



Planning Study

An Overview of Process & Outcomes

STUDY OVERVIEW

RATIONALE, METHODOLOGY, AND PROCESS

The leadership of 1st Presbyterian Church of Chattanooga (1st Pres) has been exploring, for a number of years now, what a possible initiative can and should look like to update, maintain, and expand the church's facilities and buildings. Over the course of 2022 and 2023, these conversations intensified, both due to growing interest from the 1st Pres community, and due to intensifying infrastructure needs of the facilities.

As we considered next steps, one thing was clear – it would be vital to listen to the church's leadership and congregation and make these decisions together, with input from all informing each decision. In the fall of 2023, we partnered with The Canaan Group to be an objective counsel to us, to help us listen well, evaluate support for these projects, and gauge the feasibility of funding to provide for them.

Over the course of several months, The Canaan Group conducted personal interviews with officers, staff, volunteers, and members, as well as surveyed the full congregation. This exploration process elicited input and feedback on the church's facilities needs and campaign opportunities, but also on more general topics such as church life, leadership efficacy, and perceived strength and weaknesses. In total, there were 42 individuals interviewed personally, and 164 responses received through the digital survey.

In the following sections, our aim is to briefly share, as transparently as possible, what we learned through this planning study, and the next steps that are being planned as a result.

THE MINISTRY OF 1ST PRES

WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH?

Over the course of the study, we learned much from the 1st Pres community regarding their perceptions of the church, our leadership, our ministry, and our path forward. The following are highlights from this process, including encouraging points and constructive criticism shared, with key data points that quantify this feedback. As 1st Pres leadership has processed and reviewed these inputs, it has served both as an encouragement and a push toward action in areas of improvement for our church.

A Sincere Love for Our Church and Staff

The congregation, leaders, and staff of 1st Pres have a sincere and heartfelt love for the church! More than 90% view the church and its direction in a positive light, and are pleased with its general direction.

There was an extremely high level of confidence shared in our pastoral staff as it has taken shape over the last couple of years, with nearly 80% expressing unreserved and full confidence in the staff. Those remaining have no doubts about existing pastoral staff; rather, some noted the challenge of unavoidable transitions and a desire to see continuity and steadiness achieved.

Joy in Worship

A consistent theme throughout the study was the reverence, excellence, and Word-focused nature of Sunday worship. Worship services are at the heart of the church's life, week in and week out, and nearly 9 out of 10 congregants believe the worship services of 1st Pres are "highly effective." Time and again, a firm commitment to biblical truth, worshipful music and liturgy, and the faithful preaching of the Word were referenced as staples of worship at our church. Praise God!

In addition, there is a sense of peace and contentment with our two-service model, which is noted to be unique among PCA churches. It is noted that the thoughtful nature of these two services and their individualized styles and components are appreciated and valued as opposed to divisive.

Opportunities in Leadership

Among respondents to the study, there is firm trust in the integrity of those serving as officers in the church (elders and deacons). However, when asked about the effectiveness and efficiency of their leadership of the church, roughly half of respondents cited "some confidence" in this area on both counts. In digging into this area of feedback, there are particular areas of improvement that represent opportunities for our session and diaconate:

- Clarity of roles in each body
- Efficiency in communication between the two bodies
- Consistent communication with the congregation on priorities and activities of each

Thriving Missions Work

Congregants consistently noted the growth of the missions program of 1st Pres, and its organization and communication among the church body. There is a tangible passion to see the missions impact continue to expand, and there is a high level of excitement for the intentionality that missions staff has brought to this area of ministry.

Ministry Needs & Opportunities

Those involved in adult Sunday school and small groups ministries value them immensely; however, many noted the desire to see greater organization and approachability for more in the church to be involved. For many, these are seen as niche ministries in which a few are involved, and with a clear organizational and leadership structure, there is an opportunity to grow them into core mechanisms for fellowship, discipleship, and engagement.

Similarly, many cited a desire to see our youth and children's ministries grow in organization and stability, noting that transition in staff and leadership in these areas has created a big challenge over the last couple of years.

FACILITIES OPPORTUNITIES

WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT CAMPAIGN SUPPORT?

Over the course of the study, we invited feedback regarding the Master Plan that has been shared and discussed among the leadership and congregation in recent months. There was a wealth of feedback provided that is informing next steps and action planning. The following are key themes and takeaways in this area.

Unity Regarding the General Need

There is near unanimous agreement that there is work that needs to be done to the facilities of 1st Pres. There are infrastructural needs that cannot be ignored, construction and renovation needs to accommodate growth and ministry, and updating needs to ensure efficiency of the facilities. Nearly 70% of study respondents expressed support for the Master Plan *in general*; in most cases, there was nuance and accompanying context added in conjunction with this support.

Concerns Regarding Scope

The most often cited concerns regarding the Master Plan were:

- The scope of the work (i.e. are we “biting off too much” at once?)
- The cost of the total project for our congregation
- Ensuring buy-in and support from the congregation at large
- Prioritization of the work

Certainly, there is a tangible theme regarding this project that there needs to be absolute clarity and transparency into what is being planned, how the project is being phased and prioritized, and cost.

Enthusiasm for Involvement & Giving

More than two-thirds of study respondents stated that they would enthusiastically support the project financially and provided indicators of their level of support, and more than half of respondents indicated a willingness to volunteer in some capacity as part of a building campaign. Among those who did not indicate financial support, most cited that they would expect to participate, but need to see a careful prioritization of the projects in order to have confidence in the initiative.

The study showed a conservative capacity, within the congregation itself, for approximately \$5-\$6 million in campaign pledges for this project, and our priority is to ensure that we remain realistic and pragmatic in what we set out to achieve as a body. We're thrilled to share that, even before the project has begun, there has been approximately \$7 million pledged to the project from individuals in the community, and there is significant additional interest. Praise God!

OUR PRIORITIES

WHERE DO WE STAND, AND WHAT IS NEXT?

The input provided from our congregation, leaders, and staff throughout this process is invaluable as we work through next steps.

Ministry Action

First, regarding input shared regarding the general life of our church, there are tangible outcomes from the study that are being pursued:

- The session and diaconate are evaluating strategies for ensuring 1) communication within each body and across the two bodies, 2) utmost clarity in roles and processes for decision making, and 3) clear communication to the congregation regarding the priorities and activities of each body.
- The staff and volunteers of various church ministry areas, including adult education, small groups, and youth and children's ministries are undergoing strategic planning to explore how best to achieve a proactive and organized approach, with an aim to grow participation and efficacy.

Facilities Campaign Planning

Through the study, we heard several themes clearly and consistently:

1. The scope is large, and there are varying levels of uncertainty because of this.
2. The scope is not disqualifying for the project's feasibility; however, there *must* be utmost clarity regarding prioritization of the projects.
3. There is a need for the project components to be sensibly phased in a way that accounts for varying levels of funding outcomes.
4. There must be open communication and dialogue among leadership and congregants throughout the process to ensure transparency and buy-in.

Next Steps

Given these themes and priorities, the following are planned steps that the Capital Campaign Committee is taking, under the oversight of the session:

- We are currently working diligently with our architects and contracting partners to determine tangible costs and scope of a prioritized Phase 1 of the project (infrastructure needs, connector improvements, and fellowship hall and sanctuary improvements).
- We are carefully planning for the prioritization of projects to ensure that the financial scope of the project, in clear phases, is laid out and communicated.
- As we share more information on these items in the coming weeks, we will facilitate a series of small group engagement opportunities, inviting congregants to share questions with leadership.

- We will hold a “town hall” meeting where we will provide a more formal update on progress, and allow for further questions and engagement.
- We are committing to formal monthly committee updates to the full congregation with updates on progress and planning.

THANK YOU

As a Committee, and on behalf of the leadership and staff of 1st Pres, we thank you for your support of this process by providing your open and forthright feedback and input throughout this planning study. We look forward to sharing further updates soon, and we're grateful for how our God is providing direction for this project through your participation.