

Mission Study Report

First Presbyterian Church, Durango

March 2025

Preface and Contents

The Mission Study Report was prepared as an instrument to acknowledge the successes and failures of the past, recognize where we are today, and outline our vision for the future. Appendix A provides a list of the Mission Study participants and the study process used in preparing this report. The report is divided into the following sections:

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1. Our Mission Statement

Know Jesus. Live in the Spirit. Join in the Father's work.

Believing in the transforming power of God's word and prayer and having experienced God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness, we live to know Jesus, live in the Spirit, and join in the Father's work in our community and in the world.

2. Brief Church History

The First Presbyterian Church of Durango (FPCD) was founded on December 12, 1881, and a wood-framed sanctuary was constructed on the corner of 3rd Avenue and 12th Street in what is now the Historic District of town. The original church building and much of Durango were destroyed in a catastrophic fire in 1889. The current church building dates from 1890, when it was constructed with stone, stained glass windows, and a beautiful vaulted wooden ceiling. A classic brass pipe organ was installed in 1914. Over the years, we added a two-story brick manse, which has served as church offices and as a residence for (at various times) interim pastors, youth ministers, and college interns. We also added the Westminster Fellowship Hall and a Christian Education wing, which was renovated in 2006 and funded by a capital campaign with its debt retired in 2009. A significant upgrade of our facilities occurred in 2021 with the addition of 52 solar panels to reduce electrical costs and protect the environment.

Under the leadership of a dedicated and skillful pastor from 1994 to 2005, our church experienced substantial growth, with membership rolls gradually increasing to nearly 400. When that pastor retired in 2005, we had a long interim period followed by a pastor hired in 2008 who alienated a substantial portion of the congregation and produced a contentious division among members. During the long interim period, that pastor's tenure, and following the mutual decision for his resignation, the church lost 60% of its membership.

Our most recent pastor (2012-2024) successfully stabilized the congregation in numbers and revived its hopeful and welcoming character. The COVID pandemic, however, had a substantial negative impact. Beginning in April 2020, the church converted to an exclusively online service for 8 months. Meetings of some church committees and small groups went online, but many more ceased functioning altogether. Rebuilding post-COVID has been a slow, difficult, and incomplete process. As a positive outcome of the COVID experience, we have continued online worship in addition to our in-person worship. Members who are homebound or live out of town have continued to use the online service. We estimate that approximately 15 people currently attend our Sunday service weekly via Zoom.

3. Our Congregation

a. Durango Community Overview

First Presbyterian Church of Durango is the only PCUSA church in Durango and the largest of our denomination in La Plata County and the surrounding region. While our congregation draws primarily from Durango residents, many people who live outside the city but still in La Plata County attend our church, and a few even come from outside the county.

The year-round population of Durango is about 20,000, and La Plata County is about 56,000. Both have been growing steadily at about 1% per year. The demographics for our area are like much of the U.S. Mountain West region where we are located, and recent census data for Durango and La Plata County offer similar demographic and economic profiles:

Racial/Ethnic: The community is predominantly White non-Hispanic or Latinx (78%), approximately 9% Hispanic/Latinx, 8% Indigenous/Native American, and the remainder mixed race, Asian/Pacific Islander/South Asian, and Black.

Age distribution: The majority (70%) of our population are people of working age (18-65 years). The number of retirees is growing steadily as they find this an attractive retirement area, and many own second homes here. There is a corresponding, although lesser, decline in the population of young children.

Miscellaneous: The median annual household income exceeds \$80K, and property values (median value of owner-occupied dwellings ~\$600K) reflect the limited supply and growing demand. Affordable housing is an important issue, with many people who work in Durango needing to commute from less expensive surrounding areas.

b. Congregational Membership

Membership, which had declined precipitously from its peak of around 400 two decades ago, seems to have stabilized over the past few years, ending 2024 at 119 (Appendix B1). In addition to active members, we have several congregants who are seasonal and participate actively when they are in the area but may maintain church memberships in other locations.

Demographically, we are more predominantly White (90%) than our surrounding community, and we have an aging population, with those over 65 now making up over 50% of our membership. The proportion of people in the 45 to 65 age range has dwindled from around 40% in 2017 to less than 30%, and the number of families with young children has declined significantly. Turnover in Children's and Youth Ministry Program staffing has likely been a contributing factor, as has recruiting and retaining younger adults.

While we greatly value our congregation's senior pillars, we lament the decline among younger adults, particularly families with children. This is a widely recognized concern among our church community, and we are not resigned to it. Our youth group is very active (“small but mighty!”), and steps are currently being taken to revitalize our nursery and Sunday School program for young children.

We recognize the imperative of achieving positive changes in recruiting and retaining new members and offering inviting and enriching programming for both young and old members.

c. Congregational Responsibilities

Congregational responsibilities may be broadly divided into leadership and participation roles. Regarding participation, recent feedback from the Mission Survey and a series of listening sessions with our membership (Section 9) repeatedly highlighted our strengths. Among these, we are inclusive and welcoming, have a sense of congregational community care, have Bible-focused traditional worship, have a wonderful fellowship hour, and actively support missions and our youth programs (see the charts in Section 9b).

We offer a friendly, welcoming environment and warm fellowship among members and visitors alike. Specifics include our fellowship time following worship and organized outdoor recreation activities. Our survey and listening circles encouraged us to build upon this, strengthening our outreach by capturing visitors’ contact information and systematically following up with them. Other recommendations included forming more small group Bible studies, dinner groups, and church potluck dinners to include members and visitors. All these recommendations promote establishing and building closer relationships throughout our community.

Caring for one another, especially for the elderly and infirm, is another strength enabled by the work of our Deacons and an active prayer chain. Many older members lack nearby relatives and younger families to assist them. So, while congregational care may be a strength, it is also an area we should continue to expand and strengthen.

Throughout our history, we have been active in various local mission and community service roles. For example, we have a long-standing commitment to support the work of Manna Soup Kitchen, providing volunteer teams for monthly meal preparation. We regularly join in service and fellowship on the Navajo Nation in partnership with the Newcomb, NM Assembly of God church. More recently, our Better Together initiative organized service projects in the Durango community intending to invite people outside the church to serve alongside us. We actively participate in several other community projects and always like to encourage more of our members to join in.

Lay leadership, on the other hand, has been flagged as an area for improvement. As noted in Section 2, one of the impacts of COVID restrictions was a breakdown in the frequency and attendance at team meetings for overseeing church programs, from which we have not quite recovered. If we are to strengthen outreach and fellowship, initiate more small groups, Bible studies, etc., it will require the

efforts of more people to make it happen. Equipping lay leaders to assume more significant roles in our ministry will require pastoral coaching but should provide leverage for expanding our capacity as we move forward.

4. The Durango Environment.

Durango, Colorado, is an award-winning town of 20,000 residents with stunning scenery, a Downtown Historic District, excellent cultural and culinary amenities, and many recreational opportunities. These make Durango a mecca for tourists, second homeowners, retirees, and young families. The enthusiasm for making Durango your home is somewhat tempered by the high cost of Durango home ownership and the associated rental market. To make ends meet, some workers have multiple jobs, sideline work-at-home businesses, travel out of the area for contract work, or elect to live and commute from less expensive rural areas or nearby communities.

Durango is nestled in the foothills leading to the Southern Rockies. The Animas River is one of the last free-flowing rivers and one of Colorado's best Gold Medal fly-fishing streams. Challenging rapids also draw tourists and adventurers to kayaking and rafting. An 8-mile paved hiking, running, and biking trail parallels the river throughout most of the city. It offers easy access to fishing and watching kayaks and rafts go through the rapids. Our 6500-foot elevation and outdoor recreational opportunities create a home base for many Olympians.

The Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad (D&SNGR) is a big tourist attraction. In the late Spring to early Fall, it hauls passengers from Durango to the old mining town of Silverton. The trip through the canyons of the Animas River is not just a journey back to the days of hard-rock miners. It is also a passage through more than a billion years of geological history to a water and glacier-carved landscape of jagged peaks, some of which are among the famous Colorado 14ers that climb to more than 14,000 feet above sea level.

In the summer, the surrounding hills and mountains offer some of the best hiking and four-wheel adventures anywhere. Besides the D&SNGR, US Highway 550 provides a spectacular 48-mile drive to Silverton. Brilliant wildflowers drape the lower mountain slopes while furry marmots call to each other as they keep track of hikers and their dogs. And if you want a true challenge, join the Iron Horse Bicycle Classic – cyclists racing the D&SNGR over mountain passes from Durango to Silverton. The race draws local amateur and professional challengers and even nationwide participants.

In the fall, fresh tourist droves arrive for “leaf-peeping” as the cottonwoods along the Animas River and the aspens on the mountainsides erupt in swaths of yellows and golds, with a sprinkling of reds. The local art community conducts a Gallery Walk in the vibrant Downtown Historic District. Halloween brings out pumpkins, kids, and costumes. First Presbyterian Church provides “Light Up the Night,” a not-scary venue for families and the youngest trick-or-treaters. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the downtown art galleries and other merchants host Noel Night with singing, cookies, and hot chocolate.

In the winter, enthusiasts head to Purgatory, Telluride, and Wolf Creek for world-class downhill skiing, snowboarding, and snowmobiling. Durango itself hosts skiing on Chapman Hill and a skating rink within the city limits. The surrounding area offers cross-country skiing, snowshoe trails, and even some commercial outfitters that run dogsled teams. February brings Snowdown, our mid-winter event offering light parades, games, and contests. Traditionally, First Presbyterian Church has hosted a family movie night.

And Spring? If it's a muddy year (from lots of mountain snowmelt), it might be an excellent time to head an hour west to the Ancestral Puebloan cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde National Park. Or maybe drive two hours south to the hoodoo rock formations of the Bisti-De-Na-Zin Badlands and the magnificent Ancestral Puebloan ruins of Chaco Canyon – once the tallest buildings north of Mexico.

Culturally, Durango is blessed with Fort Lewis College, which offers a variety of first-class four-year degree programs in the arts, sciences, outdoor recreation, environmental studies, teaching, and health sciences, as well as an expanding list of advanced degree studies. The College also hosts the Museum of Southwest Studies and the Community Concert Hall, which draws top musicians, orchestras, ballets, and comedians. Local thespians present numerous plays and workshops year-round.

In the summer, Durango is home to the Music in the Mountains Festival, which draws world-class musicians for symphony, chamber music, and pop programs. Additional festivals at venues across the town showcase everything from the classics to R&B, jazz, rock, Celtic, and (of course) country and western.

Overall, Durango offers a fantastic variety of opportunities, events, and happenings, whether you are a tourist or a long-time local. Little wonder that several times, Durango has ranked in the top 10 of the best small towns in the USA.

5. Target Population

First Presbyterian Church of Durango aspires to flourish as an intergenerational pastoral-sized church family (rather than a program church) with a healthy distribution of congregants of all ages and racial/ethnic diversity that closely resembles our target area.

As indicated in Section 3, we draw from the city of Durango proper and from the surrounding county. Both are experiencing steady, measured population growth; a favorable setting for potential membership growth. With Fort Lewis College in town, we have a steady source of college-age and young adult residents, many of whom desire to remain in the area after graduation.

The population of retirees in Durango is steadily growing. Many of them visit and join our congregation. While people of this age don't necessarily help fill out the "young families with children"

demographic, they often bring lifetimes of church leadership experience and offer valuable resources of time, talent, and treasure.

6. Existing Church and Community Program Activities

a. Leadership

Our Session, a 7-person Board of Elders, leads our church. We have a 6- to 12-person Board of Deacons, which leads member care and support. We have 7 Program Teams of elders, deacons, and lay members who work together to help fulfill our Mission Statement. A small church staff assists them.

i. Board of Elders

The Board of Elders oversees all operations and decision-making for the First Presbyterian Church of Durango. As a diverse board, the current and previous Sessions have worked extremely well together to discern current issues and future direction. The Session efficiently responded to the retirement of our previous pastor in July 2024 by securing a pulpit supply and calling an interim pastor within three months. The current board comprises members of varying ages, both long-standing and new members. It is representative of the congregation.

The 2025 Board of Elders is as follows:

Trent Gustafson - Clerk of Session
Marty Schank - Staff Support
Cheryl Clay - Worship Team
Greg Drover - Facilities Team
Barb Conn - Outreach & Fellowship Team
Sue Woll - Christian Formation Team
Meade Harbison - Missions Team and Finance Team

ii. Board of Deacons

The Deacons, working with money from the Missions Team budget, currently administer local mission donations and have a liaison to each community organization that we support. One or more Deacon representatives are also on each program team described below.

We replaced individual care of community members (through gas cards, paying utility bills, City Market food cards, etc.) with increased support to the local agencies set up to administer assistance. We supplement mission donations with our time and talent gifts. These include support of Manna soup kitchen with meal preparations once a month; donations to the local food bank with our food and money on the first Sunday of each month; bell ringing with the Salvation Army at Thanksgiving/

Christmas time; household item donations to Housewarming Love as administered by Neighbors In Need Interfaith Alliance (NINIA); and Laundry Love, helping unhoused people do their laundry.

The Deacons' Care Program is one of their most important missions. All members of our faith community are assigned a specific Deacon to communicate with them and look after their physical and spiritual needs. The Deacons use their Emergency Assistance Fund to provide members with short-term emergency financial support, and they send out sympathy and get-well cards. They also send special occasion cards to encourage and recognize our youth.

The Deacons help prepare special events, including memorial services, weddings, Easter Egg hunts, and bagging candy/preparing hot cider for "Light Up the Night." Once each year, the Deacons host a church potluck, usually at a local park, where church members can get together, eat, play games, and socialize. In addition, they hold an annual "Dessert Extravaganza" fund-raiser, auctioning off home-baked goodies and desserts provided by church members. The funds raised go to the Deacons' Emergency Assistance Fund.

Finally, in the spring, the Deacons send gift bags to our Veterans of Faith (VOF), those long-time members who have achieved 80 years of life, as a token of our appreciation for their faith and service to the church.

iii. Church Staff

Leadership is supported by a Church staff headed by our Solo Pastor. The staff includes an Administrative Assistant, Bookkeeper, Director of Music Ministry, Pianist-Organist, Children's Sunday School Leader, Red Door Youth Leader, and Audio-Visual Technician. Church security, cleaning, and major maintenance services are accomplished via contracts.

At present (February 2025), in addition to having an Interim Pastor, the following positions are unfilled: Director of Music Ministry, Children's Sunday School Leader, and Red Door Youth Leader. Members of the congregation are temporarily serving in those capacities.

b. Program Teams.

i. Team Worship

The Worship Team oversees preparations for regular Sunday and special worship services (e.g., Christmas Eve, Good Friday, etc.), including the administration of sacraments and preparation of the sanctuary. It is also responsible for coordinating music and arranging pulpit supply when needed.

Current Status: Team worship meets on an as-needed basis. Despite our small size, we have an enthusiastic music ministry. Under the guidance of our Music Director, we have an Adult Choir and a Praise Band. The choir performs anthems regularly and cantatas for Easter and Christmas. The Praise Band plays at our worship service approximately once a month and comprises singers and musicians from the congregation. Recently, we've had music interns from Fort Lewis College join our choir and Praise Band.

ii. Team Stewardship

The Stewardship Team organizes and leads our effort to serve God with our time, talents, and monetary resources. It collaborates with other teams, the Session, Deacons, and the Church Staff, especially during our Fall Stewardship Campaign, to encourage the generosity of our congregation. Their efforts culminate in Pledge Sunday, usually in November, where members present their pledges for the following year.

Current Status: We have not had a dedicated Stewardship Team since 2019. Presently, stewardship is conducted by the Pastor and the Elders. We hope and expect this team to be reinstated in the future.

iii. Team Facilities

The Facilities team operates, maintains, and improves the church facilities and grounds. Their goal is to provide an inviting, comfortable, and safe environment for worship and a home for the rest of the church's work.

Current Status: This team has five active members. The team is evaluating space use, including possibly reconfiguring the church office and returning the building to its original purpose as a manse. Our facilities host two Boy Scout troops, Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, and Native American Outreach. Team Facilities seeks opportunities to expand our community connections by making space available to additional, compatible local programs. They are also pursuing grant money to upgrade the aging facility.

Team Staff Support actively works with the church staff, Session, Deacons, and other teams to ensure a Christ-centered workplace with a productive, meaningfully employed, fairly evaluated, and adequately compensated workforce.

Current Status: The team supports the Interim Pastor and the four filled staff positions: Administrative Assistant, Organist/accompanist, Bookkeeper, and Audio-Visual Technician. This team is busy seeking to fill multiple positions, including the Director of Music Ministry, Children's Sunday School Leader, and Red Door Youth Leader. Our interim pastor status may make this task more challenging.

v. Team Outreach and Fellowship

Team Outreach and Fellowship motivates the congregation in evangelism, publicizes the Church's ministries, and invites the community to participate. They also organize weekly, monthly, and yearly activities designed to promote involvement in the life of First Presbyterian Church Durango.

Current Status: This team is busy with 8-10 active members. The Fellowship hour they host following worship every Sunday is recognized as one of FPCD's strengths.

vi. Team Mission

Team Mission works with the Deacons to maintain relationships between FPCD and our local, regional, national, and global ministry partners. They allocate funds for their support and provide avenues for Congregation members to grow spiritually by joining in the Father's Work. Team Mission provides encouragement, opportunities, and focus to members seeking to reach out in Christ to those in need in our community, country, and world.

Current Status: This team is active, with nine members, and meets monthly every second Tuesday. They recently added another global mission to support small farms in Haiti. Support for missions is divided into 50% local/regional, 25% national, and 25% global missions.

vii. Team Finance

Team Finance assures the church's financial security by overseeing the development of an annual budget, supervising the collection and disbursement of funds, monitoring accounting, managing the investment of the church's financial assets, and providing financial reports to the Session and congregation.

Current Status: This team has four members and meets three to four times a year. They are currently rewriting their Endowment and Investment program.

viii. Team Christian Formation

Team Christian Formation oversees FPCD's Christian Education program for children, youth, and adults. This includes Sunday School offerings for children, youth, and adults, Children's Church, Confirmation classes (as needed), small groups, and Bible studies. They are also responsible for supporting and coordinating the work of Children's and Youth Ministry Leaders, Nursery Attendants, and Volunteers participating in Christian education.

Current Status: This team was not active for several years but has recently re-formed and is mainly focused on providing opportunities for our youth. The team includes one elder and five members.

Youth: The church lost our Youth Director in 2024, and we are actively seeking to fill this position. Previous Youth Directors provided Sunday School during service and served as leader of our Red Door High School Youth Group that meets on Sunday evenings. Two young adult volunteers serve as temporary leaders for our Sunday School and Red Door High School Youth Group. We currently have only a few families with young children, and Sunday School participation is often four or fewer. We have a small but committed group of 8-13 high school-age youth who attend our Red Door High School Youth Group. Most of the kids in this group do not attend services here or at other churches.

Previously, we held a very popular VBS (often with more than 100 neighborhood and community children participating). After our VBS concluded, some volunteers, in conjunction with Team Mission, exported the curricula and assisted the Newcomb Assembly of God with VBS on the Navajo Reservation. Unfortunately, our last VBS was in 2019.

Adults: Our active Adult Sunday School program meets before Sunday service and is led by a rotating group of volunteers. Additionally, adult Bible study groups meet weekly in person or via Zoom on a seasonal basis, with a hiatus in the Summer. Traditionally, previous pastors have led some adult Sunday School Classes, Bible studies, and New Member Classes. Our Interim Pastor has continued that tradition.

7. Financial Status

Despite ups and downs, FPC has maintained financial stability over the past several years. This is primarily attributable to three key factors:

1. Fiscal discipline by our Session members ensured that we set realistic expectations and kept expenditures in line with revenues.
2. The congregation's capacity and willingness to give generously when needs are identified.
3. A reserve fund we can draw on to smooth out short-term, temporary cash flow shortfalls.

The following denominational comparisons are based on the latest data available: PCUSA-wide data for 2022 and Presbytery of Western Colorado data for 2023.

Based on 2022 PCUSA data, we were slightly smaller when comparing FPCD with PCUSA churches nationwide (116 vs. 132). However, our income exceeded the average (\$271K compared to \$253K), as did our giving per attendee (\$4,465 compared to \$3,633).

We are the fourth largest of 15 congregations in the Presbytery of Western Colorado. Based on 2023 data for the Presbytery, our regular income was above average (\$281K vs. \$263K), as was our giving per attendee (\$4,321 vs. \$3,050). However, due to the cost of living in Durango and the age of our facilities, we have higher than average fixed costs for personnel and our facilities.

Annual Unrestricted Pledged and Non-Pledged Giving has been essentially flat from 2018 through 2024, except for an anomalous unpledged windfall in 2019 (Appendix B.3). Pledged giving appears to be increasing. However, it is unclear if this will continue into 2025 as the response to date to the fall stewardship campaign seems to be falling below projections.

FPCD thinks of itself as generously supporting local, regional, and international missions, including those of PCUSA. Historically, we have been able to commit more than 10% of our annual budget to outside missions. While we continue to aspire to tithe to outside missions, our recent experience has been that we struggle to achieve that within current budget realities (Appendix B.4). By applying "first fruits" principles, we have recently taken steps to ensure that our support for missions is prioritized equally with other expenses and hope to see growth in this area.

Loss of momentum during the interim, dwindling membership, and uncertain giving capacity are the key risks to our future financial security.

8. Pastoral Leadership

The FPCD PNC compiled this Pastoral Leadership Section based on congregational surveys, listening circles, and discernment discussions. The congregational survey results are summarized in Appendix C

First Presbyterian Church Durango is a historic church with a small yet faithful congregation that needs a Pastor who can meet the challenge of regrowing our church, especially with younger families and youth.

Perhaps FPC Durango's top strength is our members' inclusive and welcoming nature. Our next pastor should embrace this strength. We strive to be a nonjudgemental church community that meets people no matter where they are in their walk with Christ.

We need an empathetic leader with a real personal relationship with our Lord who wishes to share that with others. Our church experienced significant membership loss when a previous pastor did not feel called to visit the sick and homebound. This service is essential, especially considering our current majority-elder congregation.

Our next pastor must be enthusiastic and have the people skills to engage with our local community and preach a Christ-centered message from the pulpit. Our congregation wants to hear messages that emphasize the Holy Scripture and address contemporary issues in the context of Biblical teaching. We value a pastor's ability to lead worship, provide individual spiritual development opportunities, offer pastoral counseling, and help strengthen youth programs.

We seek someone seen as a fellow traveler on life's journey. Our members would rather have someone who can guide them rather than prescribe a solution to every problem. We value a leader who is receptive to the Spirit's work among the body and is open to collaboration and new ideas. Our congregation seeks a pastor who is a realist and will help elders, deacons, and the congregation set goals based on means.

Our church wants to rebuild our small group ministries. The next pastor of FPC Durango must know how to involve the laity and delegate responsibility, allowing us to do more together. Our new pastor must also have administrative skills as a solo pastor who manages our small staff. However, our congregation believes that superb administrative abilities can't replace our need for pastoral empathy, Christ-centered lessons, and supporting youth and families.

At FPC Durango, we understand the demanding nature of pastoral leadership. We wish to offer the ability to maintain a private life with friends and family, and we will support opportunities for personal and professional development.

Summary of Requirements and Desired Qualities

- 1) Can meet the challenge of growing our church, especially with younger families and youth.
- 2) Is empathetic and can share a Christ-centered message.
- 3) Can engage with the community.
- 4) Supports a welcoming, non-judgmental environment in our congregation.
- 5) Can challenge/encourage members to grow in their relationship with Jesus.
- 6) Can help members find solutions rather than prescribe them.
- 7) Can delegate and involve laity in church efforts.
- 8) Has administrative skills.

9. Where is God Leading FPCD?

The FPCD PNC compiled Section 9 based on congregational surveys, listening circles, and discernment discussions.

a. Vision Statement of the Pastor Nominating Committee.

When writing the Mission Study Report, the PNC recognized its essential role in determining the future of the First Presbyterian Church of Durango. The PNC believes that God is leading FPCD to carry out our mission: Know Jesus, Live in the Spirit, and Join the Father's Work.

The PNC prayerfully developed a statement that expresses how we see our congregation and pastor in that mission. This is our vision:

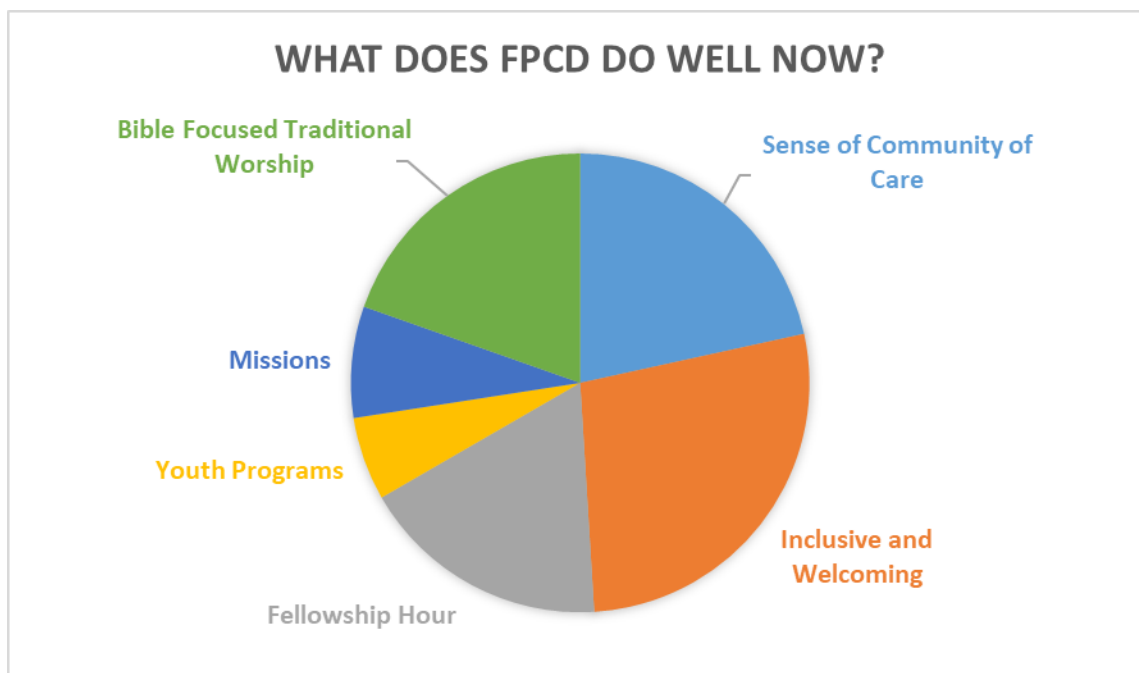
- We envision a vibrant congregation made up of people of all ages.
- We envision a congregation that welcomes people of diverse backgrounds, all races and ethnicities, and in all phases of their journey with Christ.
- We envision a congregation that gains insight and strength not only from the study of the Bible during Sunday worship, Sunday School, and in small groups but also from the experience of creation, prayer, and interaction with others.
- We envision a congregation dedicated to helping the poor and needy and striving for a just society.
- We envision a pastor committed to shepherding us in our mission.

b. The Mission Survey.

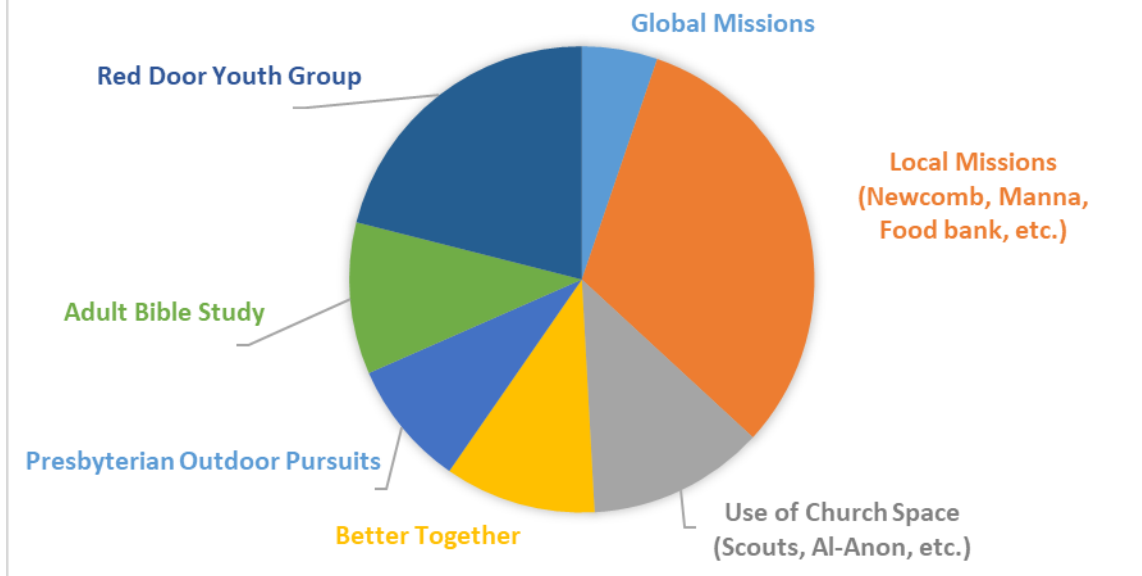
The Mission Survey asked people to offer their thoughts on the following:

- What does our church do well now?
- What programs and missions would you like to see us continue?
- What would you like to see strengthened?
- Identify a perceived weakness of the church and how you would resolve it.

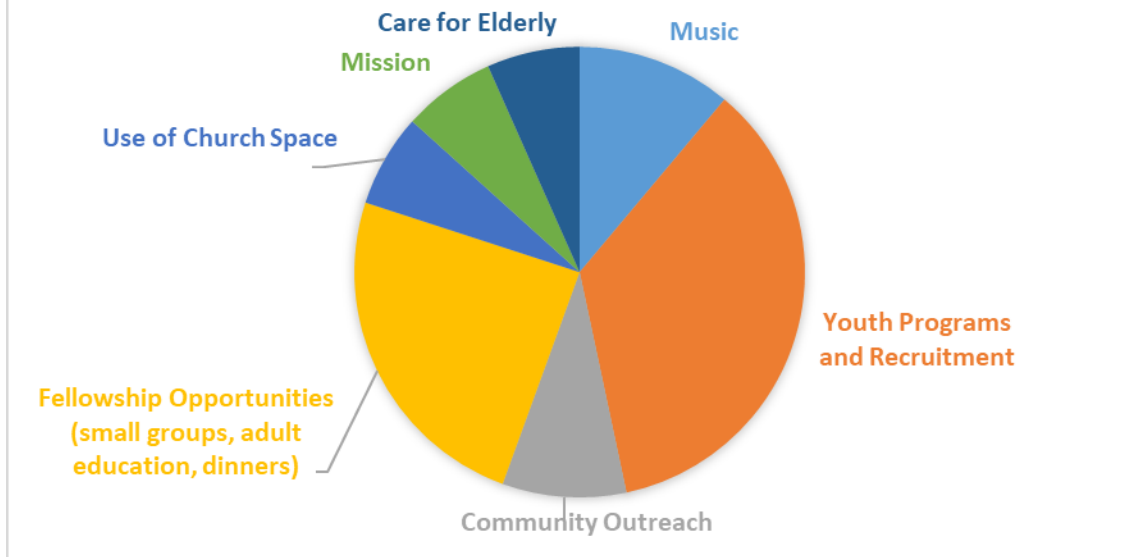
The pie charts below represent response frequencies by topic for the first three questions. Following the pie charts, the answers we received to the fourth question are presented in bullet-point lists organized into categories.



WHAT PROGRAMS SHOULD CONTINUE?



WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE STRENGTHENED?



Weaknesses of FPCD and potential solutions:

- We need to recruit and retain young families.
 - Stabilize staffing for Children’s Sunday School and the Red Door Youth program
 - Bridge the generational gap with intergenerational activities

- Create an adopt-a-family program matching older and younger families for monthly dinners
- Encourage youth and families with children to participate in our POPs outdoor recreation events
- Create an adopt-an-FLC student program

- We need to build upon our outreach and fellowship strength.
 - Increase visitor follow-up and engagement

- We need to strengthen our music program.
 - More engaging music for young people
 - Recruit FLC voice students to be section leads in the choir

- We need to free up the pastor's time for traditional pastoral roles (preparing sermons, leading worship, counseling, visiting the infirm and bereaved)
 - Recruit and train more lay leaders

- Miscellaneous shortcomings.
 - We need to optimize the use of the manse and the Sunday School space
 - We need to resolve audio-visual/tech issues with improvements to our sound system, worship streaming, and church website
 - We need to review and improve campus security procedures
 - We need to improve the transparency and timeliness of our communications with the congregation

Appendix A. Mission Study Team & Process

The Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) also served as the Mission Study Team.

PNC members were nominated by the Church's Nominating Committee and confirmed by the Congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Durango, on Sunday, October 20, 2024.

Team Members are:

Cory Riojas-Moderator

Kent Norgren-Vice Moderator

Geni Miller-Secretary

Jon Powell-Technical Advisor

Lee Ann Harbison-Vice Technical Advisor

Gay Kiene

Ginny Miller-Cavanagh

Ann St. John

Rich Wheeler

The Board of Session Elders of First Presbyterian Church, Durango, provided a survey to the congregation that could be filled out on a written form or online. The survey covered questions about the church's status and desired characteristics for a new pastor. The survey was available during November and December 2024. The PNC also conducted four Conversation Meetings using Listening Circles where church attendees could meet with PNC members to share their thoughts and make suggestions. An online Listening Circle was offered via Zoom for those who could not attend in person.

The PNC collected and processed the completed surveys and notes from the Listening Circles as presented in Sections 8 and 9. The PNC used government census sites, church documents, financial reports, and data from PCUSA and the Presbytery of Western Colorado to provide community and church statistics and comparisons.

In January and February 2025, the PNC met weekly via Zoom to evaluate and discuss the compiled survey data and Listening Circle comments. The PNC developed a framework for the Mission Study, and sections were assigned to individual PNC members. The section drafts were reviewed, critiqued, and validated by the entire PNC during Zoom meetings. The sections were corrected or rewritten as necessary and merged into a consolidated Mission Study document.

Appendix B. Recent Historical Trends

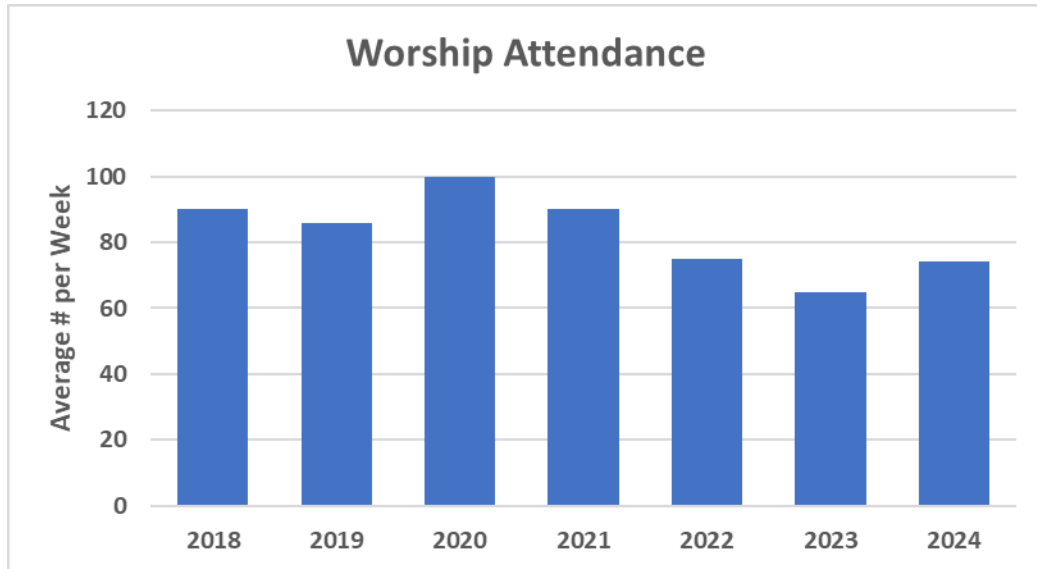
1. Total Membership



Membership at FPCD has been declining since it peaked at around 400 in 2004. Much of that decline occurred shortly afterward, when the church experienced turmoil, division, and pastoral turnover, reaching a membership low of 85. Fortunately, most of that is behind us. The 12-year tenure of our most recent pastor was much more peaceful, and recent membership levels seem to have stabilized. The church reconciled the rolls in 2011, yielding a reliable membership count of 158. Our current membership is 119.

Given the broader trends in mainstream congregations, such decline may be more the rule than the exception. We believe there are specific things that can be done to strengthen the ministry and increase our membership.

2. Worship Attendance



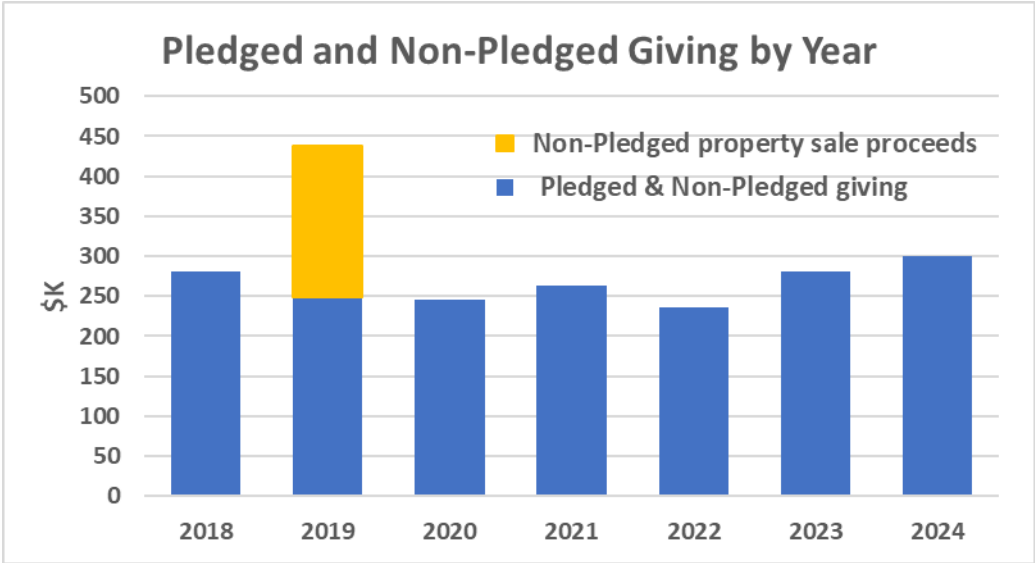
As with worship attendance across the board in the PCUSA, attendance at FPCD has declined. Our attendance and membership are above PCUSA church averages. Our attendance averaged 75 people per week compared to PCUSA, with 62 people per week attending.

Relatively high attendance in 2020, while much of the year was spent in COVID lockdown, seems counterintuitive, but a few theories stemming from the advent of online worship support it:

- Eagerness of congregants to be in a community setting while otherwise experiencing isolation
- Fewer alternative activities competing with online worship attendance
- Increased online ability to reach worshippers who might be homebound for reasons other than COVID, or worshippers who were out of town

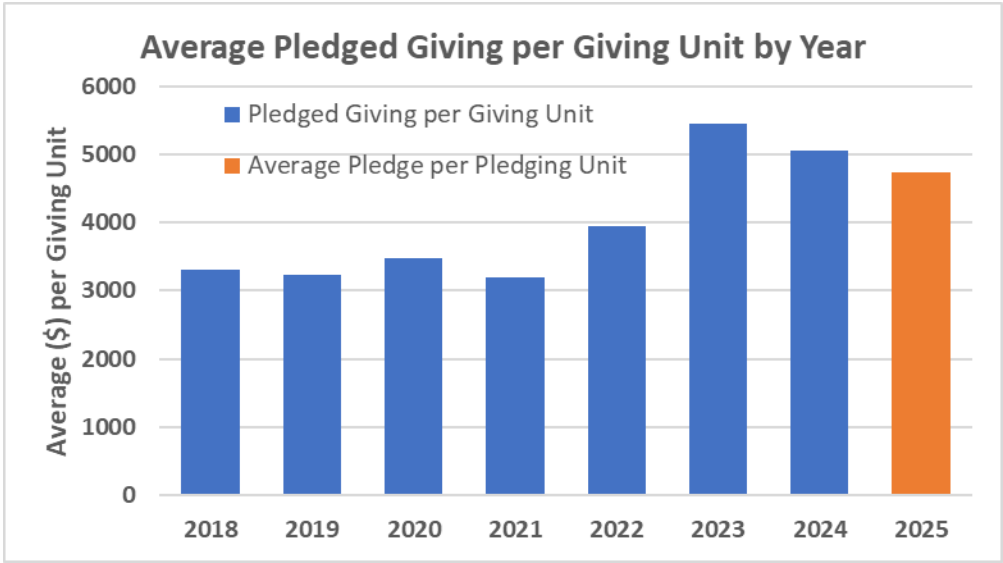
Some of these benefits have persisted since the lockdown. Since we now stream worship weekly, we can reach those who cannot attend in person. We have not systematically tracked the number of worshippers attending online; however, recent numbers average around 15 per week.

3. Pledged and Non-Pledged Giving



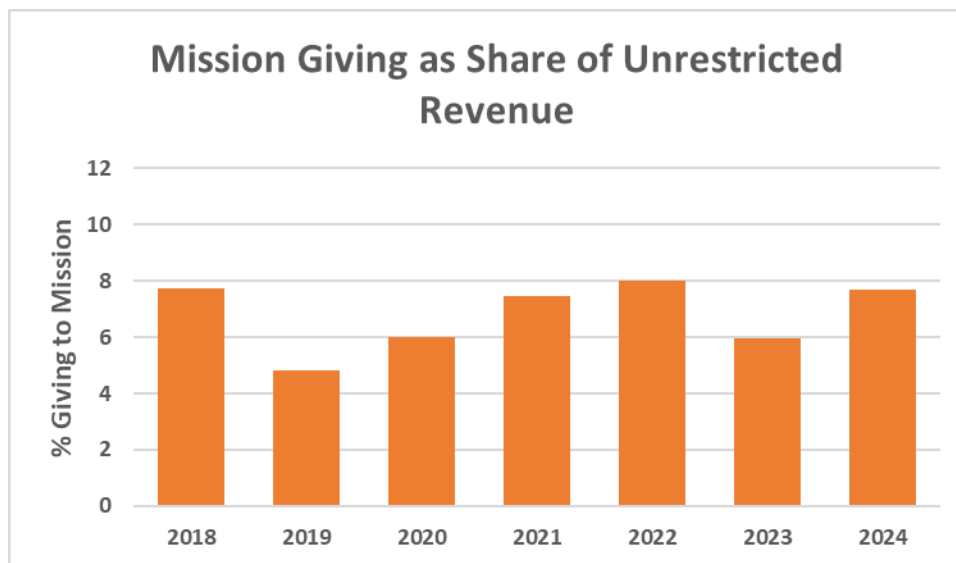
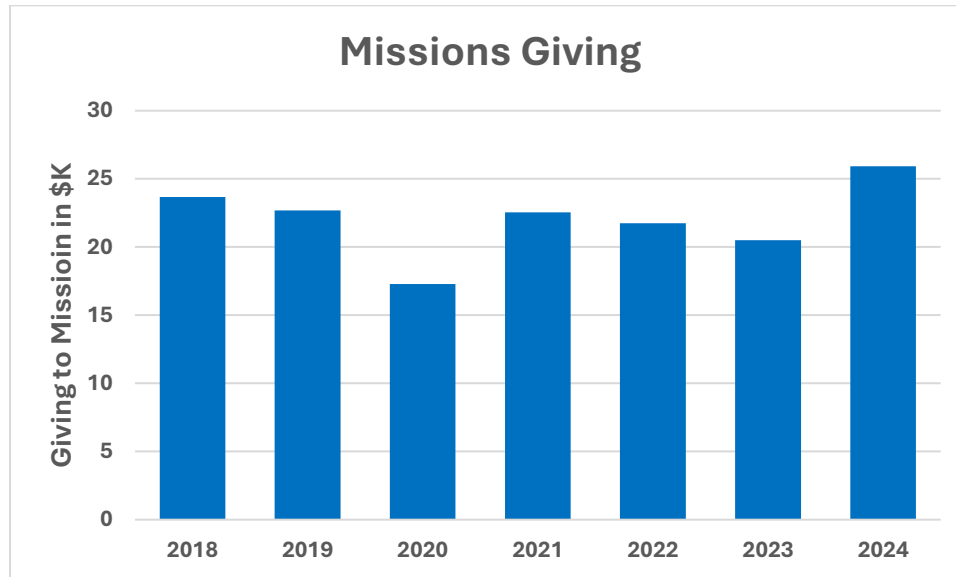
Revenue from contributions, including pledged and unpledged giving and undesignated cash offerings, has been essentially flat. From 2018 to 2023, our total annual giving increased by 7%, while total US inflation was nearly 25% during that same period.

The anomalous non-pledged receipt of \$188.7k in 2019 resulted from the sale of real property in Casa Grande, Arizona, that had been given to the church.



After a flat period during the COVID years, pledges on a per-giving basis rose in 2022, peaked in 2023, and decreased in 2024. From 2018 to 2024, the total average pledge increased 7.4%. It’s unclear if the downward trend will continue into 2025, but the response to our fall stewardship campaign has fallen below projections. The downward trend may reflect the departure of our last pastor and the ongoing interim period.

4. Missions Giving



The Missions Team aspires to see FPCD give at least 10% of total unrestricted revenue to the mission partners we support. Historically, we have given well above that percentage, but declining membership and revenue have strained our ability to meet that goal. By applying “first fruits” principles, we have recently taken steps to ensure that our mission support is prioritized equally with other expenses and hope to see growth in this area.

Appendix C. Pastoral Qualities, Characteristics, and Ministry Roles

Survey Results

The Mission Survey was sent out in paper form and via email to gather information on what kind of pastor the congregation of FPC Durango believes will best lead our church moving forward. The survey was divided into three distinct categories: the qualities of a good pastor, the Preferred Characteristics of a pastor, and the importance of ministry roles. A total of 44 surveys were completed and returned. Not every participant answered every question.

NOTE: Listening circles and PNC discernment discussions helped us to examine many thoughts and concerns that were too nuanced for the survey's "either/or" format. For example, Christ teaches us to engage issues but do so with both compassion and scriptural knowledge. Should a pastor have scriptural expertise at the expense of spiritual development? Should you aim for spiritual development at the expense of scripture? Surely a pastor needs both.

a. Qualities of a Good Pastor

Survey Data: The question of what qualities a good pastor should possess was presented to the congregation in a "Pick Five format."

The most prominent response (68%) indicated that we should seek a pastor whose primary focus is leading the congregation in Christ-centered worship. We should seek a pastor who can capture the essence of scripture with a well-articulated passion for our God. This is essential in maintaining our current congregation's attendance and inspiring newcomers to consider membership.

The second-largest number of responses (61%) considered spiritual development and pastoral counseling their priority. We require a pastor who can engage with congregants more personally and is prepared to preach the Good News to anyone who needs guidance, regardless of where they are on their walk with Jesus.

The other most notable qualities requested were a pastor who can engage well with youth and children (52%), a capable administrator (50%), and the ability to respectfully delegate tasks to the church laity where appropriate (48%).

b. Preferred Characteristics of a Good Pastor

Survey Data: The questions regarding the desired characteristics were presented to the congregation in a format that asked survey takers to choose between two preferred traits when compared to each other.

Reserved and reflective or *Socially engaging*: we would prefer a pastor who is socially engaging (92%).

Strong and decisive force in decisions or Encourages lay leadership decision-making: We would prefer a pastor who encourages lay leadership decision-making (89%).

Welcomes new approaches and ideas or does things the way they always have: We prefer a pastor who welcomes new approaches and ideas (89%).

Helps people figure things out for themselves or Tells people what to do: We prefer a pastor who will help congregants find answers for themselves (87%).

Achieved goals regardless of cost or Set priorities based on the means available: We prefer a pastor who sets priorities based on the means available (82%).

Maintains a private life outside of the church or gives their whole life to the church: We prefer a pastor who will serve the church during his working hours and maintain a private life while not working (82%).

Thought-provoking and challenging or comforting and reassuring: We mostly prefer comforting and reassuring (65%).

Usually emphasizes the Bible or contemporary issues: We mostly prefer an emphasis on the Bible (65%).

Expertise in biblical and theological matters or a focus on spiritual development: We are nearly evenly split on this selection (54%).

c. Importance of Pastoral Roles

The survey sent out to the congregation asked respondents to choose the importance of a pastor's various roles as either Essential, Very Important, Moderately Important, or Low Importance.

Survey Data:

Friend & Fellow Traveler: This survey question had the highest level of agreement. 76% of our respondents said a pastor who can be considered a friend or a fellow partner in their journey with Christ is Essential/Very Important. The remaining respondents all labeled this as Moderately Important.

Preaching the Word & Teaching: Most respondents (64%) declared this an Essential/Very Important pastoral role. All other respondents labeled this role as Moderately Important.

Church Administration: Most respondents (62%) believe that the pastor's role and ability in administration are Moderately Important, while far fewer of the congregants surveyed (30%) viewed this role as Essential/Very Important.

Celebrant & Worship Leader: Nearly half of the respondents (47%) view this pastoral role as Moderately Important, while almost the same number (45%) see it as Essential/Very Important.

Spiritual Guide: Nearly half of the respondents (48%) see this role as Essential/Very Important, and slightly fewer (44%) listed it as Moderately Important.

Group Facilitator: Half of our respondents (51%) selected this role as Moderately Important, and a large minority (39%) labeled it Essential/Very Important.

Social Advocate: Most respondents (61%) believe this role is Moderately Important, while a minority (28%) labeled it Essential or very important.

Witness & Evangelist: Half of our respondents (51%) saw this role as Moderately Important. At the same time, the rest of the congregation was split, with some (27%) seeing it as Essential and others (20%) seeing it as Low Importance.

Counselor & Healer: Most of the respondents (62%) labeled the pastor's role as a counselor and healer of Moderate Importance. A few (17%) labeled these roles as Essential/ Very Important, and some (20%) saw them as Low Importance.

Community Chaplain: Responses for this role were split evenly, with just under half (45%) of responses labeling this role as Moderately Important and the others (45%) believing it Low Importance. Only the smallest minority (9%) saw this as an Essential role for the pastor.