

Executive Summary of FPUPC's Congregational Assessment

Overview:

The 114 respondents to our congregational survey have underscored significant information about our church. Freedom Plains United has a high degree of satisfaction, ranking in the 80% against other mainline congregations in the United States. Ninety-two percent of respondents feel positive about our worship services and that they are preparing them to live a Christian life and make a difference in the World. We are a “destination” church with people traveling on average significantly further than most other churches to attend worship. We have a low degree of conflict, with high energy and flexibility which are considered important for a congregation to have the potential to grow. Our survey responses also indicate that we are an older congregation.

Climate:

Freedom Plains United has a climate described as Transformational. This climate is due to above average satisfaction with how things are going and above average morale, both of which create a relatively high level of vitality in our congregation. This level of vitality offers the church a number of strategic options including growth and expansion of ministry. These outcomes are not guaranteed, but are real possibilities if the church continues to take risks and adopts the appropriate strategies.

Culture:

FPUPC has a culture describe as Magi. The image of Magi comes from the idea of being on a journey, seeking greater understanding and new experiences of the divine as well as more faithful ways to be God's people in this time and place. In this culture, members of the church are likely to embrace changes from time to time, either because they enjoy variety or they know that change is necessary to reach a changing society. On average, the church is theologically more progressive. The combination of an adaptable approach to change and a more progressive theological perspective gives the church potential strengths that include curiosity, advocacy, and inclusiveness. On the other hand, partially due to inclusivity, the church may find it difficult to develop a clear and compelling vision for its future, and may rely too heavily upon reason to generate enthusiasm. We also may have difficulty talking about our faith, which is important for many reasons, not the least of which being that 87% of new members in churches came to the church because they were invited by friends or acquaintances.

Some Details:

- We identified our top priorities to be:
 - ⊖ 1st priority - *Making necessary changes to attract families with children and youth*
 - 2nd priority - *Developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church*

These priorities are generally the top priorities for most churches. What makes our congregation different from many others is that we are in a position to do something about it, if we so choose.

- The church scored higher than average on:
 - “the desire to adopt the opportunities provided by the church making them more accessible given the pace and schedule of my life”
 - “strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people with special needs”.

These may be areas where we need to spend some energy:

- Building relationships between parishioner is a priority for us and increased fellowship opportunities is something to consider, especially post Covid.
- While transparency and open decision making got high satisfaction scores, the way we make decisions and share them with the congregation are very important to our membership, so it is an area to pay attention to.
- Another area to pay attention to is that we lean towards being a Pastor Centered church, which means we have a deep dependence on our pastoral staff to get things done in the life of the church, and a deep dependence on them in fulfilling the qualities and duties in our church that lead to high satisfaction. We should be concerned about burn out and, even if our pastors wait to leave in retiring in a decade or more, it is not too early to start thinking about transitions.
- We are also a congregation that values education and learning opportunities. We are encouraged to think about increasing the offering of educational opportunities and are challenged to find different times that work for our busy parishioners. Members have higher than average education levels (88th percentile).
- Worship is very important to our congregation and is central to our high overall satisfaction score. Our worship quality is perceived as high and the congregation would do well to work hard to continue a high quality worship service, especially in this time of transition in our music program.
- We are a destination church. (74% of our members travel more than 5 miles to church with 24% traveling over 10 miles) That means that parishioners drive by many other churches to arrive at Freedom Plains United and they do it for some of the reasons highlighted in our survey results.
- The three primary characteristics of growing and vital congregations are high quality worship, flexibility and external focus. We have all three, but only with wisdom, risk and the energy of the congregation will we be able to capitalize on our position.