



**Worship Schedule Task Force
Report and Recommendations to Session
June 23, 2022**

Our Mission: *Changing Lives...Making Disciples*

Our Vision: *Every Member in Ministry*

In Christ United, Our Values of Ministry:

*Joyful Worship
Gracious Invitation
Prayerful Study
Sacrificial Service
Caring Connections*

Charge and Guiding Principles

At its February 2020 meeting, Session voted unanimously to create a Worship Schedule Task Force. The charge to the WSTF was to examine and recommend to Session options for the worship schedule that would best support our First Presbyterian Church Mission, Vision, and Values of Ministry. Jack Alderman, Lindsay Bunting, Jan Cale, Charlie Curtis, Bill Kuttruff, Ann Shippy, and Debbie Wagner were appointed to the WSTF. The Task Force adopted these Guiding Principles to direct our efforts:

- Worship of God is essential to our Christian faith
- Worship of God is also essential to our Mission of Changing Lives and Making Disciples
- Welcome strong attendance by a broad demographic of members and visitors
- Encourage broader participation in Christian service and the life of the church
- Optimize contributions by the music programs and choirs
- Offer online livestream and recorded access to all services
- Recognize the congregation's preferences regarding worship style and time
- Provide welcoming environment to visitors and seekers
- Encourage fellowship opportunities before and/or after services
- Allow for effective coordination of worship participants, volunteers, technology, and logistics
- Allow time for Pastors to meet with members and visitors
- Support robust Christian education opportunities for adults and children
- Input will be solicited from specific interest groups and individuals, but recommendations will be made for the greater good of the whole church and the Kingdom of God

Background

The clear need to review and adjust our worship schedule has been supported by several FPC initiatives over the past three years, including:

2019 – One of the recommendations from *theWAYforward* initiative was to “Thoroughly examine the Sunday morning worship schedule and potential options.”

2021 – In its report to Session, **The Mission-Based Budget Task Force** stated that, as we move from our pre-pandemic state toward our future state as a church, we should be “Powerfully pursuing Christ’s mission in fellowship with interactive, multi-faceted, multi-media worship, education and outreach that is compelling, inspiring, inviting, dynamic, and less dependent on time and place.”

2022 – Our **Leadership Retreat** in March emphasized that, while our mission as a church remains constant, the context in which we do church has changed markedly. We need to fully understand this new context and engage in Proactive Adaptation as we continue to Joyfully Worship and carry out our FPC Mission. Adjustments to our Sunday morning schedule are part of the “holy experimentation” we will undertake as we adapt, and we will continue to carefully adjust over time.

Methodology and Timing

WSTF determined that our work should be carried out through research, prayer, study, creative discussion, communication with other churches, and consultation with Clergy, Staff, and Ministries. We set out on that path early in 2020, just as the COVID pandemic arose. It was quickly obvious that longer term recommendations for the worship schedule would need to wait, and that the pandemic realities demanded immediate flexible changes to worship that would evolve as needed to address health concerns. The work of the WSTF was suspended during this period.

As in-person worship became possible again, Session approved a new near-term worship schedule in 2021, with Crossroads at 9:00, traditional worship at 11:00, and continued online worship with livestreaming and recording of the 11:00 service. WSTF reconvened in early 2022 to evaluate the outcomes from that schedule and to recommend any changes for Fall of 2022. This report and its recommendations are presented with the unanimous support of the continuing WSTF members – Jack Alderman, Jan Cale, Bill Kuttruff, Ann Shippy, and Debbie Wagner.

Findings and Current Realities

- The current schedule has been generally well accepted by the congregation. As expected, a few individual and interest group concerns were expressed early on, but people have graciously adjusted for the greater good.
- Two services is the correct configuration at this time: one service in the Crossroads format, and one service in the traditional format. The fuller attendance at our current two services is adding energy and vitality to both services.
- Attendance is good – the combined attendance, including in-person and online worship, is typically the same as pre-pandemic attendance (all in-person).
- Fellowship time in the Gathering Space between services has not worked as well as expected. One hour is too long to expect worshipers from both services to connect, and there is no fellowship time after the 11:00 service. A shorter time between services will enhance the joy of fellowship.
- Children’s Sunday School has evolved into a better configuration. It is not meeting in the hour between services. Instead, children are starting each service with their parents, and then moving into their classes. Both services are being made more family friendly.

- Adult Sunday School classes desire more time than allowed by the (current) one hour between services – varied options need to be studied in support of vibrant classes at different times.
- Online worship is a permanent and important part of FPC. The current effort to add online capability for Crossroads is well founded. We need more ways to invite online worshippers into the full life of the church.
- There are legitimate concerns expressed by retirement community residents about their inability to get from the 11:00 service to their Sunday midday meals.
- The Sunday morning time pressures have been significantly reduced for clergy, staff, worship leaders, and the choir. The elimination of the third service has allowed sufficient breathing room between services, and the pastors are more available for greeting and fellowship.
- Holy experimentation is now more possible in our church as pandemic concerns (hopefully) continue to wane. We are now more conditioned to change, as well as more flexible in consideration of new possibilities.
- In summary, the 9:00/11:00 worship schedule has worked extremely well for worship services, but not as well for important fellowship time and adult Sunday School. There is some built-in conflict between what is ideal for worship time, adult class time, and fellowship time. We will need to recognize that and continue to craft more innovative solutions over time. We believe our first priority on Sunday morning must continue to be the worship services.

Worship Service Recommendations

Having thoroughly studied all the relevant findings and issues, prayed for guidance, and applied our best judgment to possible recommendations, the Worship Schedule Task Force presents the following motion for Session consideration at its June 23, 2022 meeting:

It is moved that:

The standard worship service times for Fall 2022 will be:

Crossroads Service: 9:00 AM

Traditional Service: 10:30 AM

The starting date in September for this schedule will be determined by Clergy and Staff. This schedule will not change the worship time for Sundays when only one service is scheduled. The Worship Schedule Task Force will reconvene in October to review attendance data and congregational/staff feedback, then recommend any further schedule adjustments for 2023.

Possibilities for Future Consideration

If the above schedule is adopted by Session, it will not necessarily be the longer term schedule for worship – it is only for this Fall. It is a fairly modest step, but we will learn from it and continue to adjust it as necessary for the greater good of the church and the worship of our Lord. WSTF has discussed more sweeping future possibilities which may or may not deserve further consideration. These possibilities include, but aren't limited to: holy experimentation with worship formats; switching of the times for Crossroads and traditional worship; renovations in the Sanctuary for more flexible worship opportunities; and new options for scheduling adult classes and fellowship.

The Worship Schedule Task Force is grateful for the opportunity to work on this issue.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2