

Northern Illinois Conference 2019 One Matters Award

Chicago: First (Temple) (Chicago Southern District)



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple has been on a strategic journey over the last four years to determine what it means to be a 21st century church thriving in an uncertain future. Given the major shifts in society, the nation, the world, and the church, this is a critical initiative.

In 2014, shortly after a pastoral transition, the church completed a formal survey with the Samaritan Center for Congregations to assess congregational life while identifying key



preferences. They discovered that they were not only widely racially and culturally diverse, but also extremely diverse in their theological understandings. Layered upon this was the highly siloed nature of their ministry areas.

In 2015 and 2016, two rounds of 24-week Disciple Fast Track Bible study seminars were offered. This included several other short-term studies to

help begin addressing some of the discipleship growth opportunities and challenges identified above.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, the church developed value and vision statements that led to the development of new branding and a new motto, affirmation of its mission, and statement of welcome and inclusion.

On March 3, 2018, the Church Council convened a special strategic planning leadership retreat to collaborate and define the strategic priorities. The retreat led to the implementation of action plans necessary to grow the church's impact spiritually, numerically, and financially. Recommendations from the retreat, and subsequent conversations across the congregation, have led to our strategic effort: **G.R.O.W "Go Reach Others With Christ's Love"** and a **Strategic Ministry Action Plan (MAP)** that is propelling the congregation forward in hope.

The actions plans led to the following changes:

- Conducting baptism classes in groups, which fosters connections between young families and with the pastors.

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- Presenting a Baptismal Quilt with embroidered church branding to keep families mindful of the church's commitment to their child.
- Instituting a children's moment with a targeted message during worship services, which allows children to hear an age-appropriate message from the liturgical passage of the day.
- Recommitting energy and time to spiritual growth of young people; as a result, eight youth were confirmed in October 2018.
- Creating a semi-monthly youth service that meets during 11:00am worship to address the geographical challenges of planning regular youth group meetings. This service gives youth the opportunity to worship together in a more contemporary style while still being able to travel with their parents to church. The long-term hope is to create a student-led service where the youth find ways to serve both on Youth Sundays as well as during the regular Sunday service.
- Instituting greeters for Sunday morning worship services, a welcome Kiosk, refreshed bulletin boards, and new promotional materials to enhance our hospitality.
- Developing a more vibrant online presence to demonstrate that the church is alive and active through:
 - Hosting a list of all events taking place at the church, both church and outside group events, which shows visitors what the church is doing and how the church supports the community.
 - Livestreaming the 11 am service for people to hear music of faith and the sermon when they cannot be physically present.
 - Posting mini devotionals and prayers that connect to a current event or the liturgical season.
 - Posting a mid-week Sunday sermon preview with details about the sermon and the scripture passage used.
- Establishing a certified Stephen Ministries program. Currently there are ten trained Stephen Ministers acting as Christian caregivers to members and friends of the congregation experiencing extraordinary life events. All volunteers make a two-year commitment for a weekly one-hour visit with their assigned people.
- Developing a Care and Connection Team, which facilitates the signing and distribution of over 800 personalized birthday cards with artwork created by church's youth and children.
- Instituting a new Temple Connection Team, which hosts quarterly social events for members celebrating birthdays, with the opportunity to learn more about the wide range of volunteer outreach ministries at the church and connect with other members on the journey.

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