

Fountain Street Church 2017 Strategic Plan



Presented by
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Executive Summary

Background

Fountain Street Church (FSC) is an independent, non-denominational church which is facing, like many other churches, membership and income challenges. These challenges are prompting the creation of several committees, although different in task, pointed toward one purpose – ensure the long-term viability and stability of the church as it realizes its vision of challenging *“individuals to craft their own spiritual journeys and to engage in creative and responsible action in the world.”*

Furthermore, FSC initiated in 2016, a comprehensive strategic planning process intended to:

- Provide a deeper understanding of the Church’s constituency
- Update its vision, mission and programming to reflect that understanding
- Establish core requisites for its search and hiring of new Pastor

Fountain Street Church Request

On February 11, 2017, the FSC Governing Board engaged in a retreat to deepen their working relationships, better understand their organizing structure and begin to align on elements needed to move planning forward including the search for a new senior pastor.

The FSC Governing Board is asking for support in creating and executing a strategic plan that would guide the organization for the next three years. This process would involve the integration and deeper synthesis of:

- Prior planning efforts per *FSC Strategic Planning Design Team Report February 20, 2012* that were not executed
- Data collected in the *Envisioning Committee 2015-2016 Final Report 23 May 2016*
- Year-end data captured in the *Governing Board Annual Reports November 20, 2016*
- Outputs from the *February 11, 2017 Governing Board Retreat*
- As well as any additional effort required to update on who are FSC members and what they may want

Consultants

Richardson-Green Consulting, LLC believes that people matter and are the real reason organizations survive and thrive. Our strength lies in understanding and facilitating behavioral as well as mindset changes necessary for organizational change and growth. Key tools include appreciative inquiry, reflection and user-centric problem resolution.

Process

Due to the complexity of this planning effort and the desire of the FSC Governing Board to expedite the process, Richardson-Green Consulting LLC provided two facilitators – Faye Richardson-Green and Kathy Glynn to engage the FSC Governing Board, appropriate staff and select congregational members in a multi-session, multi-step process to deliver the planned outcomes.

Besides in-session group work, the process included between sessions “homework” for the participants to gain deeper insight into the challenges facing Fountain Street Church and engage as many constituents as possible.

One critical outcome of this process was the distillation of FSC’s vision, mission and core values. The values – *free the mind, grow the soul, change the world* – provide a quick way for FSC to now explain what they represent in the faith community.

Concurrent Internal Work

Concurrent to the engagement of Richardson-Green Consulting LLC, Fountain Street Church worked internally through its Oversight Committee and Senior Pastor Search Committee to align church resources to its budget realities and begin to identify the competencies required of a new senior pastor.

Both committees present complimentary challenges to those faced during this strategic planning process. Questions such as those below continuously surfaced within Governing Board discussions during the strategic planning process:

- What operating model will best meet budget, consolidate the proliferation of siloed committees and fulfill the church’s vision and mission?
- How might FSC offer educational programs that meets current as well as emerging congregant needs?
- Given increased median age of traditional congregants and overall declining worship service and educational program attendance what opportunities exist to develop sustainable church funding?

External Realities

In addition to gaining a deeper understanding of the internal challenges facing Fountain Street Church, the Governing Board needed to understand that its challenges reflect what is happening in the greater context of religion in the U.S. Deepening its understanding of the external landscape will enrich FSC implantation of its strategic action plan.

The Pew Research Center, through its own *2014 Religious Landscape Survey* compilation of research from other sources such as Gallup have concluded that the “US Public (is) Becoming Less Religious,” especially in a growing group of Americans “who say they don’t belong to any organized faith.” This group of religiously unaffiliated are frequently referred to as “nones.” this group – largely made up of Millennials - has increased from 16% of the adult US public in 2007 to 23% in 2014.

Furthermore, per Pew Research:

- 5 million fewer mainline Protestants in 2015 than in 2007; despite overall US population growth
- Mainline Protestant adults have a median age of 52, which is older than any other major religious tradition
- Religiously unaffiliated accounts for 23% of the population
- Self-identify as religious in 2006 (62%), in 2014 (54%)
- Self-identified as spiritual in 2006 (69%), in 2014 (65%)

Additionally, both the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and Catholic Church share concerns about declining church attendance and are undertaking independent studies (Hope College for the CRC) to more deeply understand what is occurring within their respective denominations.

FSC Opportunity

Richardson-Green consultants believe the greatest opportunity for Fountain Street Church is in creating a church experience that attracts, delights and retains local communities of religiously unaffiliated persons and those that self-identify as spiritual but not religious.

Potential sources within the FSC geographic area – Downtown Grand Rapids -include Grand Rapids Community College, Grand Valley State University, Western Michigan University, Cooley Law School, downtown dwellers, and others attracted to the “Cool City” urban landscape.

Summary of Strategic Planning Process

Below are summaries of the goals, methods and outcomes of each session within the greater process employed by Richardson-Green consultants. Each session included Governing Board members as well as the FSC Executive Director and Senior Pastor.

Governance Board Retreat - February 11, 2017

During the retreat, Richardson-Green consultants facilitated activities for participants to deepen relationships and align on strategic planning goals. These goals were used by the consultants as input to the approach, process and timeline for the consulting engagement as well as what should be included in the strategic plan.

- Hopes & Fear Themes
 - Fears focused on
 - Not having enough time
 - Not taking the appropriate actions
 - No change; same results
 - Accountability – will the GB actively work the plan
 - Uncertainty – what does “liberal” / “progressive” church mean today
 - Hopes focused on
 - Developing an actionable plan that creates change
 - Being stronger together; learn and grow together
 - Having a growth mindset
 - Creating sustainable financing and programs
- Strategic Planning Themes
 - Defined direction (process and results)
 - SMART goals
 - Manage through time commitment
 - Diversity of perspective is leveraged (requires willingness to be in discomfort)
 - Bringing in new ideas
 - Accountability and discipline (identify who will do what)
 - Want to get stuff done
 - Monitor and review
 - Learn how to say “no” as well as “yes”
 - Trust staff enough to come up with tactics for how goals will be met

Session 1 - April 17, 2017

The purpose of this session was to align on an opportunity statement. During this session, Richardson-Green consultants facilitated the Governance Board through a series of activities and discussions.

- Consultants shared their impressions of FSC based on the reports they were given to review.
 - Declining membership (since 2010)
 - Making church operations more efficient and effective – especially around communications– has been a theme for several years
 - There are many ways to be involved in church life
 - The average congregant is older (50+) and loyal to FSC

- Consultants wondered: why people leave, what would bring someone to FSC, what are the needs in the community, and what younger people want
- Session participants discussed core beliefs, vision and mission including exploration of alternate mission statements. It was agreed that a sub-group would review and revise the values and mission statements.
- The question was asked, “*What would happen if FSC ceased to exist?*” Three themes emerged from this discussion:
 - People have very personal reasons for being at FSC
 - There is a sense of community separate from spirituality
 - FSC is a place that reflects your voice (progressive)
- Group discussions occurred to create a common list of “knows” as well as a list of “wonders” about FSC to seed research by participants between this and the next session.

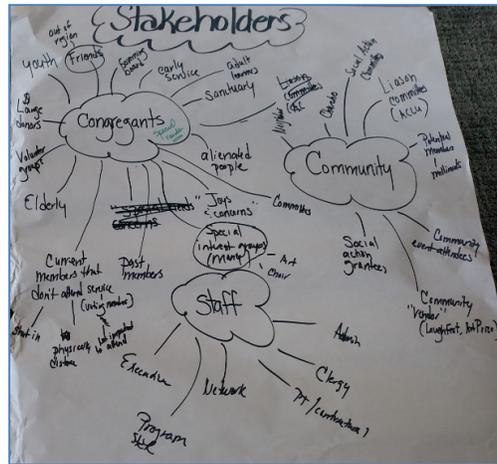
Know	Wonder
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Senior pastor will be leaving in three years ● Most frequent topic in research is funding ● Undergoing global spiritual climate change ● Volunteering is essential to operations ● No volunteer coordinator ● Membership is in decline ● Average congregant is 50+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What barriers exist that exclude people? ● Would “center for spiritual inquiry” attract young? ● How many times are we asking for money (formal / informal)? ● Why do people leave? ● Do children like FSC? ● How long can we be sustainable if nothing changes? ● Do we have proper staffing model?

- Identifying “knows” and “wonders” led to participants brainstorming potential opportunities as problems to be solved. Three opportunities emerged from the brainstorm. The board agreed to reflect between sessions 1 and 2 on what the real opportunity for FSC might be.

Session 2 - May 20, 2017

The purpose of this session was to create a stakeholder map and research plan. During this session, Richardson-Green consultants facilitated the participants through a series of activities and discussions.

- Sub-groups reported on the progress made in updating the values and mission statements. These statements were voted upon and approved during this session.
- The group agreed to pursue three opportunity statements. These statements (along with the “Wonders” created in session 1), served as input to the research plan.
 - How might we identify program priorities and align them to FSC resources?
 - How do we design an operating model that aligns with FSC congregational needs?
 - How might we fulfill our mission and values with priorities that effectively use FSC resources?
- A detailed stakeholder map was created that identified all the groups that have a stake in the long-term success of FSC.



- Research plans were created for each of the opportunity statements. Participants conducted research between sessions 2 and 3.

Session 3 - June 19, 2017

The purpose of this session was to share what was learned during research, analyze and synthesize the research findings and brainstorm potential solutions. During this session, Richardson-Green consultants facilitated the participants through a series of activities and discussions. The content generated in this session was used by the consultants as input for the strategic plan.

- Each of the three opportunity statement teams shared their research via a gallery walk. Research methods included:
 - A survey administered via e-mail to 1,000+ congregants / names in the FSC data base with 133 survey respondents
 - Interviews conducted with church staff
 - Benchmarking of other denomination’s structure
- Using a variety of analysis methods, the three groups identified patterns and themes from their research. The following themes were identified from the research:
 - Silos
 - Roles & Accountability
 - Church Messaging
 - Role Clarity
 - Procedural Standards
 - Financial Sustainability
 - Change is Coming
 - Outreach
 - Utilize people resources that we have
 - Sense of community of shared values
 - People value education
 - Coordination and communication
- From the themes, participants engaged in synthesis by identifying key insights. The following insights emerged from the themes:

- FSC is a haven and a catalyst
- Language is confusing ... we're not all speaking in the same language
- We resist change if we keep doing the same thing (Einstein's definition of insanity)
- We are a community of differences but we're bonded because of that
- We don't have to do more to be better (focus)
- Creating a solid foundation(stabilize)
- There are tensions within and between communities (ying and yang)
- Potential solution ideas were brainstormed from the themes. These ideas were used as input to creating the strategic plan.

Strategic Plan

FSC Vision

We strive to be a vibrant church community that challenges individuals to craft their own spiritual journeys and to engage in creative and responsive action in the world.

FSC Mission Statement

We support the creative tension between intellect and spirit, science and faith, individual and community, tradition and change, challenging us to honor our legacy by embracing the future.

FSC Core Values

We value the spirit of inquiry which respects the religious, humanist, and spiritual teachings from many wisdom traditions; we value the direct experience of the mystery that moves us to engage in the never-ending search for universal truths that *free the mind*.

We value the active practice of love and justice in human relationships which validate the worth and dignity of each human being, inspiring us to deepen our commitment to deeds over creeds, calling us to *grow the soul*.

We value community founded on the purposeful inclusion of all, in the service of others within our church and beyond, connecting and empowering us to *change the world*.

Recommended Strategy

As Richardson-Green consultants engaged with the Fountain Street Governing Board and Staff, we heard the group's passion and commitment to maintaining a place where seekers with a range of needs for faith and/or community could feel at home.

After reviewing available FSC research and conducting external research we, as consultants, began to imagine *a FSC church experience that attracts, delights and retains the religiously unaffiliated and/or those who self-identify as spiritual, but not religious*.

Consequently, **we recommend the FSC Governing Board builds a growth and sustainability strategy that meets the needs of the religiously unaffiliated in alignment with its vision, mission and values. The questions below are designed to assist in the process:**

- What operating / staffing model might best align with FSC resources to ensure most effective church growth and sustainability?
 - What process changes will be needed to support this new / modified structure?
 - What new capabilities and culture changes are needed to ensure this structure will work?
 - What financial resources are/will be required to support a changed model?

- How does FSC attract the religiously unaffiliated as new members while retaining existing ones?
 - Who are the religiously unaffiliated and/or spiritual, but not religious in our area?
 - What existing services and programs might also appeal to these constituents?
 - What new services and programs do we offer to satisfy the needs of these constituents?
 - What services and programs do we stop offering?

- How does FSC Governing Board ensure success and accountability while executing the strategy?

Strategic Action Plan

To build a growth and sustainability strategy that meets the needs of the religiously unaffiliated and those who self-identify as spiritual, but not religious in alignment with FSC vision, mission and values

Objective #1

Refine Operating Model for Most Effective Growth and Sustainability

- GB to commission an ad hoc committee to clarify/define the operating structure. Suggest that the Executive Director and Senior Pastor both report to the Board Chair and that responsibilities be aligned to each. Determine when collaboration is in best interest of FSC.



- GB identify capabilities/competencies required for each leader to execute their duties and provide input to search committee when appropriate. Also, provide professional development where required.
- Realign budget to match redefined model. Establish feedback process to ensure alignment is maintained.
- Establish method to regularly assess church culture to modify as needed to support redefined model.

Objective #2

Attract / Retain Religiously Unaffiliated Members

- GB establishes standing Membership Committee to identify opportunities to delight new and existing members including:
 - Determining annual growth / retention targets based on generational needs / wants
 - Surveying internal and external populations to connect to opportunities
 - Increasing experiences that meet member needs for community engagement (e.g. 150 Anniversary Event, special celebration of specific internal communities)
 - Evaluating impact of outreach and educational programs (suggesting new; sun setting others)

- Collaborate with Business and Pastoral leadership to target external sources of members, establish marketing costs and to avoid internal silos that impede membership growth.

Objective #3

Establish a “Key Indicators Dashboard Accountability System” to Better Manage Resources

- GB Budget committee to establish decision criteria for adding programs, committees and other offering that impact the FSC budget.
 - Identify high priority spending and align budget to those items
 - In collaboration with Membership Committee, consolidate, dissolve and/or reduce activities, committees and programs to eliminate redundancies and drain on financial resources
- Identify, post and review key indicators (e.g. % of members retained, operating \$ spent per member, programs +/- breakeven...) regularly (monthly, quarterly and/or annually).

Implementing the Plan

Now (0-9 months)	Near (9 – 18 months)	Far (1.5 – 3 years)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish committees as suggested to implement growth strategy • Clarify/define operating model • Identify capabilities and competencies required for key leader roles • Identify outreach opportunities to religiously unaffiliated populations within FSC market / geographic areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realign budget to redefined operating model • Identify, post and review key dashboard indicators • Establish method to regularly assess and modify FSC culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate, dissolve and/or reduce program offerings and associated financial resources

Accountability Matrix

RASIC Chart

Responsible: The person responsible for this task. Only one person can be responsible

Approve: The person(s) giving approval this task

Support: The person(s) giving support for the completion of this task

Inform: The person(s) to be informed about this task

Consult: The person(s) who can act as expert(s) regarding the task

Objective #1 Refine Operating Model for Most Effective Growth and Sustainability Tasks Required to Complete Objective	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
GB to commission an ad hoc committee to clarify/define the operating structure.					
GB identify capabilities/competencies required for each leader to execute their duties and provide input to search committee when appropriate. Also, provide professional development where required.					
Realign budget to match redefined model. Establish feedback process to ensure alignment is maintained.					
Establish method to regularly assess church culture to modify as needed to support redefined model.					

Objective #2 Attract / Retain Religiously Unaffiliated Members Tasks Required to Complete Objective	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
GB establishes standing Membership Committee to identify opportunities to delight new and existing members including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining annual growth / retention targets based on generational needs / wants • Surveying internal and external populations to connect to opportunities • Increasing experiences that meet member needs for community engagement (e.g. 150 Anniversary Event, special celebration of specific internal communities) • Evaluating impact of outreach and educational programs (suggesting new; sun setting others) 					
Collaborate with Business and Pastoral leadership to target external sources of members, establish marketing costs and to avoid internal silos that impede membership growth.					

Objective #3 Establish a “Key Indicators Dashboard Accountability System” to Better Manage FSC Resources Tasks Required to Complete Objective	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
GB Budget committee to establish decision criteria for adding programs, committees and other offering that impact the FSC budget. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify high priority spending and align budget to those items • In collaboration with Membership Committee, consolidate, dissolve and/or reduce activities, committees and programs to eliminate redundancies and drain on financial resources 					
Identify, post and review key indicators (e.g. % of members retained, operating \$ spent per member, programs +/- breakeven...) regularly (monthly, quarterly and/or annually).					

Additional Recommendations

- Include a standing agenda at governance board meetings to monitor accountability matrices.
- Strategic choices will need to be made regarding program and funding for FSC to remain viable. Governance Board should adopt a decision-making model to aid in these choices.
- Define a Governance Board process to review policies and procedures on an annual basis.
- Create an expectation of collaboration within staff and amongst committee leadership.
- Share the planning process and strategic plan with congregation. Explain how plan will be implemented and why funding and programming choices are necessary.
- Become research centric. Use it to understand existing and emerging constituencies. Be curious!
 - What internal barriers exist that exclude people?
 - How does FSC energize its brand in the greater Grand Rapids community?
 - How does FSC strengthen its connection to its various generations, especially millennials?
 - Why do people leave FSC?
 - What would bring someone to Fountain Street Church?
 - What would happen if Fountain Street Church ceased to exist?

And, finally...Richardson-Green Consultants LLC appreciates the opportunity to work with the Fountain Street Church Governing Board and senior staff. We hope that the process and methods used helped you engage in critical discussions, encouraged collaboration and pushed critical thinking in ways that have added value to the FSC community.

If there are any future ways that we can serve you, please let us know.

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