

First Church of Crystal Lake Elgin District

Our “One Matters” Story May 2018

First United Methodist Church of Crystal Lake celebrated its 175th Anniversary in 2014, but was seeking to connect faith in Jesus with the contemporary needs of the community in which the congregation is located. The *Congregational Assessment Tool* (CAT) was utilized in early 2015 in consultation with the Samaritan Center for Congregations in order to help evaluate the health of the church.



The evaluation outcome indicated that there was a significant disconnect between the congregation and its surrounding community. Even more surprising, the congregation itself had become characterized, according to the CAT tool, as a “low energy/low satisfaction” church. We were dissatisfied with our situation but had little energy to do anything about it!

What followed in 2015 to the present time has been a strategic congregational redevelopment effort that has included re-organizing the local church decision-making structure, attending to major items of deferred maintenance (new boilers, new roof, new carpeting, upgrading information technology, adding ADA compliant electric door openers), and implementing a fresh alignment of mission, vision, values, use of time, communications, leadership roles, staff positions, and financial resources.

This re-connecting of the congregation's abiding mission with its contemporary community has led to a number of new ministry initiatives, including:

Evangelism

- The Alpha Course offered every year in the fall for those who are exploring Christian faith for the first time or the first time in a long time.

- A homegrown “Field Guide” for the path of Christian faith development that helps people through the seasons of being an Explorer, a Believer, a Follower, and a Leader.
- Financial Peace University, parenting courses, and a range of Bible study and small groups to assist growing faith.

Welcoming the Children and Families

- Re-establishing year-round Sunday morning Children’s Ministry.
- Re-organizing our preschool weekday ministry to achieve “Silver Status” with the *Excelerate Illinois* program to raise the level of early childhood education across Illinois.
- Outreach events for children including "Trunk or Treat", "Santa’s Wonderland", the "Eggstravaganza", and Summer Science Camps
- Established an annual summer weekend multi-generational camp for the church family and friends.

Serving Families with Special Needs

- Launching “Buddy Break”, a monthly respite ministry for families whose children have special needs. We currently have over 60 trained and screened “Buddies” who volunteer.
- Including specific accommodation for children with special needs in Vacation Bible School.

Sex/Human-Trafficking

- Partnering with *Refuge for Women*, a national ministry of after-care for women being rescued from sex-trafficking, First Church helps provide a local residential home for six women, ongoing financial support, and volunteer assistance.

Feeding the Hungry

- Every Friday First Church staffs a food distribution in cooperation with the Northern Illinois Food Bank and four local Jewel Grocery stores that benefits an average of 90 people each week.
- For eight months of the year we fund a Mobile Food Pantry from Northern Illinois Food Bank that, on average, benefits 300 adults and children. A volunteer team of 35 works together to help this happen.

Affordable Housing

- The UMM group has committed to building five homes in five years in partnership with Appalachian Service Project. The first home has been completed. The second home will begin in September.

- First Church has been selected by Habitat for Humanity (Fox Valley North) as the anchor faith community to spearhead the development of a nine-home “subdivision” in Crystal Lake with three homes to be built each year for three years beginning this fall (2018).

Immigration

- First Church has an active team, under the leadership of Associate Pastor Cesar Hernandez, who supports a Justice for Our Neighbors free legal assistance clinic on a bi-monthly basis in connection with JFON/NIC.

Public Schools

- In collaboration with other congregations and the District 47 school district, First Church has “adopted” Coventry Elementary School to provide food assistance (78% of the children are on free or reduced lunch support), clothing as seasons change, Christmas gifts for families, and trained tutors. Currently we have 9 tutors assigned and a goal of 20 by next September.
- Annually we offer the Advocate Children’s Hospital Mobile Medical Clinic for school physical exams and vaccinations

Mental Health

- First Church partners with the Mental Health Board of McHenry County in providing Mental Health First Aid training, QPR Suicide Prevention Training, and provides volunteer leadership to the McHenry County Suicide Prevention Task Force.

Congregational Care

- Stephen Ministry has been launched with nearly 40 trained Stephen Ministers used for congregational care.
- GriefShare, a ministry of bereavement care, is offered three times each year.
- A Faith Community Nurse has been added to the staff of the church to care for emerging and chronic health needs, particularly among our senior adult population.

These initiatives have helped moved First United Methodist Church out of the “low satisfaction/low energy” quadrant to regain its footing as an engaged and energetic community of faith. In addition, the congregation has paid apportionments at 100% and

raised an additional \$80,000 - \$95,000 to be given away *each year* through its Faith Promise missions emphasis.

A recent study of First Church finances undertaken by Horizon Stewardship Services found that while average worship attendance has *decreased*, the financial engagement of the individuals and households of the congregations has *increased* from being below the "United Methodist average" to well above the denominational average. At First Church in the past several years, giving overall has increased by almost 22%, the giving per worshipper has grown by 58%, and the number of giving units has increase by 15%.

The outcome of all of this is not only greater impact on the community, but new access opportunities for individuals.

One of the younger, newcomer adults expressed his reason for becoming part of First Church.

"We have a lot of choices for our time, attention, and commitment. These days it is it counter-cultural as a young adult to have anything to do with a church. But First Church has impact and allows me to be part of something significant. That's why I'm here."

Another recent arrival, who moved to the area to be near grandchildren, said, "We've been looking for a church that doesn't just talk about faith, but actually does something. We've found that here at First Church."

The vision statement of First Church is "to bless our community and world with passionate followers of Jesus, the strategic and generous sharing of our resources, and an invitation to follow Jesus." One by one, whether within the congregation or the community we serve, we welcome others to a partnership for the healing of the world in Jesus' name. We refuse to settle for anything less.

Prepared by Pastor Scott Field