

**FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
FALLS CITY, NEBRASKA**

MISSION STUDY REPORT
December 19, 2015



Our Mission

To be a Spirit-led church with Christ at the center by:

Bringing other to Christ

Expressing our faith through giving time, ability and money

Acting with care and compassion

Making a commitment to do God's work

Seeking to know God's word

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Introduction

The yoked parish of First United Presbyterian Church, Falls City and First Presbyterian Church Hiawatha, called “NEB-KAN Parish,” began a period of pastoral transition on June 1, 2015 with the retirement of The Rev. Roxie Sullivan, who served as the pastor for 14 years. Recognizing that the congregations and the society at large have changed much since the last pastor was called, this transitional time has called for each congregation to complete a mission study process and consider what God might be calling each church to do and to be in the years ahead.

The Falls City mission study team, consisting of Ann Claymiller, John Martin and Rick Martin, and led by The Rev.Carolynn Winters-Hazelton, interim pastor, designed the mission study process, gathered and discussed the information, and compiled this report. History was researched and input from the congregation was sought in various ways, including questionnaires and personal conversations.

Who Are We Today?

Through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit, we seek to bring people into and nurture our ongoing relationships with God. With a committed membership of 40, we demonstrate spiritual vitality through traditional Sunday worship and music, working together on outreach, mission and fund raising activities, and regularly communicating with and caring for those within and beyond the congregation. A one room Sunday school is offered twice a month during the school year. Week night Bible Studies during Lent and Advent have been provided. Members serve in school, health care, business, and farming professions, while those retired include teachers, business persons, farmers and those with a farm-related heritage.

Members enjoy strong church family relationships, sharing in monthly coffee and cookie fellowship time together, church potlucks, and regularly reaching out to each other in times of need. Homebound and hospitalized members stay connected through visits and frequent contact. Almost half of our members are over the age of 65, and we have several active families, including eight children. A number of our current members grew up in the church, and have been deeply touched by this church. Those times identified which have held particular importance and meaning to these long term members include the opportunity to serve in leadership, to teach Sunday School, to use their gifts to help others as well as their own or family weddings, baptisms, funerals and ordination services.

Our Presbyterian Women's group meets monthly for Bible study and support. They spearhead the annual, community-wide “Salad Luncheon and Bazaar,” which provides significant support to several local and global mission projects. In the last year, the PW group has organized two well attended and appreciated baby showers for our young mothers. Over 50 individuals participate in an active prayer chain, with several weekly emails sent keeping all abreast of special needs and happenings. Six newsletters a year also keep members and friends informed. Members gladly share in leadership, with an active Session, Deacon Board and Parish Council. The July Red Cross blood drive depends on the congregation for staffing and assistance, and church members provide regular food staples to the local food bank. At the annual city Cobblestone Festival, we sponsor a bagpipe group that

plays a concert on the “porch” of the church, a location that also serves as the ideal parade viewing place.

Our congregation deeply values vibrant preaching, worship and music, our strong fellowship and family-like feeling, our welcoming and hospitable attitude, our ability to come together and share in the work needed to accomplish special tasks (such as the major undertaking to refurbish the sanctuary and the beautiful stained glass windows), our trust in and cooperation with each other, and helpful spirit to those in need, both near and far.

Our facility is attractive and well maintained, with stunning stained glass windows in the sanctuary and a Moller pipe organ. A ramp off the street allows for accessibility to our upstairs sanctuary, church office and restrooms. In addition to a shared pastor (at 50% time for each church), we share an organist with the Hiawatha church. We employ a secretary and a janitor, each working several hours a week.

Members are generous givers. Though our numbers have declined over the years, our total contributions have steadily increased during that time. With the solid financial support of past years, we have maintained a surplus and have been able to draw upon this for unexpected building repair costs (such as repair of the concrete steps and porch that lead to the sanctuary) as well as funding the budget when annual expenses exceed income. We recently completed the Presbyterian Foundation's “Road to Financial Health Assessment,” which recommended we give attention to the following areas to maximize resources: bequests and planned giving; cultivating, teaching, preaching and discussing stewardship; and increased planning and communication.

A key way the congregation helps strengthen the wider community is through the Falls City Area Ministerial Association (FCAMA). The clergy meet monthly to provide support for each other and plan joint programs. Presbyterians are active in FCAMA's weekly Lenten program, Thanksgiving and Longest Night of the Year worship services, Thanksgiving food drive, writing the annual Advent devotional guide, Summer lunch program for children, and a HELPLINE available to the community for financial needs like transportation or utility bills.

Highlights of our yoked relationship with the First Presbyterian Church in Hiawatha, include a combined Sunday service in the spring, the Advent Lessons and Carols service, the Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday services, as well as potlucks and picnic fellowship activities.

Members value the PC(USA) denomination, and the church has a long history of active involvement in the Presbytery. In the recent years, the pastor served as Presbytery Moderator and currently, several members serve on committees. The church continues to provide solid support to Presbytery's Calvin Crest Camp. We participate in the One Great Hour of Sharing and Christmas Joy offerings, as well as supporting the church through per capita, Basic Mission Giving and the Theological Education Fund.

Like many small town, rural congregations today, we face a variety of challenges. Most of our membership loss in the last 20 years has been due to transfer of membership (often the result of marriage to a Roman Catholic) and death, while new members have been gained from new residents in the community. However, we know with our rich history and talented and committed members, we have many strengths and assets to offer the community.

Our History

The First Presbyterian Church of Falls City, NE was organized in 1866 by a committee appointed by the Highland Presbytery. At its first organizational meeting, one Elder and six Deacons were received as members of the church. In the following years there were an active Ladies Aid, Missionary Society, Christian Endeavor Society, and a Mission Sunday School.

The first church built on the current site was built and dedicated in 1910, but was destroyed by fire in January 1932. The next four years services were held in the American Legion hall. In 1933 plans were made for the construction of a new building on the same site. Formal dedication of the new church took place on September 27, 1936. To help pay the indebtedness of the new church the ladies took turns serving dinners to the public once a month. In April of 1945 the final payment was made, two years ahead of schedule.

In the mid 40's the ladies tried a luncheon and bazaar to raise funds for mission – this event continues to this day. In 1958 Mrs. Thomas Still and Mrs. Lester Hoban were installed as Elders and were the first women to hold office in our church.

Though membership was high throughout the 1960s, our congregation reached its peak membership of 215 in 1980. Unfortunately, the 1980's was a devastating decade for agriculture and rural Nebraska, with farmland values and the population experiencing significant decline. Concurrently, church membership declined.

In 1999 we joined the First Presbyterian Church of Hiawatha, KS as part of the NEB-KAN Parish. In 2001 we installed our first woman pastor, The Rev. Roxie Sullivan. She retired in 2015. An interim pastor for the NEB-KAN Parish began July 1, 2015.

Since the Church was first started we have had 33 solo pastors, with their terms lasting from one to 25 years. We also have had 63, 50 Year members with 7 of those still living. Many improvements have been made to the church building, including a Moller pipe organ, new steps, air conditioning, a new roof, repairs to the stained glass windows, a handicapped ramp, upstairs restroom, wireless sound system, cushions for church pews, and remodeling the kitchen.

Our Community

Falls City was established in 1857 and became the seat of Richardson County several years later. While serving as the hub in the four-state corners – Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Iowa – Falls City faces many of the challenges of rural communities in the Midwest today. At the same time, we are a very active community with many social and civic organizations, including churches. Falls City boasts strong public schools along with a new Community Medical Center, new Library and Art Gallery (principally funded by and named after a member of the congregation), water park and new ball parks. The historic downtown is in the process of a complete renovation. In recent years, many facets of the community have come together to address issues to prevent further population decline, keep and attract young people, and transition to a stable economy and demographics.

First United Presbyterian Church is located on Highway 73 (Harlan Street), the main North-South street through town and is a few blocks north of the downtown. The SunMart grocery store is across the street from the church (their parking lot provides church parking), so most shoppers see the church building when exiting the store. The nearby neighborhoods consist of tree lined streets with

many large older homes.

Future Possibilities

With a strong desire to grow our membership, we have identified several ideas for increasing the congregation's visibility, outreach and support to the community. While we have an effective and well maintained web page and Facebook page, we hope to design a new church brochure and disseminate it widely to invite guests. The church would benefit by adding signage on the south side of the building, inviting to worship those exiting the grocery store parking lot on that side.

In the effort to reach out to the particular needs in our community, we have identified several organizations that we might partner with, including the Falls City Sixpence Project of the public schools which builds strong families for those with children 0-3 years of age and the lower elementary school. In addition, as a "hands on" project, we are considering organizing a school supplies/backpack drive at beginning of the school year.

We also hope to explore ideas for ways our former organist, David von Behren, could provide concerts or workshops when he is back in town. David is an extremely talented musician currently studying at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and we are fortunate that he continues to serve as our organist for several weeks during the summer and holidays.

Since our facility includes a large, well equipped kitchen that opens to the large fellowship hall, the church is an ideal location for hosting community activities (though our downstairs is not handicapped accessible), and we need to explore how to make it available to community groups and family gatherings.

Pastoral Leadership

We desire a pastor who has strong Biblical knowledge with strong leadership, communication and organizational skills that match well with small church needs. We hope our next pastor will be personable, work well with all ages, and will provide assistance with visitation, bereavement and other life challenges as well as be active in the ministerial association and larger community. In particular, we would like to work closely with the pastor to address financial challenges and attract new members.

Approved by Session December 21, 2015