

OSC Mission Commitment, 2018-2020



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Introduction

This is not a “strategic plan.” Strategic plans develop detailed goals and objectives, often projected 3-5 years in advance. Such efforts are fundamentally democratic, engaging a wide group of staff, congregants, and even community members in order to find out what people want and what the majority of them would be willing to work toward. It is, essentially, an organizing effort. As a result, strategic plans usually produce a wish-list of hopes (goals) based on the expectations that traditional congregants have for what a church should be and do. The purpose of such a plan is to ensure future success. This kind of process has been conducted at least three times at FCC¹ since 1980, with little or no success.

Our approach has been somewhat different.

The past 50 years at FCC – and of Mainline Protestantism in general – demonstrate that the religious landscape in America is shifting too rapidly and too dramatically to entertain the illusion of control for organizations that cannot adapt quickly. We simply cannot predict what will effectively reach people in five years and we cannot base future goals on past expectations.

However, we are convinced that *God is at work* in these shifts – both at the larger societal level and in our own little congregation. Therefore, this process has been an effort of *discernment*, not planning. The question

¹ FCC stands for First Christian Church of Oceanside, which was the name of our congregation at the time of this Mission discernment process. One by-product of this process, was that our congregation decided in the fall of 2018 to change our name to The Oceanside Sanctuary.

has not been, “What do we think FCC should be and do?” The question has been, “What is God *already* doing?”

This has been a subtle but important distinction. By seeking to discern the patterns of God’s Spirit among us, we may be able to plot a *trajectory* that should suggest an array of possibilities for our future.

This is why we’ve produced a statement of our “commitment” to a stated mission, not a strategic plan. We cannot create any strategy or plans that will guarantee success. We must be willing to discover the plan as we go. That will require a high level of experimentation and an ability to adapt, change, or even abandon short-term plans quickly.

The FCC Mission process began in January of 2016 with a series of prayer meetings and concluded in November, 2017 at a special congregational meeting. It will provides a sense of direction and focus for all our ministries for the next 3 years.

Our slow process of discernment

So, what *is* God doing at FCC? We sought to answer that by:

- **Praying** earnestly together (Winter & Spring 2016).
- **Learning** what God is doing in the wider Church (Summer 2016).
- **Understanding** how our City is changing (Fall 2016).
- **Researching** our own history and legacy (Winter-Spring 2017).
- **Identifying** our values, gifts, and dreams (Summer 2017).

What we discerned

We believe there are enduring legacies at FCC combined with key shifts in our congregation that have positioned us to have a unique impact on the Oceanside community – particularly in ways that reflect the gospel’s ability to help our City thrive. We flesh that out in 5 parts:

1. **Our Legacy** reveals insights into our character & calling.
2. **Strengths & Opportunities** reveal our gifts & challenges.
3. **Key Shifts & Guiding Values** reveal our current direction.
4. **Vision & Mission** statements describe what we could become & how we could develop it.
5. **Mission Priorities** propose how we could focus our efforts.

Our Legacy

FCC started with 13 members on November 21, 1875 as "The Christian Church at San Luis Rey." Located just south of the old Mission, members met in a one-room school house with a tin-can coal oil lamp hanging from the ceiling. It was the first "Christian Church" (Disciples of Christ) in the San Diego area and remains the oldest active Protestant church in San Diego County.

The Early Years

Oceanside incorporated in 1888 and by the turn of the century was in the middle of a housing boom. On January 1, 1908, the little church moved to Oceanside with 23 members, building a small structure at the corner of Hill and First Street (now Coast Highway and Seagaze) and became known as "First Street Christian Church."

The congregation grew quickly with the City, and by 1927 had swelled to 200 members. So they built an ambitious new facility at our present location, complete with stained glass windows and a choir loft. The opened the new church in 1928 and changed the name to "First Christian Church of Oceanside."

The Peak Years

During the Great Depression, FCC opened a soup kitchen to feed hungry residents under the leadership of Mrs. Grace MacDonald. FCC's first woman Pastor, "Grandma Grace" led the church from 1932 to 1936. This began a long legacy of compassion and hospitality.

The church grew steadily from the Great Depression through the post-war years, reaching its peak in the early-1960's. In the church's 1963 Directory, long-term Pastor Dan B. Genung, Jr. wrote:

"Today First Christian, with nearly 300 members, is noted for its friendly fellowship. It combines warmth with quiet dignity of worship. First Christian stresses growth in spiritual living as a community of Christ's folk."

A Long Period of Decline

During the Vietnam war, the church organized relief efforts for "war widows" at nearby Camp Pendleton, but the cultural upheaval of the 1960's would take a heavy toll on the traditional congregation. In 1968, Pastor Charles Elswick preached anti-war messages that weren't well received by the traditional congregants. But his ouster in 1970 cost the church many of its younger members.

By 1980 the the church had experienced a decade of long, steep decline. Membership had dropped to only about 40 people who were struggling to keep the ministries, committees, and finances afloat.

Four Decades of Revitalization Efforts

In his April 27, 1982 report to the Pastoral Service Committee, Pastor Kenneth Brady wrote:

"The new budget for 1982-83 when reached as a new challenge will call the congregation UP to the new, proposed PROGRAM benefits as outlined recently in my Pastoral Report [...] starting the congregation UP to new growth to include: A Unified service on

Sunday mornings; Becoming increasingly a social service center for Oceanside community and neighborhood; The BENEFIT of stimulation and enthusiasm of moving upward."

Pastor Brady's report illustrates at least three recurring themes that run through much of FCC's history:

- A commitment to **reconciliation** as the heart of the gospel, seen in Pastor Brady's goal of "a Unified service on Sunday mornings."
- A commitment to **compassionate** service - expressed in Pastor Brady's vision to become "a social service center for Oceanside."
- A strong theme of **renewing** or re-vitalizing a dying congregation.

For nearly 40 years - from the late 1970's until the present time - FCC hovered consistently between 55 and 65 active members and churned rapidly through a series of Pastors and efforts to revive the congregation. Unfortunately, despite his ambitious plans above, Pastor Brady only lasted 2 1/2 years and his plans never gained traction. In 1987 Pastor Carol Rawlings came to FCC and embarked on the most thorough strategic planning process to-date. But the congregation continued to shrink in spite of her efforts. She left in 1990 when the church couldn't afford to keep up with her part-time salary.

In 1991, Pastor Bob Case came and served the congregation during a time of relative stability. Through his leadership, the church built an after-school homework tutoring center (reminiscent of Pastor Brady's plans to become a "social service center") that engaged a number of youth in the community and led to a genuine period of modest growth. After his departure, the church grew smaller again.

In 2005 Reverend Steve Turner became the Pastor and developed plans to jump-start a young adult congregation. By then, the facility was in severe disrepair. The congregation not only embarked on a new strategic planning process, but also began looking into loans to make improvement to the building. Unfortunately, Reverend Turner left his position after just 2 years, and those plans were abandoned.

Present Day

Over the past few years, we have made some progress. We've added several new families with young children, cleaned up and repaired much of the facility, remodeled the children's classrooms, and undertaken our own long-term "Mission" process. Along with our longstanding Tuesday night homeless dinner, clothing closet, and weekly cafe, we have added a food pantry in partnership with Feeding San Diego, a hot showers program in partnership with the San Diego Presbytery, and an internship program with Cal State San Marcos. We are presently at around 75 active members.

Observations

Historical Strengths

- A message of reconciliation through the gospel.
- A friendly, warm, & hospitable congregation.
- Compassionate service runs deep in our history.
- Youth & children accompany periods of growth.
- Long-tenured Pastors accompany periods of growth.

Historical Vulnerabilities

- The church's flourishing is closely tied to the City.
- When we alienate younger people, the church declines.
- Times of cultural upheaval can cause church upheaval.
- Short-tenured Pastors accompany periods of decline.
- Lack of funding leads to instability in pastors, programs, and facilities, which tends to push people away, which leads to a further lack of funding.

Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, & Threats

Churches going through transition often assess their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to understand the bigger picture.

Our Strengths & Opportunities

Strengths are the *internal* characteristics that make us more effective and resilient in our mission. Opportunities are the *external* circumstances that increase the possibilities for our mission.

Strengths

- Highly **welcoming** & committed members.
- A congregation that is racially, socio-economically, and theologically **diverse**.
- Distinctive **facility** & sacred space located at the intersection of important dynamics in the City.
- Distinctively good **teaching & music**.
- Heart of **compassionate service** & outreach.
- Growing number of **younger families** & children.
- Rooted in a deep tradition of faith & **historic legacy**.

Opportunities

- Vital, diverse, & **growing neighborhood**.
- New opportunities from generous **donors & grantors**.
- Increasing **community volunteers** in our programs.
- **Growing partnerships** with fellow churches, schools, nonprofits, & businesses.

- **Community interest** in our facility for concerts, meetings, & events.
- Close proximity to local **schools & colleges**.
- Increasingly **polarized national climate**.

Possibilities Based on Strengths & Opportunities:

- Expand ministry to our **families & youth**.
- Expand **hospitality efforts** to welcome more people, groups, & events into our facility to meet community needs.
- Highlight our distinctive emphasis on the reconciliation of the gospel to address community tensions by hosting gatherings that promote **reconciliation & peace**.

Our Weaknesses & Threats

Weaknesses are the *internal* characteristics that make us less effective in our mission and more vulnerable to failure. Threats are the *external* circumstances that impede our mission.

Weaknesses

- Facility in **severe disrepair**.
- Lack of **discipleship training** & mentoring.
- Lack of spiritual practices & **fellowship depth**.
- Poor **integration of new people** & ideas.
- Inconsistent **internal giving**.
- High rate of **volunteer turnover**.
- Poor **community recognition**.

Threats

- Increasingly **secular & non-traditional culture**.
- Rapidly **changing neighborhood demographics**.
- **Negative image from some neighbors** due to homeless ministries.
- **Tensions with City** due to homeless ministries.
- Increasingly **polarized national climate**.

Possibilities Based on Weaknesses & Threats:

- Conduct a **remodel of the facility** to improve the overall repair, aesthetics, & function of our building.
- Work on **new ways to connect people** for fellowship & Bible study.
- Work on **new ways to volunteer** that are fulfilling without being burdensome.
- Work on ways to **focus our social service ministries** so they are seen as an asset to the neighborhood & City, not as a threat.

Key Shifts & Guiding Values

Below are **7 Key Shifts** in the culture at FCC that we've noticed are *already occurring*. These are shifts in value, attitude, and operation, that are helping us to be more relevant and effective. *These are not our only values, but they do seem to be key values for guiding us in our transition.* Therefore, based on these shifts, we are proposing **7 Guiding Values** for our development as a church in the years ahead.

Key Shift #1

From the "gospel of heaven" to the "gospel of the kingdom."

Key Scripture - Luke 4:18

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
 because he has anointed me
 to bring good news to the poor.
 He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
 and recovery of sight to the blind,
 to let the oppressed go free."

Why is this shift important?

Jesus announced the in-breaking presence of God's Kingdom *now*, and demonstrated it by ministering to the sick, helping the poor, liberating the oppressed, and disrupting unjust social practices. *To be a Christian means to follow Jesus into that same present reality.* Proclaiming and demonstrating the whole gospel makes us more relevant and impactful in our community.

Guiding Value #1

"We have faith in **the whole gospel**, by which God's love is reconciling all people, places, and cultures."

Key Shift #2

From "enlisting members" to "making disciples."

Key Scripture - Matt 28:18-20

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Why is this shift important?

Churches can sometimes become exclusive communities based on "believing" the right things. But Jesus didn't start a club for the benefit of its members. He taught practical ways to live a life empowered by the goodness of God to anyone who would follow. Church membership should reflect that same open, welcoming, and inclusive posture with a high priority on learning to follow Jesus.

Guiding Value #2

"We put the wisdom of **Jesus' teachings** into practice in the everyday lives of our families, neighborhoods, and cities."

Key Shift #3

From “protecting our traditions” to “remembering our roots.”

Key Scripture - 1 Chronicles 16:12

“Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered.”

Why is this shift important?

Older churches can get stuck in traditions that no longer appeal to young generations. But in a culture obsessed with novelty, our deep historical roots are a strength that set us apart. We must learn to celebrate the best of our legacy, while always working to translate our spaces, language, symbols, and practices in ways that are meaningful to new generations.

Guiding Value #3

“We **remember our roots** so we can grow into our future without being held captive by our past.”

Key Shift #4

From “formal committees” to “functional teams.”

Key Scripture - Rom 12:4-8

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in

exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”

Why is this shift important?

Smaller churches that rely on too many committees can overburden their members with administrative responsibilities. Good governance structures should empower people to minister according to their gifts and callings, not burden them with procedures. This liberates the congregation to engage in the life-giving ministry of making new disciples in a wide variety of ways.

Guiding Value #4

“We lead with **lean structures** that enable us to listen carefully, adapt with wisdom, and prioritize ministry over administration.”

Key Shift #5

From a “fear of change” to the “joy of birth.”

Scripture - Acts 10:44-48

“While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.”

Why is this shift important?

Churches focused on preserving their traditions are sometimes closed to new expressions of faith. But the Holy Spirit is always birthing new expressions to engage new cultures and new generations in ways that are meaningful to them. Resisting those changes cuts us off from the fresh movement of God in our world. Therefore, we must learn to be open to the fresh move of the Spirit by creating a safe atmosphere for incubating creative expressions of faith.

Guiding Value #5

“We pursue opportunities for **creative expressions** of Christian faith, birthed by the surprising move of the Holy Spirit.”

Key Shift #6

From “surviving in isolation” to “thriving in collaboration.”

Key Scripture - 2 For 8:8-16

“I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something – now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your

present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.'"

Why is this shift important?

Struggling churches often withdraw from the community as their own internal resources wither. Over the years, FCC has learned that relying on the abundance of our community has enriched our ability to do more with less. We should continue to push even further into those kinds of generous relationships.

Guiding Value #6

We seek **generous collaborations** to bring about more just, sustainable, and enduring expressions of an abundant faith community.

Key Shift #7

From "serving community needs" to "solving community problems"

Key Scripture - Acts 2:43-47

"Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the

goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Why is this shift important?

The earliest followers of Jesus used their gifts and resources to solve problems in the surrounding community. Our own society is currently shifting from a value for *service* to a value for *solutions*. In order to have a more just and enduring impact on our community, we should embrace that shift as an opportunity to demonstrate the whole gospel in all our ministries. If the community begins to see FCC as a church that solves problems rather than creating problems, we will be more effective in our mission.

Guiding Value #7

“We work toward **lasting solutions** so our expression of the gospel produces a genuine hope for the good of the whole city.”

Vision & Mission

A **Vision** is a depiction of an ideal future for the people an organization serves, while a **Mission** is a description of how the organization plans to achieve that vision.

Key Elements

- Embracing the best of our history as a resource for the future.
- Leaning on our strength of being a welcoming place of hospitality.
- Championing our identity as Disciples who teach a surprisingly inclusive, reconciling, & peacemaking gospel.
- Becoming a place where new expressions of faith can be launched by younger generations.
- Prioritizing discipleship (teaching people how to do what Jesus taught) above all other activities.
- Becoming a congregation that serves compassionately for the purpose of making a real & deeper impact.

Vision Statement

"We envision an historic downtown church that is surprisingly inclusive, inspiring, and impactful, in a city that is more loving, more peaceful, and more enriching for all its residents because our church is here, faithfully practicing the wisdom of Jesus."

Mission Statement

"Our mission is to make disciples for the sake of the city, who know how to practice radical hospitality, fearlessly create new expressions of faith, and minister the wholeness of the gospel in a fragmented world."

Mission Priorities

To accomplish this vision and mission, FCC is committed to **5 Mission Priorities** meant to leverage our strengths & opportunities and diminishing our weaknesses & threats in a way that is consistent with our guiding values.

Priority #1

Embrace our “Vintage Modern” identity.

Possibilities

- Remodel our facility to be clean, welcoming, and modern, while still honoring its historic character.
- Make every space as multi-use as possible so we can serve the community in a wide-variety of ways: weddings, special events, concerts, community gatherings, classes & workshops, co-working spaces, a community cafe, etc.
- Remodel our basement so it can be optimized as a central location for all our compassion-driven social service ministries.

Pitfalls to avoid

- Don't lose the historic character of the building.
- Be frugal, but do repairs well, so the building will last.

Priority #2

Double-down on discipleship & community building.

Possibilities

- Experiment with digital media – podcasting, live streaming, online classes, etc. – to extend our preaching and teaching to people who are at-a-distance and more oriented toward those forms of learning.
- Cultivate a variety of ways to build community beyond after-church potlucks (community dinners, outings, short-term service trips, book clubs, etc.) so we are building community in ways that different people experience community best.
- Go beyond merely serving people in need and offer them ways to grow in faith – prayer ministry, study groups, fellowship groups – so the wisdom of Christ and the Spirit of God can transform their difficult circumstances.

Pitfalls to avoid

While we are cultivating deeper relationships with each other, don't fall into the trap of becoming an insular Church. One thing that makes us distinctive is our inclusiveness and commitment to welcoming everyone.

Priority #3

Empower youth & young adult expressions of faith.

Possibilities

- Recruit a staff person and small team of leaders who are called and gifted to engage local young adult communities and empower, release, and resource them to incubate fresh and meaningful expressions of Christianity.

- Find out what causes matter to youth and young adults and give them ways to explore faith-in-action through those causes, rather than expecting them to get involved in the causes that matter to us.
- Explore alternative spaces and forms of communication that are meaningful to youth and young adults rather than expect them to connect in ways that are meaningful to us.

Pitfalls to avoid

Avoid the trap of creating a generationally-fragmented church. Make opportunities for an integration of the whole congregation.

Priority #4

Focus our ministry efforts on longer-term impact and sustainability.

Possibilities

- Focus our compassion-driven social services ministries to help people make real progress in their lives so we can have a lasting and positive impact on our clients, our volunteers, our neighborhood, and the city as a whole.
- Multiply our community partnerships so we can have a greater impact by relying on the strengths of other churches, nonprofits, businesses, and government agencies.
- Explore social business ventures to bring in streams of additional revenue while also offering meaningful outlets of ministry for professional congregants and tangible work-training opportunities

for the people we help (e.g. handyman business, co-working space, cafe, etc.).

Pitfalls to avoid

- Be careful not to allow our focus on disciple-making to drift because we're too busy pursuing new partnerships and ventures.
- Don't fall into the trap of everything having to be perfect. It's okay to experiment, fail, and learn from our failures.

Priority #5

Streamline our governance structure to be more agile & empowering.

Possibilities

- Create a simpler, more accessible, and more functional leadership structure based on the biblical example of elders and deacons.
- Make "membership" more accessible to congregants who have genuinely made FCC their church home, and who serve the congregation, but don't find meaning in the formality of a membership ceremony.

Pitfalls to avoid

Be careful to preserve the congregational polity of the church, where every member has a genuine voice in the governance of the church. This is a good, valued, and important legacy from our tradition.

Summary

The *Mission Commitment* establishes a clear trajectory for our ministry efforts. Within that trajectory, FCC leaders and congregants have the freedom to explore, experiment, and discover what God has called them to be as followers of Christ in this time and place.

Our Guiding Values

- We have faith in the **whole gospel**, by which God's love is reconciling all people, places, and cultures.
- We put the wisdom of **Jesus' teachings** into practice in the everyday lives of our families, neighborhoods, and cities.
- We **remember our roots** so we can grow into our future without being held captive to our past.
- We lead with **lean structures** that enable us to listen carefully, adapt with wisdom, and prioritize ministry over administration.
- We pursue opportunities for **creative expressions** of Christian faith, birthed by the surprising move of the Holy Spirit.
- We seek **collaborative partnerships** to bring about just, sustainable, and enduring expressions of an abundant community.
- We work for a **lasting impact**, so our expression of the gospel produces a genuine hope for the good of the whole city.

Our Vision & Mission

- **We envision an historically-rooted church that is surprisingly inclusive, inspiring, and impactful**, in a city that is more loving, more peaceful, and more enriching for all its residents because our church is here, faithfully practicing the wisdom of Jesus.

- **Our mission is to make disciples for the sake of the City**, who know how to practice radical hospitality, fearlessly create new expressions of faith, and go out from here to minister the wholeness of the gospel in a fragmented world.

Our Priorities

- Embrace our **vintage modern identity**.
- Double-down on **discipleship & community**.
- Empower **youth & young adult** expressions.
- Focus our ministries on **impact & sustainability**.
- Streamline our governance to be **agile & empowering**.