



Ad Hoc Planning Committee

Survey on the Future of FSA

Summary of Findings

17 November 2016

**First-St. Andrew's United Church of Canada:
an inclusive Christian Family encouraging spiritual growth
through worship, friendship, learning and action.**

Introduction

The mandate of the Ad Hoc Planning Committee is to give leadership to FSA to define its future in a way that is sustainable, constructive and creative, guided by the values of cooperation, collaboration and spiritual growth.

The reasons for undertaking this Congregational Survey were to give the Planning Committee an understanding of whether a number of areas of possible change were supported by the congregation as a whole, and to get additional ideas for future consideration. This information will be used in part to help define strategic priorities to guide the future of FSA over the next five to ten years. These results, together with future congregational engagement opportunities will be used to articulate a strategic vision of FSA – putting into words what we want to look like as we move into the future. The purpose is not to treat the future as something that just “happens to us” but as something “we make happen”.

This survey was undertaken as a follow-up to a Town hall meeting held on October 5th to talk about the future of FSA from a number of different perspectives. The following themes were discussed and from this a number of ideas were put forward by those present.

- The role of musical worship
- The concept of campus Ministry
- The future use of FSA property and buildings
- Improving communications and transparency
- Enhancing the community profile of FSA Ministry
- Using more technology

Based on this input a congregational survey was designed and distributed both electronically and in paper/print form. As of November 11th a total of 99 surveys were returned – an excellent response! Thirty-one surveys were returned in paper form and 68 on-line.

The number and quality of the survey responses tells us that people care deeply about FSA and its future. Sincere thanks are extended to everyone who took the time to participate.

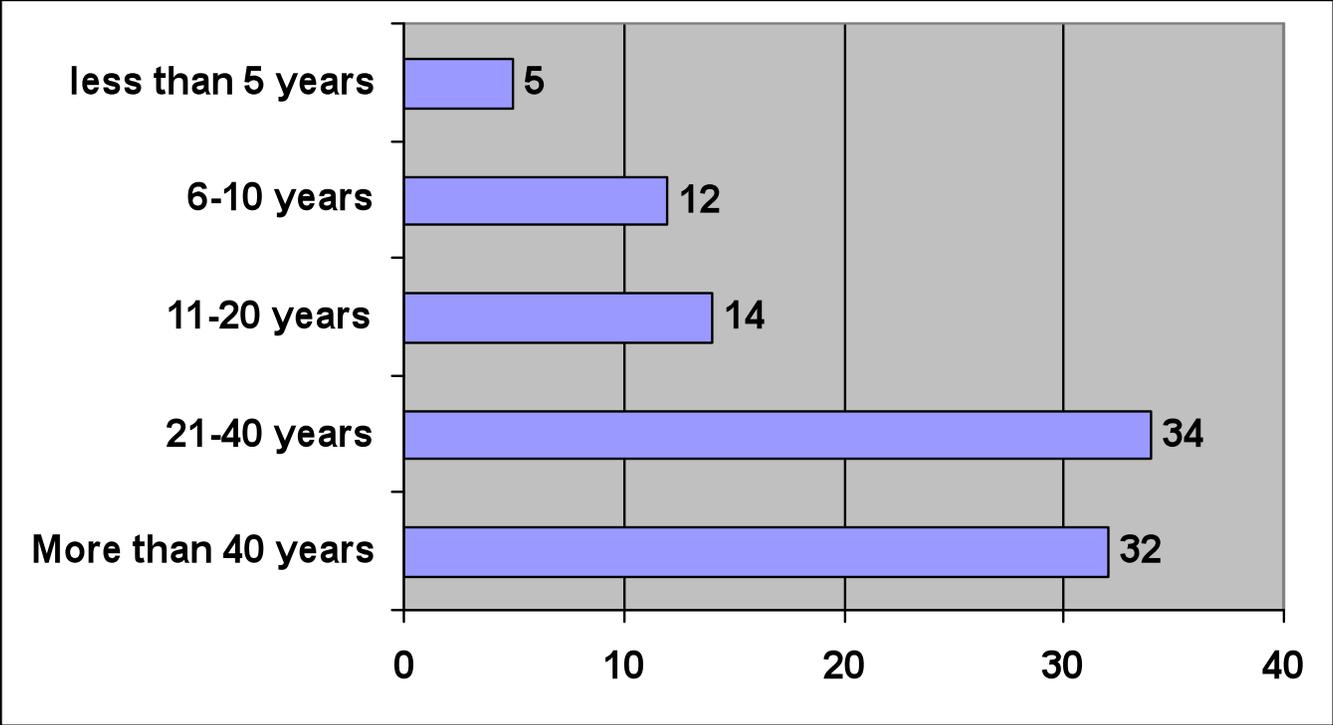
We hope that you will find the results of interest and that you will continue to be involved and engaged as the future of FSA continues to be defined and evolves.

The following pages will provide you with an outline of the responses to the questions that were put forward as well as a brief commentary. As applicable, next steps are also suggested.

Please note that additional steps will be taken to ensure the information collected is as inclusive as possible - for example, a focus group with God Squad members is proposed.

Q1 To help us gain an understanding of who is completing the survey, please use the following options to tell us how long you have been involved with FSA

Length of time involved with FSA



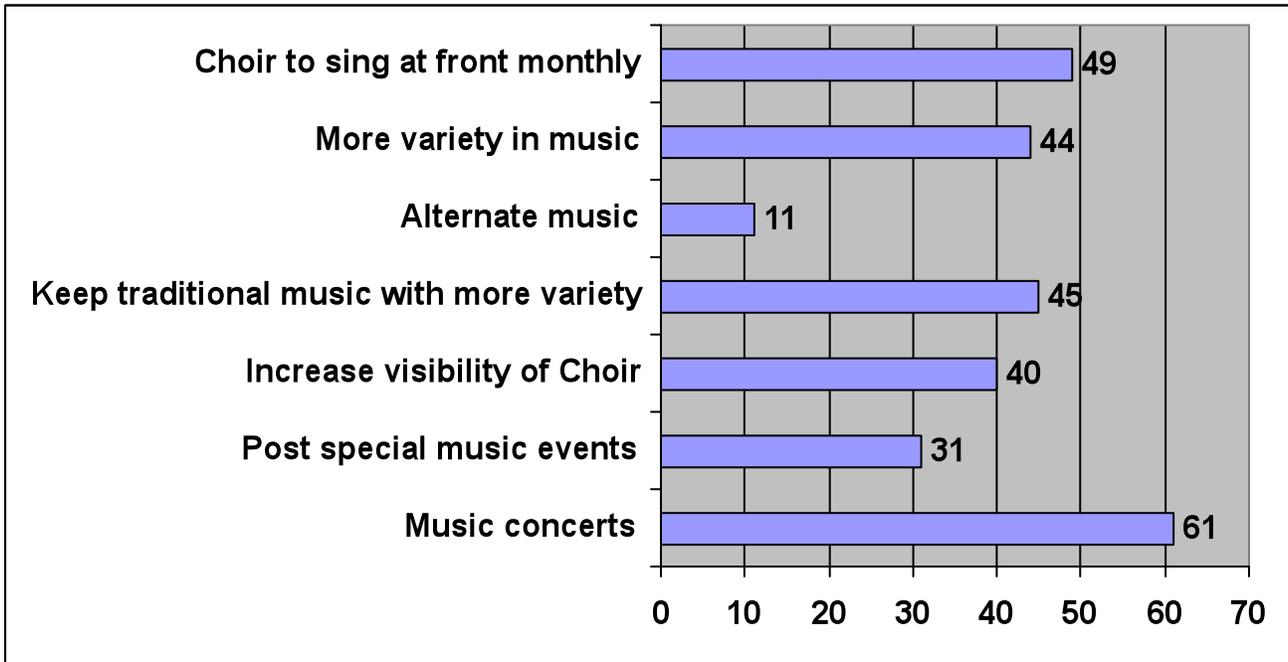
Commentary

- The responses came from a cross-section of FSA members (or participants) in terms of their years of involvement. The majority of respondents (nearly 70%) have been involved for at least 21 years. This speaks to the fact that FSA has a long-standing and loyal membership going back many years and multiple generations. An important minority of respondents (30%) have been involved for a shorter period of time.

A future challenge for FSA is to continue to be a warm and welcoming place for people who are new to the church so they can develop their own history and commitment to FSA as a place of worship and fellowship.

Q2 Please use the items listed below to let us know if you support the ideas brought forward regarding Enhancing the Musical Worship.

Enhancing the Musical Worship



(Respondents were able to check multiple responses)

Commentary

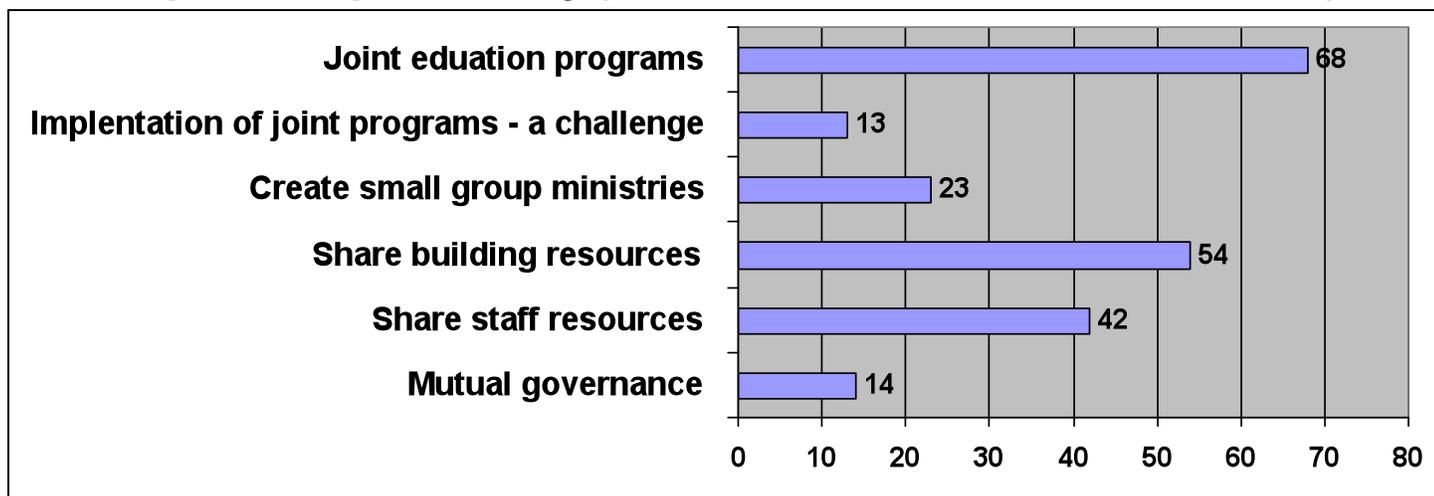
- One of the central features of FSA, in fact something that defines and sets FSA apart, is its music program – its role in the weekly worship service and well as special events. Behind the scenes many people of all ages are engaged in practices and rehearsals – to bring music and plays forward that enrich worship and give it special meaning.
- Most of the people who responded to this question are open to change, with the possible exception of “alternate music”. While this was not defined, it’s fair to say it was interpreted as bringing “rock” type to the fore – something that was seen as running counter to music at FSA as it is currently enjoyed. It is important to note that “music concerts” received the single largest expression of support from respondents. This speaks to the important role of music outside of the worship service and presents an opportunity to make FSA available to the larger London community.

A future challenge for FSA is to continue to provide music excellence that enhances and enriches the worship service, and deepens the spirituality of the worship experience, while at the same time being open to new approaches and experiences. Outside of the formal worship service, music concerts present an opportunity to enhance the visibility and musical reputation of FSA.

Suggested Next Step: Request the Worship and Music Committees to review the details of the survey results to that they can develop future recommendations and directions regarding the music programs at FSA. It is proposed that after a period of time (to be determined) a meeting be held with the Ad Hoc Planning Committee to jointly discuss the outcome of the review, including future plans and possibilities.

Q3 Please use the options listed below to give us your feedback on the following ideas concerning the Concept of Campus Ministry (collaboration with other neighbouring United Churches).

Concept of Campus Ministry (collaboration with other United Churches)



(Respondents were able to check multiple responses)

Commentary

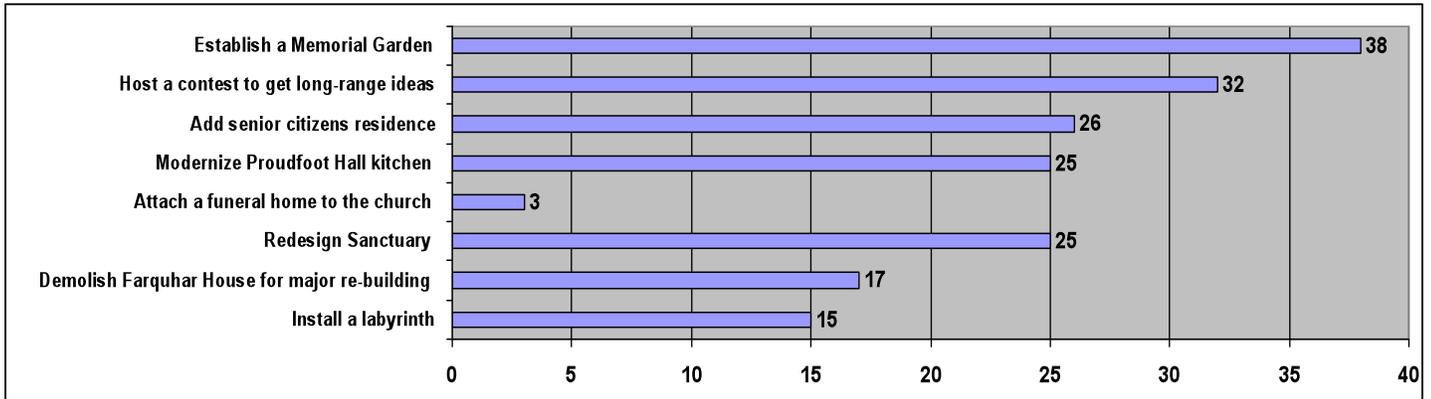
- Although the use of the term Campus Ministry outside of a university setting might not be familiar to many, the concept of sharing resources with others, and the examples given, tried to clarify this (not always successfully).
- It is clear from the responses that there was overwhelming support for joint education programs with other neighbouring United Churches. This could build on the special events that are currently being shared to include other events as well as on-going programs. Sharing building resources also received strong support. Both ideas, as well as others, provide an exciting outreach opportunity that is focused on developing closer relationships with sister congregations.

A future challenge for FSA is to be able to think of the possibilities of engaging and partnering with neighbouring churches on special occasions and on an on-going basis. This is something that is broadly applicable across FSA and was broadly supported.

Suggested Next Steps: Request each standing committee of FSA to identify opportunities to expand or initiate partnership opportunities with neighbouring United Church congregations – through both special events and on-going programs as it applies to their mandate. One follow-up to this committee-level activity could be to engage with the leadership and congregations of neighbouring churches.

Q4 Please use the options listed below to give us your feedback on the following topic: Re-Purposing the FSA Property and Buildings.

Re-Purposing the FSA Property and Buildings



(Respondents were able to check multiple responses)

Commentary

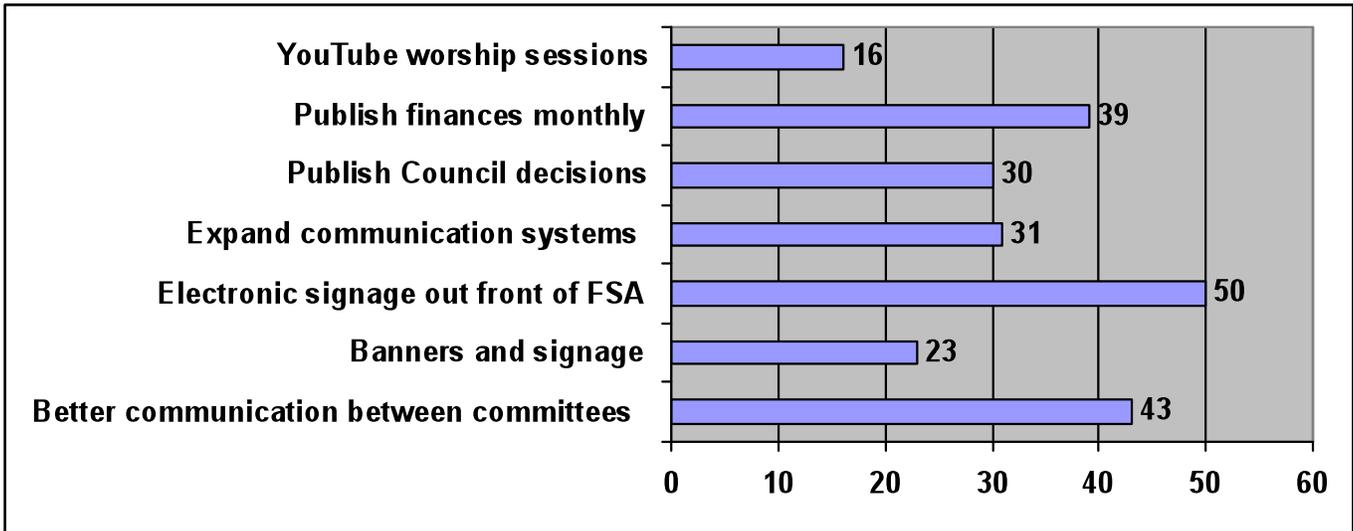
- This question was the most controversial of all the questions in the survey, likely because it put forward some options that are radically different from today. Some respondents made the point, quite emphatically, that repurposing the church might be in conflict with its historical designation or repurposing in some cases would require rezoning. A number of these suggestions came from what people have seen done elsewhere. None of the suggestions was supported by a majority of respondents.
- There is no doubt that some of the suggestions put forward would require significant resources and planning and would require a detailed business case before an informed decision could be made. The underlying theme behind these suggestions is that FSA consider using the existing footprint of FSA differently. The suggestion of soliciting repurposing ideas from outsiders received some support
- Several suggestions – modernizing the Proudfoot Hall kitchen, installing a labyrinth, establishing a memorial garden suggest ways to enhance the existing property and make it more attractive and useful. These are suggestions that could be acted on in the near future.

A future challenge for FSA is to think creatively about how the current building and property could be used as effectively as possible to meet the changing and future needs of the congregation and the community it serves.

Suggested Next Step: Request the Property Committee to examine the future of the FSA property and buildings and develop specific recommendations focused on immediate, short term and longer term actions and optional futures. It is proposed that a meeting be held with the Ad Hoc Planning Committee to jointly discuss the outcome of the review, including future plans and possibilities.

Q5 Please review and give us your feedback on the ideas listed below regarding: Improving Communication and Transparency.

Improving Communication and Transparency



(Respondents were able to check multiple responses)

Commentary

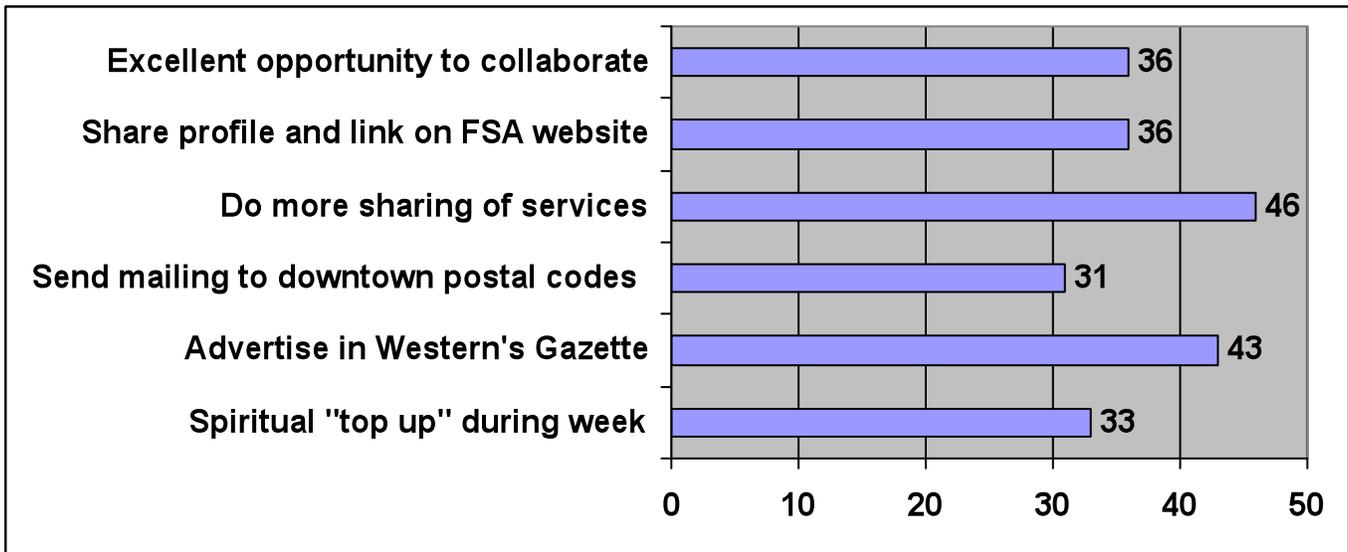
- At the Town Hall meeting a number of suggestions were put forward to improve communications and transparency. Some of these focused on internal communications while others were externally or outreach focused. Of all the suggestions having electronic signage received most support followed by better communication between committees.
- Effective communication both internally and externally is essential to engage the congregation of FSA and the larger community. Some of the suggestions made are intended to offer different ways to communicate while others focus on communicating specific content – for example, finances and Council decisions.
- Opportunities to reach out to people who cannot or do not currently attend church is now possible using electronic media, more so than ever before. This theme is a corollary of the earlier comments concerning outreach and community engagement. They are mutually reinforcing. The success of the FSA website and eBlast illustrate ways in which technology is being used to improve and expand communication and transparency.

A future challenge for FSA is to continue to improve information sharing within FSA in order to foster the on-going understanding and engagement of the FSA congregation. Equally important is the challenge to explore and implement ways to improve the visibility of FSA in the community.

Suggested Next Step: Request the FSA Communications & Marketing Committee to take a leadership role in following up on the suggestions brought forward through this survey AND that the FSA Council take a leadership role in fostering inter-committee communication and collaboration. This is particularly important given the FSA-wide leadership role of Council. It is also proposed that after a meeting be held with the Ad Hoc Planning Committee to jointly discuss the outcome of the deliberations, including actions, future plans and possibilities.

Q6 Please review the ideas listed below regarding Enhancing the Community Profile of our Ministry and indicate any items you support.

Enhancing the Community Profile of our Ministry



(Respondents were able to check multiple responses)

Commentary

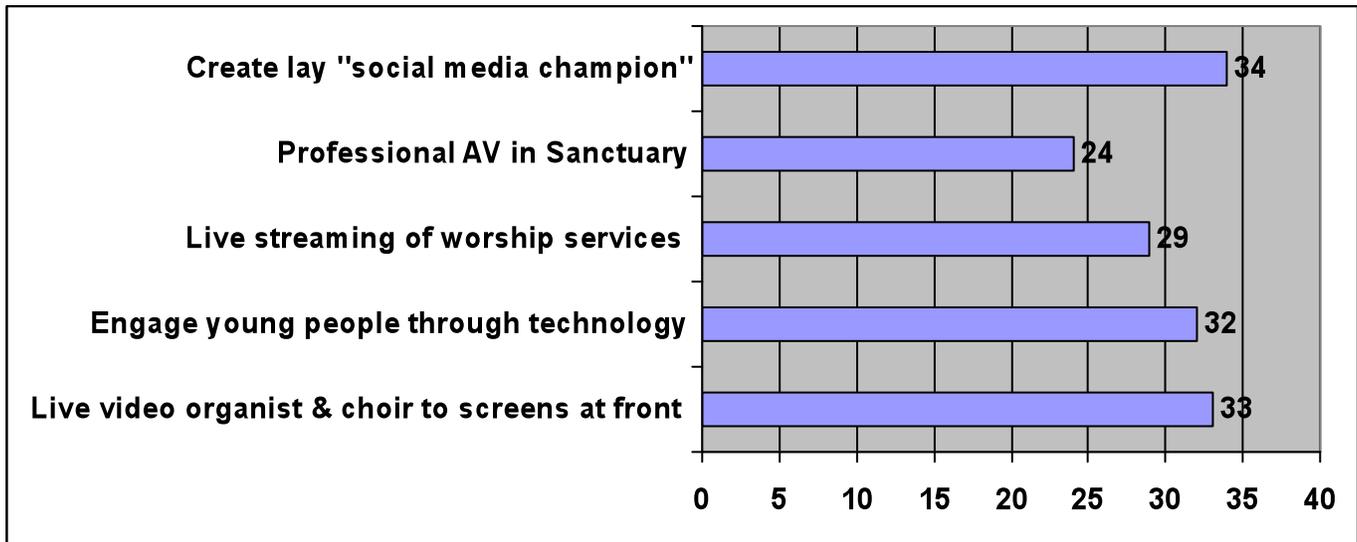
- This question focused on opportunities to enhance the community profile of FSA and its Ministry. The suggestions put forward at the Town Hall were quite specific and a number were supported through the survey responses.
- The notion of spiritual “top up” sessions is a combination of outreach and an opportunity for congregational members. The idea of sharing services and learning sessions fits nicely with Question #3 – Collaboration with other United Churches. The idea of leveraging the FSA website is good example of using existing communication tools to foster community awareness of FSA and its spiritual message.

A future challenge of FSA is develop and implement creative ways to enhance the visibility of FSA’s Ministry and find ways to attract and engage the community from a spiritual perspective.

Suggested Next Steps: Request the Worship and Communications & Marketing Committees to explore together, in more detail, opportunities to enhance the profile of the FSA Ministry. It is also proposed that a meeting be held with the Ad Hoc Planning Committee to jointly discuss the outcome of the review, including future plans and possibilities.

Q7 Please review the items listed below regarding Using More Technology.

Using More Technology



(Respondents were able to check multiple responses)

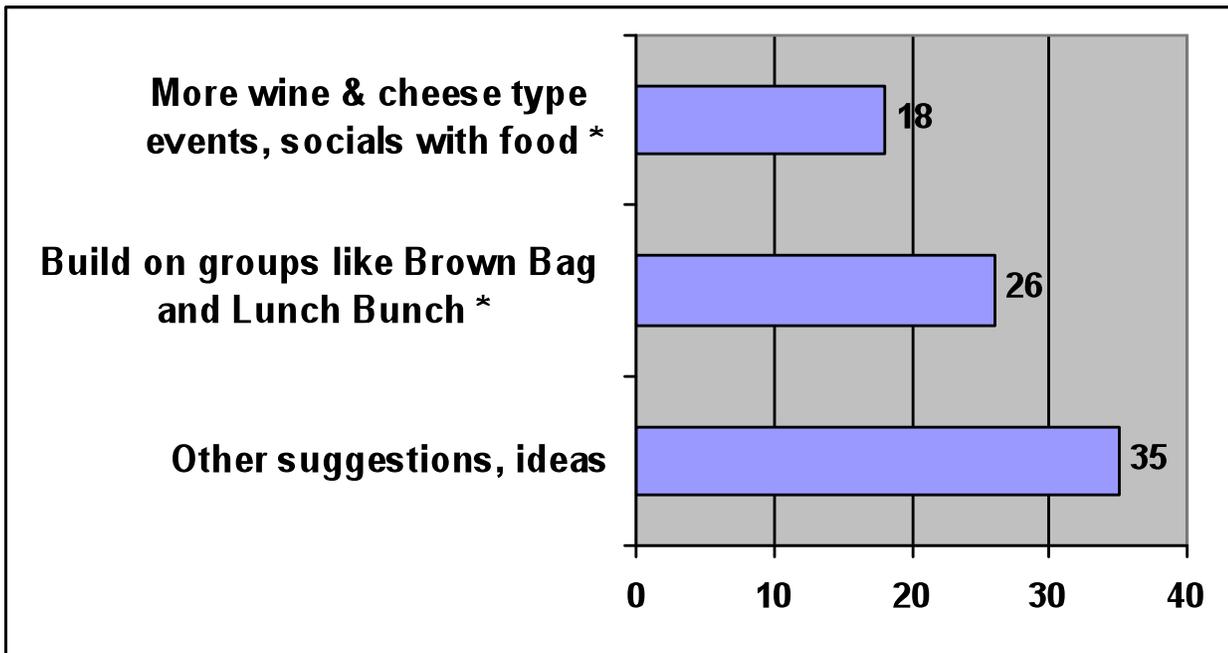
Commentary

- There was some overlap between the suggestions put forward in this question and some of the earlier ones.
- As noted earlier there are many different and emerging ways in which technology can be used to engage people. Having said this, some comments made in response to this question indicated that it is important that technology be used to serve the needs and interests of FSA and not interfere or drive it.
- As it applies to the worship experience in particular, technology needs to be evaluated and applied in terms of its ability to enhance the spiritual experience of those who attend worship – this is the yardstick against which it should be assessed.

A future challenge for FSA is to recognize the value and contribution technology can make while recognizing that it is a tool to serve the spiritual mission of FSA.

Suggested Next Steps: Request the Worship and Communications & Marketing Committees to assess the future role of technology at FSA as part of its mandate. It is also proposed that a meeting be held with the Ad Hoc Planning Committee to jointly discuss the outcome of the review, including future plans and possibilities.

Q8 The following are additional ideas that were noted at the Town hall meeting. Please review and check those you support.



** In error, the way this question was structured did not allow respondents to check both given responses. Fortunately, many respondents indicated that they supported both suggestions in the comments section of this question.*

Other suggestions:

- Teen’s homemade soup challenge was a wonderful hit. The Hootenanny was another family-friendly event that drew all age groups and was really fun for all, from toddlers to seniors
- Lunch after church
- Sunday evening special meals
- Lecture series last year drew a good audience
- Pot lucks open to everyone, all ages
- I support "food-based" groups that bring people together, and I fully support the groups already functioning well.
- FSA needs to think beyond the sanctuary and Sunday services, which it does through MOE and a few other smaller activities, but it needs to find a way to make its presence known in the greater community.
- Could we have family-friendly movie nights with supper or Sunday afternoon after church services and lunch?
- Create more non-worship related groups that appeal to a younger generation. For example, a daytime Mom/Dad/Caregiver drop-in playgroup or an outdoor hiking group (a child friendly one, an adult only one and a dog friendly one). And

have monthly/yearly events such as "Yoga and Wine night" or "Young Entrepreneurs social" or "Lego/Minecraft/Pokemon Night" or "Fun Fair" or "Variety Shows" or "Social Club" - I enjoy the lessons, learning and reflection, but that is not why I want to be a member of a church. I want to be a part of something bigger than me. I want to have a place where my family can socialize and meet other people with similar interests. I want to have fun at church services. I want to be introduced to more opportunities within my community. I want my children to have close friends and want to come church. I want to learn more about how to worship in this changing world.

- More congregational suppers with a program/entertainment (poetry reading, script recitations, comical topics, youth presentations).
- It is by building community that we will build up our congregation. Community does occur with shared experiences like over food and social events.

Commentary

- The social functions of FSA build community and a sense of belonging and fellowship. These events provide an opportunity to engage existing FSA members as well as introduce new people and the broader community to FSA.
- Activities that bring people together in small and larger groups should continue to be supported and encouraged.

A continuing challenge for FSA is to continue to explore ways of building community through social events and to continue to be creative by using the many talents and gifts that members of FSA have to offer.

Suggested Next Steps: Continue to offer a wide variety of social events of interest to specific groups and the congregation as a whole. Ensure that these events are known and recognized in different ways – for example, feature stories in Tidings, postings and stories on the FSA web site, Facebook postings etc. These can be shared with other congregations and the general public.

As a final note, 24 respondents added additional comments at the end of the survey. Some commented on the survey itself, other offered additional ideas to respond to the future needs of FSA. These comments, along with all the others will be taken forward for additional consideration and review.

Current members of the Ad Hoc Planning Committee: Steve Elson, Rev. Michelle Down, Barrie Evans, Don Jones, Michael Mandich, Bob Slater, and Bob Swartman

Conclusion

This survey was intended to engage the FSA congregation in thinking about and giving input into the future of FSA. From the perspective of having almost 100 responses to the survey it has been an unqualified success. As such the responses provide an important base on which to continue to plan the future of FSA.

As part of the commentary a number of next steps have been suggested. There are a number of immediate, short-term actions that can be taken. However, the defining feature, from a future perspective is that these actions need to be grounded by a strategic vision for FSA and related strategic priorities. While this phase has not yet been started, it will be part of the next steps undertaken by the Planning Committee. In the meantime, the following guiding principles are put forward to help guide this process:

- While the future is always uncertain, FSA has the opportunity and need to be proactive in defining its future and its role as a United Church congregation in the City of London, both locally and globally.
- The spiritual quality of the worship experience, for most, is at the core of their church experience and it serves as an important focal point for spiritual growth and development – this should not only continue but should be enhanced.
- Music both within and outside of worship is a signature program of FSA and one that needs to continue to be celebrated and expanded.
- There are new and innovative ways to bring the worship experience to those who cannot attend in person. Outreach of this kind serves the changing needs of the congregation, and offers the opportunity to carry the message of worship beyond traditional boundaries.
- There are many ways in which people connect with FSA outside of the worship service. New and creative ways of building on past successes in this area provide opportunities to build community and make FSA attractive to people who might not know what FSA has to offer.
- There are opportunities to build on FSA's strong tradition of community and world outreach by collaborating and partnering with neighbouring United Churches. This outreach, within the community of United Churches offers the opportunity to enhance the visibility and understanding of what FSA has to offer and vice versa.
- Effective communication is the cornerstone being able to share the spirit of FSA internally and externally. As a Christian community communication is at the heart of building and sustaining an effective sense of belonging. The responsibility to foster this is a responsibility that belongs to everyone and is a shared mandate among all leaders within FSA. Further exploration of how technology can foster communication is warranted.

Comments about this report can be directed to Steve Elson, Chair of the Ad Hoc Planning Committee at stephenelson2@gmail.com.