



A Church Alive in Spirit and Service

Long-Range Plan 2022-2026

Introduction

The 2022-2026 Covenant Long Range Planning Committee has spent much of the past year reviewing the work of past planning committees and how those plans were implemented (or not), reflecting on how best to discern God's will for our Covenant Community, listening to the observations and concerns of the Covenant Community through an online survey and continuing our listening in a series of twenty small group discussions. We completed that work and have sifted through all that we have heard in an attempt to discover Who and Where Are We, Where We Want to Be and How We Should Move Forward.

You may notice a lot of similarities in what we heard and the recommendations you received from the Long Range Planning Committee in 2016. We find the similarities to be confirming in the sense that our Covenant Community has not wavered in their support for who we are and what we are doing. We also believe that the message is that we should not slow our efforts to expand on the themes and be intentional in seeking an even more spiritually vital community.

We offer our findings, recommendations, and possible actions for prayerful consideration by the Session.

Who and Where Are WE?

We start with the premise as articulated in our readings from "Leading off the Map."

"Our mission is to be a community of disciples and demonstrate the good news in every sector of society. We want to reach people for Jesus Christ."

By being who we are, emphasizing our strengths, adapting to changes carefully and incrementally, and communicating who we are to the wider community of believers and those searching for belief, we will grow and strengthen our membership and continue to nurture our Covenant Community appropriately.

As a part of the interpretation provided by Holy Cow of the Congregation Assessment Tool (the online survey), we learned the following about ourselves as told to us by members of our Covenant Community:

1. As shown by the Descriptive Map, we are a progressive/adaptable Community. (see Appendix 1)
2. As shown in the Energy Satisfaction Map, we are a High Energy and High Satisfaction Community. (see Appendix 2)
3. As shown in the Performance Dashboard, we are strong in all indicators with the exception of Spiritual Vitality. (see Appendix 3)
4. Compared to other churches, we are in the 57% percentile of the amount of giving as a percentage of income (2.47%). (see Appendix 4)
5. We are welcoming and friendly, with strong preaching and teaching, providing a nurturing worship experience anchored by a superior music element.
6. COVID has been stressful and difficult and there is an urge to return to normal but a reluctance to do so without practicing safe strategies. Our virtual platforms have been a very helpful response and will be a continuing element in our programming.
7. Recent findings by Holy Cow on the impact of COVID-19 on Hospitality and Spiritual Vitality scores, and the prioritizing of relationships with family/friends, affirm the findings in our report. (see Appendix 5)

Where Do We Want to Be?

“The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters but one who has insight draws them out.”

Proverbs 20:15

We want to build on our strengths and continue to nurture our strong foundations, which include being a welcoming and friendly community, having nurturing

worship experiences, supporting a superior music program, and promoting excellence in preaching and teaching.

We also want to explore ways to build on those foundations and expand our personal and communal spiritual vitality through intentional efforts. Holy Cow's CAT Survey defines spiritual vitality as "faith being central to our lives rather than peripheral or episodic." We believe there are five themes that will help us increase our spiritual vitality as we move along that path of being a church alive in both spirit and service:

1. Outreach
2. Engagement
3. Diversity
4. Stewardship
5. Technology

How Should We Move Forward?

The Long Range Planning Committee offers the following recommendations for Session action to address the five themes of intentionally building on our spiritual vitality.

Outreach

GOAL: Intentionally expand outreach to those living on the margins of society while supporting societal and institutional change. Celebrate and publicize those efforts with periodic reports and personal testimonials.

INTRO: A spiritually vital congregation lives into its call to spread the good news and support to those in need in the greater community. Two of the top-ranking responses in the Congregational Assessment Tool results were:

1. Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society. (i.e. homeless, immigrant, transient persons).
2. Work as an advocate for social and institutional change so that society might better reflect the values of the kingdom of God.

These responses were confirmed during our small group discussions. Although our Covenant Community already has a strong outreach program, we have heard a call for more.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Establish a task force (a “temporary” group with a limited focus) to evaluate existing Outreach efforts and explore other opportunities that can either be led by Covenant or in which Covenant or its individual members can participate.
- Inventory our existing Outreach effort and opportunities.
 - What are they?
 - When are they?
 - How many community members already participate and who are they?
- Use “moment for mission” with personal testimonials more often to educate the Covenant Community as to “what we do.”
- Explore more ways to communicate to the Covenant Community what we are already doing and how that addresses those living on the margins of society.
 - An annual report in writing and celebrated at an annual gathering with in-person testimonials
 - “Bite-sized” information on what Outreach activities we are engaged in, using charts and visuals
 - Development of videos and slideshows illustrating the Outreach effort to be posted on the website, on Facebook and other social media and delivered through the newsletter and by email periodically
- Develop partnerships with other community entities that engage in Outreach efforts.
- Speak out for those unable to speak for themselves or who are unheard.
- Set aside resources yearly for unexpected needs (ex. Afghan refugees).
- Explore additional support for the Afghan refugee project.
- Consider expanding the Outreach budget.
- Keep using the societal task force for Outreach projects.

Engagement

GOAL: Identify, educate, and empower lay leaders to enrich the spiritual development of the church community. Create special interest groups to develop a deeper sense of belonging and cohesion amongst church participants.

INTRO: A spiritually vital congregation has a high level of engagement leading members and visitors alike to act out their Christian mission in their daily lives. The coronavirus pandemic has significantly changed the way we engage as a congregation and has possibly caused a decrease in our sense of spiritual vitality. The Covenant Community, as seen in the responses to the CAT survey, has identified the need to live its faith outwardly, but inward development was mentioned as being a priority as well. The two specific areas of engagement identified were in the identification of lay leaders, with the development of a lay leader training program, and the creation of special interest groups within the Covenant community specifically in the realm of younger families; older, single women; and men.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

Congregational “lay leader” engagement

- Define “lay leadership”, identify its structure and develop a training program to include proactive attraction of potential lay leaders.
- Recruit new participants as greeters, team members, choir participants, and Sunday school teachers. Importantly, look beyond those who currently and regularly volunteer to those who would add diversity of age, thought, gender and others.
- Engage new members immediately through surveys and develop a plan to actively follow up in a timely manner. Possibly add a new members class to Sunday School options.
- Develop a system to thank current volunteers to ensure that they know they are appreciated for their contribution to Covenant.
- Develop a “lay leader” program for Sunday School teachers and other identified church leaders.

Congregational “special interest” engagement

- Create a sub-committee of the Fellowship team. Included in the focus of this group should be specific ideas to deal with their unique situations and

how to ensure their continued participation in the church. Examples of areas of focus for the subcommittee:

- More programs for young families ages 18-35
- Explore a contemporary service for young people ages 18-35
- Development of Moms groups
- Parent specific dinner groups/Bible Studies/outings
- More events for those who have a full-time job
- Inclusion of child care in activities
- Organize certain Covenant programs around children's bedtimes
- Reinstate Agape groups
- Bring back mid-week (TOW) programs
- Include scripture in dinner groups
- Additional virtual bible studies beyond the Monday morning study
- Engage our current preschool families through family-friendly activities and continued outreach. If mandatory Pre-K happens, reach out into the community with scholarships.
- Develop programs designed to allow opportunities for the fellowship of men and to encourage male leadership, particularly as Sunday School teachers.
- Develop more opportunities for the engagement and participation of older women who don't have a partner or a partner who attends church with them.
- Create a drama team for youth.

Post-COVID congregational engagement:

- Establish a clear strategy for attracting people back to the in-person experience of being part of the Covenant Community, and implement.
- As COVID continues and once we emerge, create more opportunities for online Zoom events for different social groups.
- Develop specific ways of adding to the virtual and hybrid experience, including:
 - Intentional messaging during the Sunday worship service to include both those present in person and those attending virtually
 - Virtual messaging before and after the Sunday worship service
 - Explore a virtual choir
 - Provide sign language support for the hearing impaired

Diversity

GOAL: Break down societal barriers using intentional outreach and select programming (educational, social, spiritual) to promote understanding and a welcoming environment for people of different ethnic groups, races, orientations/genders, ages, and social/economic/educational backgrounds.

INTRO: The call was heard from a number of the small groups to put our racial reconciliation book group studies into action. There is a desire to be more intentional in listening to and learning from people of different and less privileged backgrounds to discover how we can walk alongside them and understand what our Christian response might be. There is also an expressed wish for forums to build alliances and friendships among different racial and socioeconomic groups within our community. Our Covenant Community recognizes that we as a church are homogeneous in many ways and some may be uncomfortable embracing too much change in our worship structure in order to attract a more diverse church body. As we explore changes, it should be noted that the second top priority from the CAT survey is “to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.”

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Create more opportunities for experiences that foster racial inclusion, understanding, and connection. Explore ways we can connect to those not like us, such as partnering with “Building Bridges” in Staunton.
- Encourage the continued development of contemporary elements to our worship services to attract diverse crowds while maintaining the integrity of our mission.
- Plan joint activities with other local churches/organizations/faith groups.
 - Host events to break down barriers to those “not like us”
 - Apply a special focus on groups within the community
 - Partnership with other churches such as Allen Chapel
 - Choir or minister exchange on Sunday morning
 - Share meals together
 - Have youth and other groups attend a local Black church service
 - Develop adult groups for visitation to other churches
- Identify and be intentional about creating programs to bridge the intergenerational gap. Our youth want more opportunities to work and

socialize with older people, along with more blended age groups for Sunday school and other activities.

- Communicate our welcome to the LGBTQ community. Add pronouns in parentheses next to staff names in the bulletin to demonstrate our welcome to all genders.
- Do outreach to Mary Baldwin University students: identify any current outreach and determine whether a task force should be created that includes student representation / surveys. Explore the development of a UKirk mission to the Mary Baldwin students.
- Continue to explore different styles of worship, building upon the diverse musical styles that Chris and Jeff bring forward.
- Join with local churches for musical events.
- Create musical opportunities to reach diverse unchurched audiences in our community.
 - Host a concert for UVA University Singers.

Stewardship

GOAL: Develop new communication and reporting structures whereby people can know where to give their time, talent, and treasures so that individually and collectively we can better support each other and our community.

INTRO: Each year the Stewardship and Finance Team sends a letter asking each of us to consider our financial pledge, our personal commitment to nurture our faith, to minister to those in need, and to share our time and talents.

Financial contributions per year over the last five years (2016-2020) have risen steadily, with an annual average increase of 2.1 percent. The first and third priorities that came out of the CAT survey were “Expand outreach ministries that provide direct services to those living on the margins of society,” and “Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances.” As we look to the future in asking people to give of their time, talent, and treasures, we need to keep in mind our congregation has placed a high priority on looking outside our church walls to minister to those in need.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Maintain an updated inventory of community Outreach activities led by other community entities that individual members might participate in.

Include the contact person, phone number, email address and website information.

- Create a searchable database of everyone in the Covenant Community that is updated frequently to include:
 - Birthdate (including year of birth) so that we can track our trends by age and to sort and target communication to those most likely to be interested in a particular program or issue.
 - Include all items that are captured in the new member form and offer multiple opportunities for existing members to complete a form so that we can update their experience (i.e. Session membership, committee membership, interests) and be able to sort for future planning and communication.
 - Use the searchable database to target Covenant Community members who have expressed an interest in specific or general Congregational and Outreach activities.
- Provide an explanation of tithing in new member packets and provide to all members periodically.
- Have the finance committee develop more intentional ways of providing budget information to the congregation in more detail and more often.
- Educate the Covenant Community on the use of wills, stock donations and other approaches to growing the endowment.
- Modify the church calendar on our website so it is “interactive” with links that provide one-click access to the person to contact for more information about a church event, also to short video testimonials from those who have participated in a past event, and ways to contribute on-line monetarily to a program.
- Explore other possible updates to the website (is it who we are? or what we are doing?).

Technology

GOAL: Assess and implement a plan for use of technology in order to enhance virtual worship and expand opportunities for outreach and spiritual vitality across the life of the Covenant Community.

INTRO: As COVID created new challenges everywhere for everyone, the church faced the challenge of reaching the Covenant Community in the face of lockdowns and guidelines that prevented the kind of in-person worship we were

used to. The current tech platform for virtual church services was put in place in the first months of the pandemic. In small group meetings the effort was well received and had high praise from respondents. Comments in small group sessions supported continuing virtual services beyond COVID restrictions to reach those in the Covenant Community who cannot attend in-person and for those who live too far away to attend. We recognize that virtual worship service is here to stay and has become an essential component of the spiritual life of Covenant. Presently the tech platform is adequate for current broadcast needs, however to maintain it there must be an effort to assess and plan for changes in hardware and broadcast opportunities in the future. It was made clear in small group meetings the Covenant Community does not want virtual worship to just be seen as a replacement for in-person worship, rather as a way to reach existing and new distant members who cannot attend in-person services for a variety of reasons. Small group respondents also questioned and considered what else, in terms of outreach and spiritual vitality, Covenant can do with expanded tech opportunities.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- Create a Technology/Communication Team that has responsibility for tech and communication needs for the church which seeks to identify and fill any current gaps, anticipates future needs, and stays up-to-date on the latest technology
- Consider creating a new committee or task force to review and support how Covenant uses technology and find ways to enhance and improve its ability for outreach to Covenant members and the larger community.
- Review the current internet platform for virtual broadcast to provide the best possible visual and sound enhancements to make the service seamless and of high quality. Continue to monitor changes for affordability and quality.
- Review hardware requirements necessary to produce the best possible visual and sound for the broadcast. Current equipment is adequate for our needs, but toward the end of the five-year planning cycle, it is expected that there will be changes in technology that would merit review towards upgrading.
- Review ways to enhance the musical portions of the virtual service. There is a need to study the ambient noise in the sanctuary during services so

that congregational responses can be detected and included properly during the broadcast.

- Review ways to use existing or new technology to offer virtual broadcasts of additional church meetings, such as Sunday School, musical programs, etc. either in real-time or archived so they can be watched at a later date.
- Survey members to make sure they have the ability to watch virtual worship services and look for ways to provide the technology if it is not available to them. Consider holding clinics or assembling a team of tech advisors to provide assistance to congregation members who may need help watching broadcasts on their home computers.
- Consider a dedicated social media platform for outreach to younger members within the church community to publicize services, events, opportunities for service, recognize members/committees for their accomplishments and service within the framework of the church.

With gratitude to God and trusting the leadership of the Spirit, we look forward to the future with hope and enthusiasm.

Thom Jennings

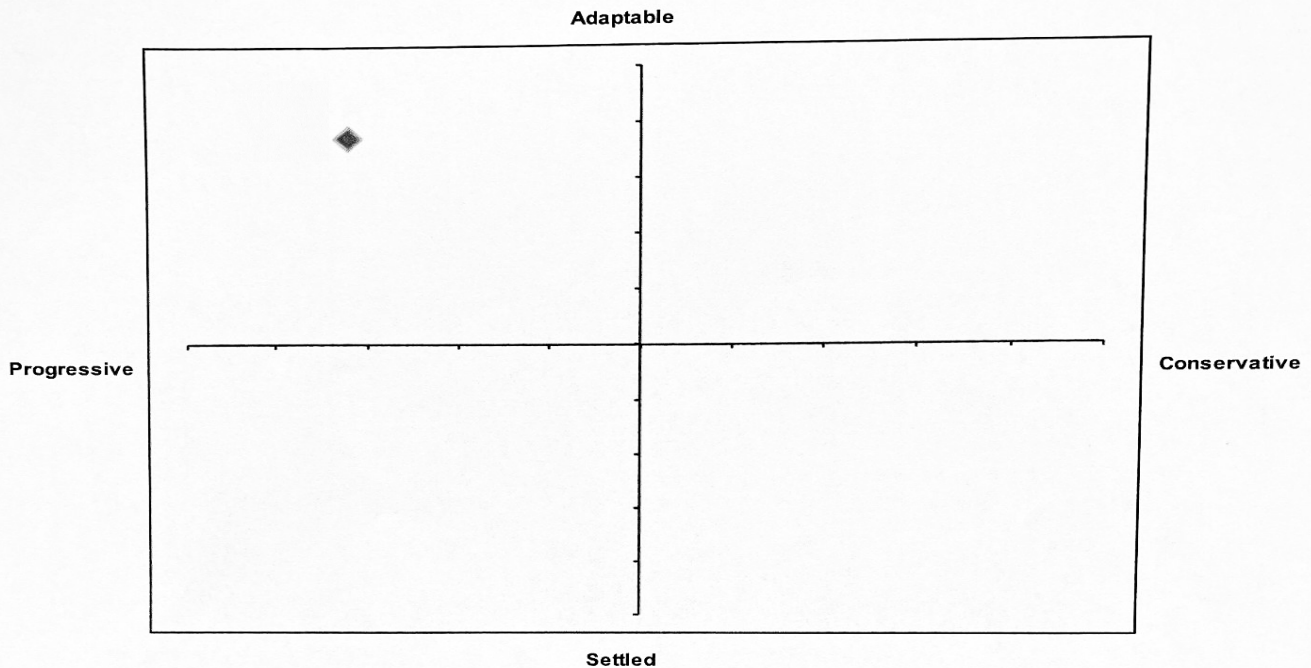
Kristin Siegel

Jim McClary

Sue Morley

Darlene Schneck

Bob Stripling, Chair



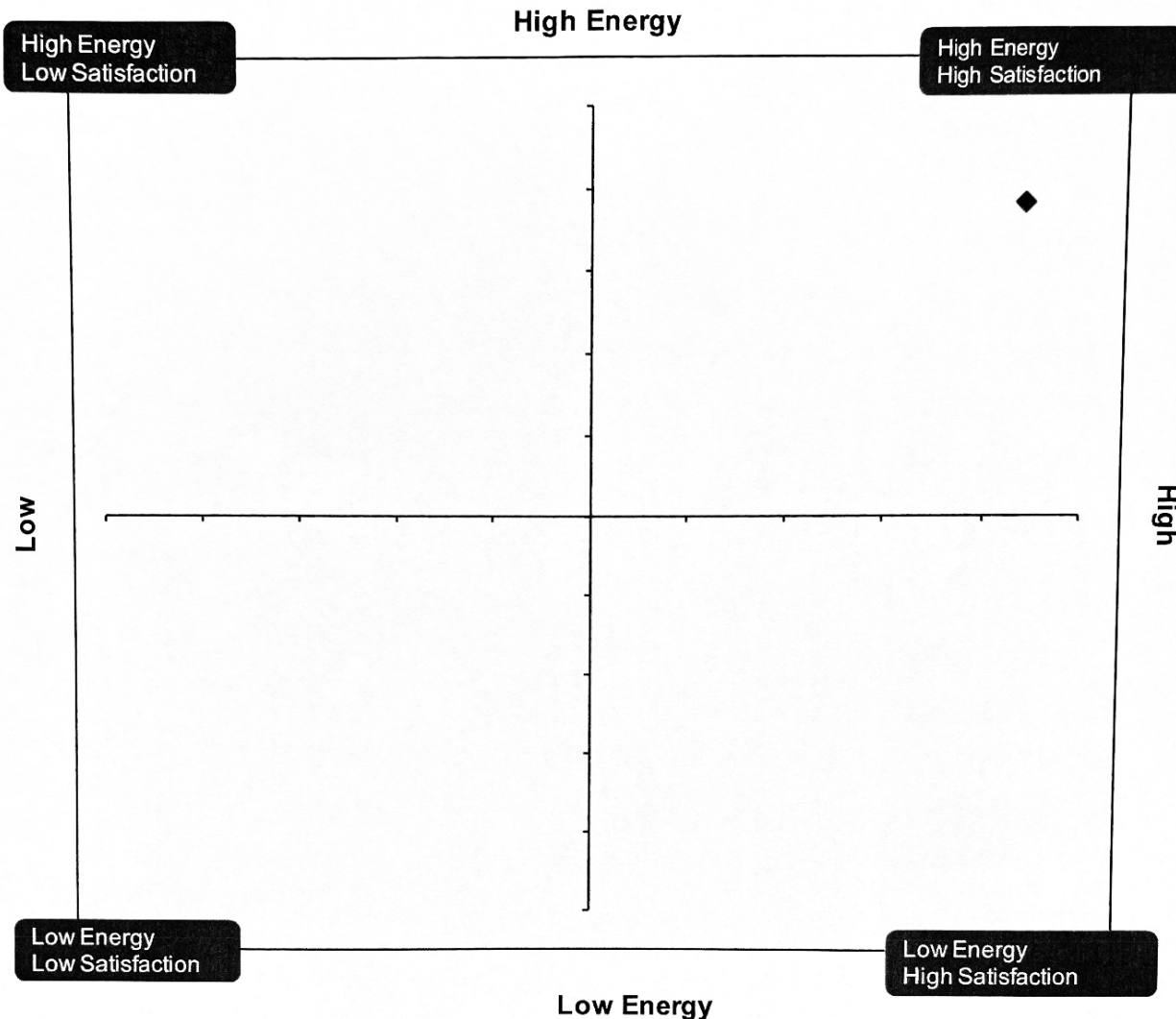
This map indicates the particular style of a church using two characteristics. The first characteristic is whether the church is theologically conservative or progressive. The second characteristic is whether the church is more adaptable or settled in its approach to its life. The combination of these two characteristics produces the four different possibilities for the overall style of a church. These are noted in the four quadrants of the map.

1. **Progressive-Adaptable** churches
2. **Progressive-Settled** churches
3. **Conservative-Adaptable** churches
4. **Conservative-Settled** churches

Each of these quadrants represent core values that need to be clarified relative to theology and style. It can also be helpful to explore whether strengths have been fully developed and to identify opportunities for further development. Leaders can also work to understand how the vulnerabilities inherent in their type can be hampering vitality and growth.

The Energy-Satisfaction Map

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The levels of satisfaction and energy have been found to be reliable indicators of the health and vitality of a church. There are four quadrants on this map.

The **high energy-low satisfaction** quadrant is the chaos quadrant. Churches in this quadrant are often struggling to structure and channel their energy into a direction they feel good about.

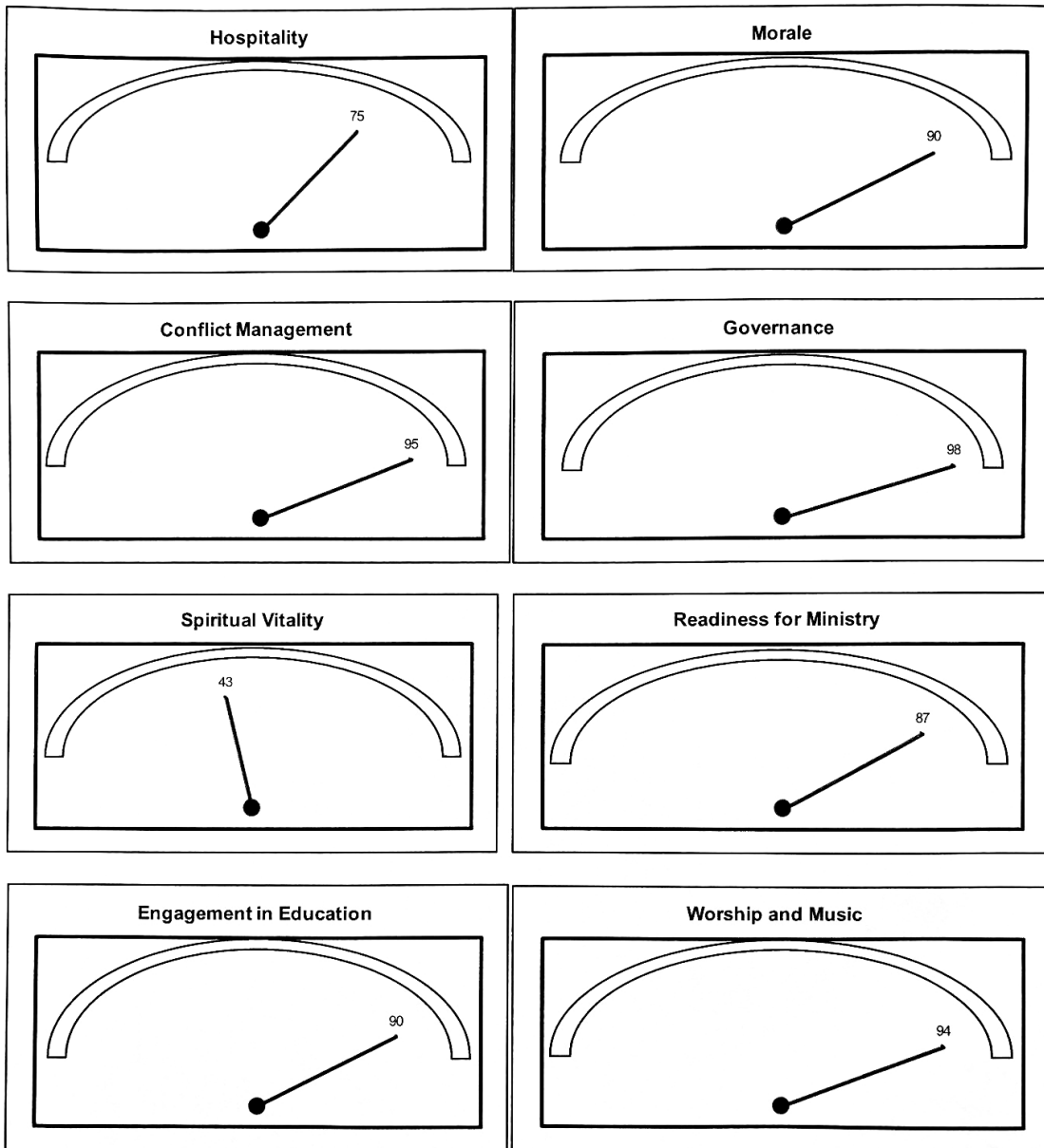
The **low energy-low satisfaction** quadrant is the recovery quadrant. Churches in this quadrant require major changes in order to regain a significant level of vitality and health.

The **low energy-high satisfaction** quadrant is the static quadrant. Churches in this quadrant have normalized a low level of vitality in the church which enables them to be relatively satisfied.

The **high energy-high satisfaction** quadrant is the transformation quadrant. Churches in this quadrant are sources of new meaning and purpose for their members. They may also serve as mentors to other churches.

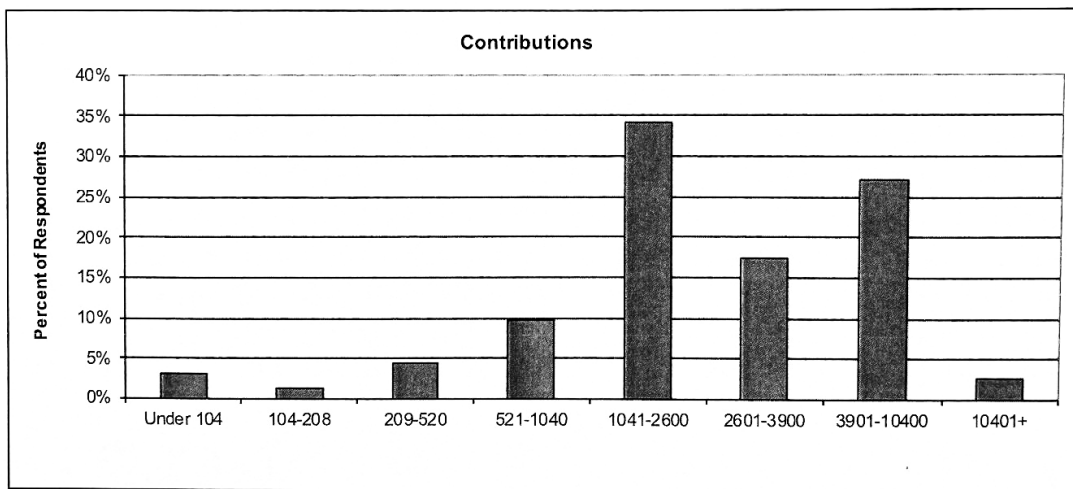
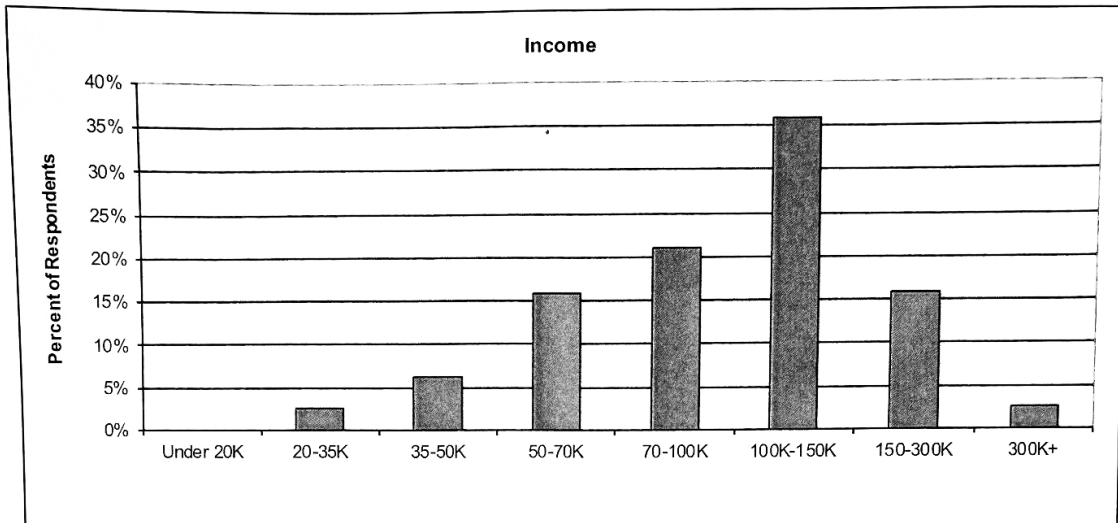
Appendix 2

Performance Dashboard



Appendix 3

Financial Information



Total church income	\$672,317
Contribution per household	\$2,975
Average household income	\$120,395
Average percent of income given	2.47%
Percentile rank	57

Appendix 4

Appendix 5

From: **Nancy Meehan Yao** <assocgp@shenpres.org>
Date: Wed, Mar 9, 2022 at 12:17 PM
Subject: HolyCow! Consulting and Covid data
To: Dan McCoig <dan@fpcwinc.org>, amanda maguire thomas
<amanda@fpcwinc.org>

Dear All-

In the past 2 years, HolyCow! Consulting has continued to receive and analyze data from congregations- either in regular CAT/Conversations assessments, or through specific Covid related assessments (there is both a free, short 4 question survey, and a longer, covid assessment)

You are receiving this because you have used a HolyCow! tool in the past 2 years or so, or have indicated to me an interest in covid and its effects on congregational health.

Here are the results of their analysis, from HolyCow!

COVID UPDATE FOR CAT DATA:

It seems almost impossible that we have been collecting data from congregations during the pandemic for almost 2 years. As we have been watching, data has been slowly shifting in a few areas that I want to share with you all:

1. **Hospitality scores** are lower. When you are looking at the CAT you are interpreting please know that the hospitality scores are lower for churches during COVID. You can share with the congregations you are working with that if they were only being compared to other churches during COVID their scores would be approximately 8% higher in our benchmarking.
2. **Spirituality Vitality** scores are also lower. Again, please share with your congregations that if they were only compared with other churches during COVID their scores would be approximately 10% higher in our benchmarking.
3. **Creating more opportunities to form meaningful relationships** is now very often a third priority for churches who have taken this

assessment during COVID. This is very different for the overall database where that priority is on average the 6th priority.

4. **Friends and Families matter a great deal.** When asked what has helped with their spirituality during this time without exception congregations state that, it is not worship or church work, but rather friends and family.

The thread through all of this is not surprising but is helpful to see and confirm in data. People are longing for and needing connection, both with each other and with God. To me, that is very hopeful news and opens up a lot of opportunities for our congregations.

for more information, go to <https://holycowconsulting.com/>

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