



## FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, SARASOTA

# MISSION STUDY REPORT

### AUGUST 24, 2021

In **LISTENING TO EACH OTHER**, the Mission Study Team heard from more than 170 people in small and large groups, in person and via Zoom, and received written comments from FPC members and staff. All brought their personal perspectives of what has occurred in the last months in First Presbyterian, what their hopes are for our future, and consequently for the pastor who will be called to join us in this journey together. Additionally, leaders from Sarasota civic and social service organizations agreed to share their thoughts about the role of First Presbyterian Church in the Sarasota community, and data from MissionInsite.com was considered.



By **LISTENING FOR GOD**, the Mission Study Team created this report which represents, as faithfully as possible, those shared views. In this document we offer an open, hopeful, and honest presentation of the history and the future ministry and mission of First Presbyterian Church in Sarasota.

### I. WHAT ATTRACTED US TO FPC and WHAT KEEPS US COMING BACK?

To open our listening sessions and provide participants a chance to introduce themselves, we began every meeting with the question, “What attracted you to First Presbyterian Church?” The results fell into three main categories.

#### **People**

The welcoming nature of the congregation was one of the important factors that attracted and kept people coming back to FPC. Some members who attended the NewSong fellowship noted how they met and were attracted to the church via the preschool. Older congregants noted how wonderful it was to see young people involved in the church. The diversity within the congregation made it welcoming to people of many backgrounds, ages, and stages of life.

While we are a largely white, upper-middle-class congregation, that is not our whole story. Our congregants range in age from newborn to 100+. Some watch Fox News, some watch MSNBC. Some like rock, some like Bach. Together, we are the body of Christ. We are stretching to grow in our understanding, even as we acknowledge that we do this work at different paces. In 2018, two of our members, one black and one white, began an interracial book group. Three years

later there are eight groups with 85 members.

Also in 2018, our beloved Director of Music Ministries and Congregational Care shared with us that he is gay. He has felt embraced and affirmed by the congregation as he has made that journey, and his sensitivity is allowing many of us to grow in empathy and awareness. The climate of acceptance has given LGBTQ youth confidence and permission to be active leaders in worship and service.

### **Mission and Ministry**

The Church of Jesus Christ cannot help but be involved in the world. Many members first learned about First Presbyterian through their involvement in the community and either met FPC members out in the community or heard of the church's involvement from others. Programs like Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity (SURE), Caritas, Family Promise, Manasota Interracial Book Club, Brentwood Elementary School Partnership, Beth-El Farmworker Ministry, Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), and our preschool are among the ministries that draw us out into the



community. An annual interfaith service, held in our sanctuary, is treasured both by this congregation and the larger Sarasota community.

### **Quality of the Ministerial Staff**

The quality of preaching has attracted many worshipers to FPC, as has the pastoral care that new and visiting worshipers have experienced. Many shared how warmly they were greeted by congregants and pastors. Over the decades, individual ministers have touched congregants' lives at critical moments early in their visits to our church. These made lasting impressions.

In the listening sessions, the follow-up question was, "What keeps you coming back to First Presbyterian Church?"



The initial reasons for being attracted to FPC were also reflected in the reasons people have remained at the church. This is despite the difficulties of the last year during which the departure of both pastors coincided almost precisely with a shutdown caused by the global pandemic. The isolation caused by COVID prevented the congregation from gathering. What held people together and has given them a willingness to see the search process through has been the connection of worshipers to each other. Many spoke of the enduring relationships and

connections to other members as the primary reason they choose to remain.



Existing ministries pivoted to respond to challenges presented by the pandemic and new ministries formed. Our members were no longer permitted to host events or volunteer at the Title One elementary school with which we partner, but we could still deliver box lunches, hold supply drives, sponsor classrooms, and be sure there were ample gift cards at Christmas.

In the early days of the pandemic, the church committed to becoming a weekly distribution point for our local All Faiths Food Bank. Every Thursday members greet and distribute food boxes to local residents who face food insecurity. It has proven to be a lifeline not only for neighbors in need, but also for our own members. It is the church being the Church.



Another outreach ministry that is valued by FPC is the Pastoral Development Seminar. During its seven years, more than 40 young pastors have gathered in Sarasota to develop their talents and skills. The pastor cohort then joins with the congregation and community for a Faith Focus Weekend to deepen their faith as they share time with a distinguished guest speaker.

**There are excellent education programs involving an insightful and spiritual level of conversation.**

FPC has a host of opportunities for service and ministry, both internal and external to the church. The worship services, music, choir, and bells are of high quality and are deeply spiritual.

**Youth Sunday is looked upon as a deeply meaningful rite of passage.**

The NewSong service gives many a different kind of worship experience and a chance to participate less formally from the traditional service. There are excellent education programs involving an insightful and spiritual level of conversation. Younger families and many youth expressed the importance of their involvement at various times in the church calendar.

Youth Sunday is looked upon as a deeply meaningful rite of passage. Having a venue for worship which allowed children to participate in an atmosphere that was not formal or that did not require them to be completely still was a wonderful way for young families to worship and share their lives together.

Caring for members' physical and emotional needs are important ministries for the congregation of First Presbyterian Church. Each Tuesday our Faith Community Nurse, Cheryl Track, facilitates



a “Care Team” meeting. Two retired pastors and our current pastoral care staff join Cheryl to review ongoing needs within the congregation and share assignments in an effort to ensure that members are receiving appropriate assistance.

Additionally, there is a dedicated Stephen Ministry team. It has proven to be a help for many members experiencing long-term difficulties and provides them with caring and confidential support in partnership with the care team.

**Transitional Pastor Margaret LaMotte Torrence has brought peace and healing to our community during this difficult year.**

**Sermons consistently communicate a depth of intelligence, craft, and spirituality.**

Preaching is an important aspect of what brought people back. Sermons consistently communicate a depth of intelligence, craft, and spirituality. Congregants are challenged to reflect upon their lives and are encouraged to come closer to a Christ-filled life. The excellent preaching has been, and continues to be, a chief quality that members of FPC have grown to expect.

In some cases, the ministers introduced the church to new ways of caring for the community. Associate Pastor Clay Thomas involved the congregation in social justice ministry. Pastor Glen Bell instituted annual Pastoral Development Seminars. Associate Pastor Kelly Fitzgerald was in touch with the needs of families involved in the preschool and made them feel that there was a place for these young parents. The music ministries, led by Steven Phillips and others who came before him, have played an important role in making FPC a place of beauty, joy, and worship. Transitional Pastor Margaret LaMotte Torrence has brought peace and healing to our community during this difficult year.



Through her sermons and those of ministers from the past, we have been given words of hope, a commitment to the wisdom of scripture, and a tie to the confessions of our Christian heritage. These continue to be qualities that have held this church together over the years.

## **II. WHERE IS GOD LEADING US?**

After a scripture reading of Matthew 5:13-16 in which Jesus uses the metaphors of salt and light, the Mission Study Team meetings asked attendees to discuss what these teach us and how we are instructed to be faithful to this teaching. There were many good points about salt and light along with many examples of the kinds of ministries in which we need to be involved.

### **The Wisdom of the Salt and Light**

Participants most often pointed out how salt preserves food and adds to its savor. Salt also promotes healing; sometimes it stings. Even small amounts cause powerful effects. Salt brings out the good characteristics that are already there. Being used to preserve food was also important, and once again, use of a relatively small amount is all that is required to produce the desired effect.

The same points can be made for the use of a light which at the time would have been a candle or an oil lamp. It again is influential but does not have to be a giant fire to be effective.

It was noted that many churches in our culture have found it important to be large and have huge facilities and programs which overwhelm the congregants with all-inclusive activities and services intended to bring in large numbers of people. That is something quite different from the wisdom of this teaching and a lesson for FPC as we move forward.

### **The Lesson of Salt and Light in Practice**

Going forward, members suggested we continue to evaluate the resources we have and the needs of the community. We do not want to be just carrying out programs as we have done for years, feeling like these must be maintained at all costs.

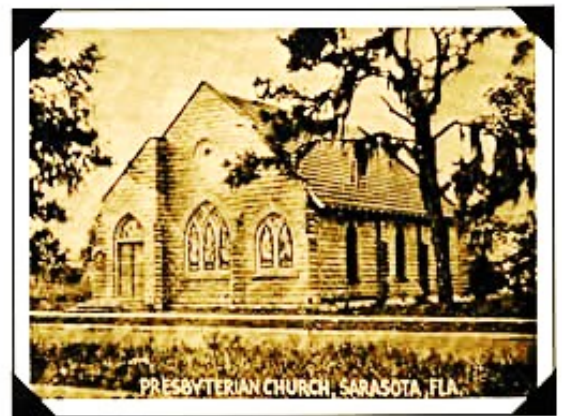
Being salt and light means being effective with our talents and resources to meet real needs. The needs of our community are also changing and will require reevaluation as to what is needed and how we can effectively meet those needs. Many participants were introduced to other members of the church who are currently involved in outreach ministries and were touched by the passion with



which members are committed in the missions.

Congregants noted that there are needs that currently may not be fully addressed. We have ample, flexible facilities. FPC currently offers the use of our campus as a venue for programs like AA, music groups, choirs, and the arts community. There may be other groups that could benefit from the church's hospitality—the LGBTQ+ community was mentioned as one example. We have a congregation that cares and in the coming years will need to be guided to wisely use our facilities so we do not lose our saltiness or have our light dimmed. Finding the right minister, whose wisdom and experience will guide us to use the talents of the church, will be important.

### **III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, SARASOTA**



### **Significant Events in Our History**

First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota was founded in 1906. The first sanctuary was built in 1908 on Orange Avenue a block south of Ringling Boulevard. We moved to our Oak Street location in 1928. In 1973 the Session voted to limit membership to 1500 members because of site constraints and affirmed our identity as a downtown church. Our current site has seen many building transformations and upgrades in

the last century, the most recent during the past five years, in which the sanctuary was renovated, the organ rebuilt, and the infrastructure refreshed.



Christian education has played an important role in the growth of our congregation. In fact, FPC began as a Sunday School, meeting in the homes of Presbyterian pioneers in Sarasota. From early in our history, we have employed trained Christian educators to provide professionally designed programs for adults, youth, and children.

In 1947 we began a week-day kindergarten, the fore-runner of our current preschool, now known as the best preschool in Sarasota. We also provide facilities for the pre-Head Start program in a house on the edge of our property (the Dalbeck House). The Reverend John Cairns instituted the Academy for Christian Living as an adult education program at FPC, with quality short-term classes for adults. Our church library has a surprisingly large collection of Bible commentaries and other resources for adults and children to grow in the faith.

Music has always played an important role in the life of FPC, and this continues to be true under the leadership of Steven Phillips, a classically trained organist and choir director who is also a talented jazz musician. He has instituted the Oak Street Stage as a venue for musical outreach to the Sarasota arts community and local

musicians who enrich our worship experiences. Sarasota music groups rehearse and perform in our sanctuary, and the local chapter of the American Guild of Organists has provided concerts on our newly rebuilt organ.



The inauguration of the NewSong worship service, featuring contemporary music in the Fellowship Hall, provides an informal worship experience attractive to all ages but especially to families of young children.



Throughout our history there has been an emphasis on mission and outreach, with the congregation enthusiastically supporting local missions as well as missions of the presbytery. From neighborhood Sunday Schools to week-day kindergarten, to feeding the hungry in neighboring Payne Park during the Great Depression, to ministry to the Air Force



base located at the Sarasota Airport during WWII, to hospitality to international students through Cedarkirk Camp and Conference, to rebuilding in New Orleans following hurricanes, FPC has been and continues to be a leader in mission outreach.

**“ . . . in 75 years, the church has had only six senior ministers, an unusual longevity record for pastorates.”**

This congregation has given birth to seven other churches in the area, including one Mennonite church. The most recent addition was ten years ago when Peace Presbyterian Church in Lakewood Ranch was formed. We could be called the Mother Church of the Sarasota/ Bradenton area.

A quote from the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary history of First Presbyterian has this interesting bit of information:

*“ . . . in 75 years, the church has had only six senior ministers, an unusual longevity record for pastorates. The church has been blessed with effective, loving, and beloved ministers.”*

*“Session minutes reveal only two instances in which church members and ministers have been in serious disagreement. The first instance involved a minister who took a three-week vacation ‘without notifying the session or any member.’ The minister was already in the process of departing and the only after-effect was that a street named for him was renamed for his successor.”*

*“The second instance was more serious for it involved a dispute over church doctrine. The situation deteriorated to the extent that it led to the minister’s resignation, to the consternation of most church*

*members who were either unaware of or indifferent to the situation. Presbytery was aware of the problem and exercised its power, without dictation, in guiding the pulpit committee to call a minister who would heal wounds. Few members were lost or even disturbed by this incident.”*

### More Recent History

During our more recent history, the congregation experienced conflict with pastors and the presbytery on two occasions.

In 1994, the pastor and the session became at odds with one another when the pastor’s authoritarian leadership style would not allow for the collaboration and sharing of church governance with the session as defined in *The Book of Order*. When the pastor and session could not agree on these leadership roles, the session called for the resignation of the pastor, which was met with resistance from the presbytery. The relationship between the pastor and the congregation was ultimately dissolved.

In March of 2020, a conflict of leadership styles between the pastor and associate pastor led both to abruptly resign just before the church had to shut down because of COVID restrictions. While our pastor served the congregation with many gifts, his interactions with staff and church leaders behind the scenes created an unsupportive environment, leading to the resignation of several staff members and church volunteers over his eight-year tenure. Our associate pastor had many creative gifts but sometimes worked alone without the knowledge or support of either lay or pastoral leadership.

Due to pandemic complications, a congregational meeting to act on their resignations and to consider severance

was not held until May 31, 2020. Since we could not gather in person the meeting was held by Zoom. The motion to accept the resignation of the senior pastor carried 186-4. The motion to accept the resignation of the associate pastor was rejected 182-14. (Her call ultimately was dissolved by the presbytery.)

A gifted bridge pastor, Kathi Wiggins, served the congregation until a transitional pastor could be found.

In June of 2020, the presbytery installed an Administrative Commission (AC) with authority over staff and personnel matters. At the same time, the presbytery gave the AC the authority, "if deemed appropriate, to establish the office of Designated Associate Pastor for Family Ministry, with the Rev. Kelly Fitzgerald having the opportunity to apply for the position."

Though well-intended, that Administrative Commission struggled to work collaboratively with the session and to make consistent decisions.

- On September 20, 2020, a Designated Associate Pastor Nominating Committee (DAPNC) was elected by the congregation.
- On January 14, 2021, the AC announced the dissolution of that DAPNC.
- After determining that dissolving the DAPNC was not within the Administrative Commission's purview, the DAPNC was allowed to continue its work.
- At the request of the session, on January 31, 2021, the AC, session, and DAPNC held a meeting to talk through concerns. At the end of that meeting, all parties present agreed that the DAPNC would continue its work.

- On February 17, 2021, the church was informed that the AC and COM had suspended the search process of the DAPNC until a called senior pastor is installed.

The presbytery met for its stated meeting on February 25, 2021. Acknowledging that the relationship between the Administrative Commission and congregation had deteriorated, the presbytery expressed confidence in the church's leadership to address remaining challenges and dissolved the AC.

Since that time, representatives of the presbytery have made themselves available for conversation with the session and Mission Study Team. It will take time and commitment on all sides to restore a trusting and vital relationship.

For now, our associate pastor position remains vacant, but we have secured a gracious and gifted part-time colleague to join the efforts of other staff members in providing vital ministry to our children and youth.

We are committed to continuing to learn from the whole of our history, both the passages when we have felt clearly led by the Holy Spirit and the passages when we have struggled to see the path ahead.

Had the session been more aware of the difficult atmosphere created by unrealistic expectations and lack of support for the staff, they might have intervened in a way that would have made for learning and reconciliation on all sides. Therefore, the session is committed to being more engaged and aware going forward. A session retreat in early 2022 will consider guidance offered by scripture and our polity. Our Personnel Committee is strengthening its liaison relationships with staff members and instituting more thorough review processes. We are



committing to greater transparency at all levels of the church's life.

### **Our Relationship with Peace River Presbytery**

Peace River Presbytery and First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota have enjoyed a rich and productive relationship through the years. FPC leaders shared their gifts while serving as moderators, treasurers, trustees, chairs, staff, and members of many committees.

Our members are involved with work at Beth-El and Immokalee Farmworker Ministries. People of all ages from the congregation enjoy spending time at Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center and have benefitted from the traveling Vacation Bible School offered by Cedarkirk for several summers.

However, many in the congregation feel that more recent decisions by Peace River Presbytery were made without consideration for or acknowledgement of the congregation's concerns and desires. Many people feel anger and frustration that there was little effort on the part of Peace River to hear from leaders and members of the congregation before acting. Several families have left the congregation because of these actions.

To address the congregation's concerns that were voiced in the Mission Study Small Groups, representatives from the Mission Study Team met with the General Presbyter of Peace River Presbytery.

In a follow-up letter to the congregation, Peace River General Presbyter Melana Scruggs wrote, "In the past, the presbytery has been conflict averse, so sometimes things did not get addressed because they were difficult. We are working to change the culture in the presbytery, so that difficult things can be addressed in a timely manner."

She acknowledged that, "there was a serious disconnect between the AC (Administrative Commission) and the session," and reiterated that the presbytery's desire through the whole process has been "to promote healing and wholeness, not bring further frustration and pain." She expressed the hope that the presbytery and congregation "can move together toward forgiveness and reconciliation as we strive to practice being the body of Christ."

With the dissolving of the Administrative Commission in February 2021, the leadership of FPC feels a developing sense of trust with and from the presbytery as we move into the future in mission, ministry, and our search for a new pastor.

The Mission Study Team plans to communicate to the session the hope that a more thorough understanding of Presbyterian polity could be provided for church officers and other members of the congregation so the relationship's benefits and boundaries can be better understood by both groups.

## **IV. WHAT THE DATA TELL US**

### **Sarasota Area Demographics**

Sarasota and the surrounding area are known as popular retirement destinations, and the reputation is reflected in the data. The 65+ age bracket is the largest group, at 30.8% of the population within a 15-mile radius of the church. The population is also more highly educated than the rest of the state of Florida. The percentages of the population with a college degree (43%) and graduate degree (14%) are higher than the state averages of 40% and 11% respectively.

The large retirement community can mask a growing younger demographic. For example, Sarasota produced four

Olympians in 2021, many of whom trained at city and county supported facilities from a young age. The fastest growing demographic over the next ten years is expected to be 0- to 4-year-olds, at 3% per year. First Presbyterian Preschool is consistently the top-ranked preschool in Sarasota, uniquely positioning the church to serve this growing demographic.

#### Age Distribution Near FPC Sarasota

Age Range	2021 (%)	2031* (%)	% Point Change
0-4	2.4	5.4	3.0
5-17	13.0	13.3	0.3
18-24	8.1	7.2	-0.9
25-34	10.7	11.3	0.6
35-54	20.8	20.3	-0.5
55-64	14.1	10.9	-3.2
65+	30.8	31.4	0.6

Based on 15-mile radius from First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota

\*Estimated. Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies Inc. Experian, Decisions/MissionInsite

#### First Presbyterian Church Demographics

The membership rolls of First Presbyterian show the age demographics of the congregation and reveal a mixture of new and long-term members, a majority of whom are married. As of July 2021, there are 555 full-time, confirmed members from 312 households. The majority (61%) are female. Over half are 65 or above. Over 60% are married, with another 12% widowed.

#### Full Time Members - General Information

Names in File	555
Head(s) of Household	312
Average Household Size	1.4
Average Age	65.2
Males	217
Females	338

#### Marital Status

Status	Male	Female	Total
Divorced	8	24	32
Engaged	2	1	3
Married	148	186	334
Separated	4	7	11
Single	40	59	99
Widowed	11	57	68

The age breakdown table shows a multi-generational church, with a mixture of children, youth, and young adults, as well as a strong community of members in the empty-nester and retirement age brackets. Note that the table includes non-confirmed children but excludes about 20 adults who chose to not give their age.

#### Age Breakdown

Age	Male	Female	Total
0-15	29	26	55
16-25	12	19	31
26-35	13	16	29
36-45	17	23	40
46-55	23	25	48
56-65	28	47	75
66 & Up	112	198	310

The length of time at First Presbyterian varies widely. Twenty-two percent have joined in the last four years. The numbers generally decline over time, with variations coinciding with previous pastoral transitions. Twenty-one have been members for more than 50 years, representing a dedicated cohort of lifelong members.

#### Longevity in Church

Years in Church	Number	% of Total
0-4*	123	22.2
5-9	114	20.5
10-14	62	11.2
15-19	84	15.1
20-24	63	11.4
25-29	19	3.4
30-34	31	5.6
35-39	18	3.2
40-44	10	1.8
45-49	10	1.8
50 & Up	21	3.8

\*Eight joined in the last year

## **V. WHAT WE HEARD FROM COMMUNITY LEADERS**

Representatives of eight civic and social service organizations met individually with a member of the Mission Study Team. These community leaders were eager to have an ongoing conversation with our church. Two specifically mentioned that they would like an introduction to our new pastor.

The community leaders identified areas in which First Presbyterian Church could consider focusing its efforts. There are also opportunities to act in partnership with service organizations or city and county governments.

### **Affordable Housing**

Perhaps the most critical issue consistently identified by community leaders is the lack of affordable housing. Sarasota is rare in that we have both low wages and high-cost real estate. There are approximately 20,000 households spending more than half of their income on housing, an unsustainable situation.

To address the affordable housing issue, a working partnership with county government is imperative. Changes in housing policy must happen to address this crisis. More faith-based organizations are needed to make this a priority and to work with county officials to make effective changes.

Families and individuals displaced from the workforce by the pandemic and unable to pay their rent now face the possibility of being evicted from their homes and becoming homeless. Our opportunity here is to work towards preventing the evictions by partnering with other groups to maximize our impact in keeping people in their homes. Non-profit leaders are worried about the eviction moratorium ending. A pastor who has experience advocating for this would be an asset.

## **Drugs and Crime**

The pandemic has amplified the existing causes of poverty and added additional ones. A real concern is that drug use will increase along with crime because of the pandemic. Our community's ability to respond to this crisis will depend on the collaborative efforts of government, non-profits, and churches. We continue to have opportunities to partner with other groups in our community to address these concerns.

## **Education**

### **The COVID-19 Gap**

By partnering with existing agencies and non-profits we can be of service in addressing the academic deficit caused by the loss of in-person class time due to the pandemic.

### **High School Dropout Rate**

By partnering with other organizations that work with teenagers who are challenged by their ability to stay on grade level we can address the issue of high school dropouts. A project similar to our efforts with Brentwood Elementary School could make a difference in the lives of at-risk teenagers.

### **Summer Reading Gap**

There is a need for programs to address the "reading gap" created when school is not in session during the summer. Preventing the reading gap is important for children to stay on grade level. We could partner with other groups in the community to aid in reading awareness and to provide volunteers to assist in existing programs. Educating children and keeping them at or above grade level reading is the single most important thing we can do to break the cycle of poverty.

## **Mental Health**

The Child Protection Center has 61 kids on a waiting list to see a therapist. They know they need therapy because of a trauma, and there is a critical shortage of therapists.



This is a great place for faith agencies to help because counseling has always been part of a church's portfolio. Right now, the mental health needs are off the charts, particularly in children. Our church could make a big impact assisting non-profit agencies that are providing mental health services.

### Childhood Nutrition

Meeting the nutritional needs of children is important for their physical and mental health. It is also critically important in their ability to learn. Proper nutrition is important to help break the cycle of poverty. We can help by partnering with other groups that provide nutritious meals to children.

### The Environment

We have an opportunity to be a model in the community for best practices in sustainability. We can start by getting volunteers from the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences to assess ways First Presbyterian can lower our carbon footprint in areas such as landscaping, HVAC, recycling, and use of environmentally responsible products.

**Partnering in God's rebuilding of trusting relationships, among members of this congregation and with the presbytery, will be an incredibly challenging and rewarding calling.**

to identify and utilize the gifts of the staff, session, and congregation. He or she will be a strong preacher, grounded in the Word, and will interpret scripture in ways that are dynamic, relevant, and meaningful to the congregation.

This pastor will work equably and compassionately with the congregation and the community in addressing local issues – such as poverty, homelessness, juvenile justice, and racial justice – and just as passionately address national and international issues through our many mission projects.

With a diverse membership, the minister must know, value, and support the whole congregation – those who are young or old, able or infirmed, who worship at the NewSong service or the traditional

service, who are long-time members or who have only recently begun to worship with us.

Partnering in God's rebuilding of trusting relationships, among members of this congregation and with the presbytery, will be an incredibly challenging and rewarding calling.

## VI. GIFTS OF THE NEW PASTOR

### Personal Characteristics

The congregation is projecting its hopes and dreams onto a pastor who is a committed follower of Jesus Christ. We seek an honest servant leader, who will challenge us to live responsive to the Spirit's leading and who will communicate with love. That person is joyful, compassionate, caring, approachable, diplomatic, and creative.

The congregation seeks a minister who will be a faithful steward of the gospel, discerning God's vision with us and helping us to live into it. The congregation seeks a strong, but not domineering, leader. This leader will be able

### Specific Gifts

Dynamic sermons, inspired leadership, and empathetic pastoral care will be the most important gifts of the new pastor.

The head of staff will need to be a skilled manager. He or she will be asked to lead, not dictate; to inspire and empower church

members and staff; to resolve conflicts and negotiate crises with flexibility; to motivate and hold people accountable; and to lead the

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congregation in embracing under-represented and marginalized communities.

First Presbyterian Church is located on a substantial in-town campus. Working alongside the pastor will be a dedicated and talented staff that includes the director of music ministry and congregational care, preschool director, children and youth coordinator, children and youth leader, faith community nurse, operations manager, finance manager, pastors' assistant, sexton, tech team leader, and parish associates.

A visionary leader will tap the countless gifts of this team to successfully advance the many missions of the church. He or she will have a deeply ingrained sense of kindness and peacemaking skills, be approachable, compassionate, and attuned with justice. Our next leader will relate to and value the many generations who worship at First Presbyterian Church.

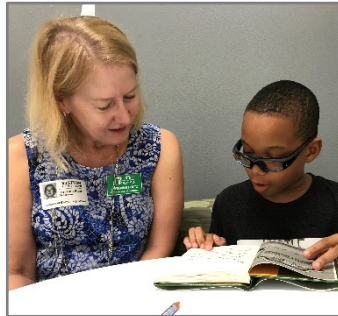
The new minister will appreciate the essential role of the music ministry which is highly regarded and appreciated in this congregation. A NewSong contemporary service and a more traditional service address the congregation's varied worship styles.

The incoming minister will be asked to champion a continuing education program for all ages, from preschool to adult. The church continues to host an annual Pastoral Development Seminar for young pastors during its Faith Focus Weekends.

Having heard from the congregation and the community, we believe that First Presbyterian Church, Sarasota, is ready to move forward. We are aware of our history's highs and lows, we are receptive to God's lead in the future, and we joyfully anticipate welcoming a new pastor to guide our congregation.

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*Approved by the session of First Presbyterian Church of Sarasota on August 24, 2021*



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