenant partners in service and mission opportunities in Houston and around the world.

We will also identify key learning modules on prayer and hospitality to be given to Sunday school classes and small groups.

APPENDIX A:

BIBLICAL RATIONALE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Christian community is a theme that pervades every aspect of a congregation's life in God's Church. In community, we are formed, encouraged, convicted, nurtured, and sent out into the world as followers and ambassadors of Jesus Christ. "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this." (Life Together, pg. 21). In the New Testament, the Christian life is not only an individual pursuit, but also, simultaneously, and equally important, it is a life shared with other believers, "...life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only...where it understands itself as being a part of the one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles of the whole Church." (Life Together, pg. 37).

In addition, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is intended to pervade every aspect of a congregation's life - our beliefs and behaviors; our plans and practices; our preaching and prayers. "...[W]e should think of the church as the community of the gospelized...when a person or a church is gospelized, they ooze gospel, they bleed Jesus, they overflow with Spirit, they radiate the Father's glory...we are to be and become a church that knows the gospel, preaches the gospel, and lives...the gospel." (Evangelical Theology, Michael Byrd. pg. 705). The good news of the gospel seeping into every person, relationship, and group is vital to the health of any congregation.

The key word in this priority is, "transformative." The gospel not only transforms us initially, but it also continues to transform us as a people day in and day out if we allow it to. The primary goal of the Christian life is to become like Jesus Christ; and doing so in community is vital to our growth.

Consider the various biblical imagery connected to God's Church, the community of faith:

- The body of Christ – 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- A temple built of living stones – 1 Peter 2:5
- Bride of Christ – Revelation 19:7-9
- A city set on a hill – Matthew 5:14

In addition to the various imagery used in the New Testament to describe the nature of Christian community, there are a variety of biblical passages that describe what transformational community actually looks like in practice:

Acts 2:42-47 - They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and

possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Hebrews 10:23-25 - Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

The foundational biblical rationale for transformative community is found in one key Bible passage which is central to this priority:

Matthew 18:19-20 – Jesus said, “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

The emphasis is on three words that Jesus uttered which are, “***in my Name.***” Transformative community is not just Christians spending time together, although that is paramount. It is cultivating relationships with other believers ***in the Name of Jesus Christ.*** This practice can be experienced anywhere: during worship, in Sunday School classes, in small groups and D groups, on mission, in people’s homes, on the golf course, at a restaurant; the list is endless.

The point: Christian community ***becomes*** transformative when it is experienced in the Name of Jesus. This priority and theme connect with every aspect of the congregation’s life and ministry.

As believers gather together in the Name of Jesus, we discover that there is an historic framework articulated by Greg Ogden, former pastor and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, that cultivates transformative community. He writes,

“...when the truth of God’s Word is at the heart of self-revealing, intimate relationships rooted in mutual accountability, you have the ingredients for Spirit-motivated transformation.” (Discipleship Essentials, Greg Ogden, Pg. 10).

Matthew 18 is indeed a key passage for a theology of transformational Christian community. The emphasis are on three words, “***in my Name.***” Christian community is not just Christians spending time together on the golf course, at a restaurant, It is about being together in the Name of Jesus. Christian community becomes transformational when it is experienced done ***in the Name of Jesus.***