

Overview of January 2023 All-Church Meetings

First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor (FUMC) is one church with two locations, a property in downtown Ann Arbor (Downtown) and another on Green Road near the University of Michigan's North Campus (Green Wood). Before deciding what future projects and renovations to make at each building, the FUMC is undertaking a planning process to identify our collective future vision for our facilities.

While this project is focused on facilities investments, it was important to start by understanding, broadly, the FUMC community's opinions about future growth. In January 2023, FUMC hosted two all-church meetings, one in person at the Green Wood on January 21st and one via Zoom on January 24th. In total, more than 100 people participated in these meetings, the purpose of which was to:

- Begin building a shared understanding of and appreciation for the diversity of perspectives at FUMC, and
- Begin articulating a common vision for FUMC's future.

The meetings were opened by Senior Pastor Nancy Lynn, who described the project and introduced Brittany Galisdorfer and Lori Byron of Bridgeport Consulting, a local Ann Arbor firm. FUMC has contracted with Bridgeport to serve as a neutral third party in designing an inclusive decision-making process to set priorities regarding investments in FUMC's facilities. After Senior Pastor Nancy's opening remarks, Brittany described the themes that arose during Bridgeport's early conversations with members of the FUMC community:

1. FUMC's two buildings are distinct, beloved, and reflective of the identities of those who worship there.
2. Operating Green Wood and Downtown in parallel is putting pressure on already tight financial and staff resources; a resolution is sought.
3. To ensure FUMC's long-term viability, new participants must be cultivated.
4. Although recent renovations have been necessary and effective, both properties remain underutilized and in need of further investment.
5. Core questions exist regarding the identity and desired future of FUMC; generating a sense of greater cohesion and clarity among church stakeholders is required.
6. Most interviewees had ideas about how to proceed with the buildings but remain open-minded.

Meeting attendees then worked in small groups to respond to the following discussion prompts:

- Conversation #1:
 - Which themes from the summary resonate with you?
 - Which do not align with your experience?
 - What questions do you have?
- Conversation #2:
 - What are First Church's most important assets or attributes in attracting new people to participate in worship and in service?

The responses to these questions that were documented at these meetings, cumulatively, tell us that the FUMC community's focus is on growing participation in service and in faith, and that the highest priority building investments should be those that support that growth. This information will serve as a guiding light as the conversation in February turns to the buildings.

Bridgeport prepared this summary document, which compiles responses recorded most frequently on poster papers and the Google form, respectively, at the January 21st in-person and January 24th virtual meetings. The appendix catalogs the early ideas for growing participation that were identified; the catalog serves as an archive for FUMC to reference as it devises programs and initiatives to grow participation outside of this project.

Summary of Small Group Conversations

1. The summary documenting Bridgeport's early conversations resonated, nearly in its entirety, with most attendees.

- There was a widespread belief that the themes that have surfaced thus far align with most attendee's experiences of FUMC.
- In particular, there is a sense that priorities are needed, both in terms of FUMC's mission and FUMC's buildings, even while it remains unclear what could possibly be deprioritized.
- There is relief that FUMC is embarking on a proactive process to determine its own future, and recognition that the process is likely to be emotional.

- There is energy and enthusiasm for conversations about how to grow FUMC and how to deepen engagement with the broader community.
- There was some disagreement about the extent to which Green Wood and Downtown operate in parallel versus as a single church community; opinions vary based on individual experiences.

2. Growing FUMC participation requires a multifaceted approach.

- There is an opportunity for members of the FUMC community to work more with the community - both to be of service, and to invite new people into FUMC.
- Different people prefer different types of music and worship; variety must be maintained.
- More could be done to host social events for existing and prospective members of the FUMC community.
- Virtual participation is worth cultivating, as long as we are mindful not to do so at the expense of in-person community building.
- More work is needed to spread the word about FUMC and make it visible in the community.
- Partnerships - especially with the Wesley Foundation - present an opportunity to bring people into the FUMC community.
- Changes to FUMC's properties and buildings could be helpful in attracting people.
- There is a belief that having more community members in the building and having non-religious programs/partners in the building translates to growing the FUMC community.

3. More work is needed to communicate the problem to be solved via this facilities strategic planning process, the process for resolving the problem, and the opportunities that exist.

- Attendees have many questions regarding FUMC's current finances, properties, and outreach.
- Many recognize that those in attendance at the all-church meetings, may not be well positioned to represent the preferences of future FUMC community members.

Appendix: Ideas for Growth from January 21st & 24th Meetings

Below is a summary of the early ideas for growth that were documented at the January 21 and 24, 2023 all-church meetings, organized by theme and ordered by the frequency with which that theme was mentioned. The purpose of this appendix is as an archive for FUMC to reference as it devises programs and initiatives to grow participation, which is beyond the scope of the facilities strategic planning project. To that end, unlike with the section above, this appendix does not discriminate between ideas that were suggested once and those that were mentioned many times. All ideas are cataloged below.

1. Physical space

- Leverage property locations - Downtown to partner with the University, businesses, etc.; Green Wood's proximity, convenience, and easy parking
- Use the green space and outdoors to attract people
- Implement universal design
- Make the buildings energy efficient
- Add color and visual "pop" to the buildings
- Change the exterior of the Downtown building to appear more welcoming, less intimidating
- Address Downtown parking needs (e.g. increased reserved parking spots during weekdays)
- Cafeteria, gym

2. Service and social justice

- Community service opportunities
- Something other than "church" to attract new and younger people
- Active, excited, involved members
- LGBTQ work
- Space for homeless housing and services

3. Ministry

- Youth and children ministries
- Digital ministries and connections
- Opportunities to share our progressive theology

- Publicly teach and use Wesley's Quadrilateral

4. Worship and Music

- Service times
- Diversity of music and settings
- Downtown Choir
- Coffee House at Green Wood

5. Social

- Sporting events, indoors and outdoors
- Recreational events like euchre nights
- Author readings/presentations (e.g., Anne Lamont, NBW, Rob Bell)
- Music events

6. Outreach/Marketing

- Appeal to students, families, empty nesters - all people
- Accept and build off the transient nature of Ann Arbor
- Show we can minister issues of trauma, racism, and poverty
- Better signage

7. Partnerships

- Wesley Foundation
- FUMCN
- Local services agencies
- Serve as a missional/service hub and connect with other churches

8. Welcoming

- Our current people and culture
- Provide a place for the community to gather
- Be open to different opinions

4. Leadership and staff

- We need a plan to bring people into the church
- Budget transparency
- Communication