

The background of the cover is a photograph of the First & Central Presbyterian Church. It is a large, historic brick building with a prominent white portico supported by columns. A tall, dark steeple with a cross on top rises from the roof. To the right, a modern glass skyscraper is visible. In the foreground, a sign is posted on a brick wall, and several people are standing near the church entrance.

First & Central Presbyterian Church

Mission Study Report

*A process of discernment
during pastoral transition*

April 21, 2021





Foreword:

Without a doubt, 2020 was a year unlike any other for First & Central Presbyterian Church. In a short span, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the merger of two of Wilmington's heritage congregations, we shut the building as COVID-19 moved into the community, our beloved pastor of seventeen years announced his departure, and a civil rights demonstration turned violent just blocks from our building in downtown Wilmington.

And yet, we are an Easter people. The church has found new ways to minister to its membership, adding two weekly prayer services, one in person and one online, along with pre-recorded liturgy and music for Sunday worship. We found new ways to take a stand for peace and justice, partnering with another downtown congregation in monthly silent walks. We found new ways of governing, with Session taking a much more assertive role in the absence of a guiding pastor. And we held each other in Christ's love, even when we could not hug each other during our passing of the peace.

The past year has brought our church, perhaps more than any other year, to a critical inflection point as we seek our next pastor. We are no longer content to coast on the trajectory of our past, but seek ways to bend the curve toward a more vibrant future. We will act out our faith, walking alongside our pastor and walking into the neighborhoods around us.

The theme of that 100th anniversary celebration was taken from Hebrews 12: "Let us run the race with perseverance." Put on your shoes, and help us dance toward the finish line.



A detail of the "Christ in the City" liturgical art displayed in the sanctuary.

Table of Contents

FOREWORD:	2
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION	4
A CHURCH AT THE CROSSROADS	4
NEW VISION, NEW MISSION	5
THE PROCESS	5
THE DISCERNMENT	6
SECTION II: DISCERNING THE MIND OF THE CONGREGATION	7
THE CHURCH FROM ITS FOUNDING	7
THE LEGACY OF RECENT YEARS.....	8
THE PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH.....	9
THE WORSHIP AND MISSION LIFE OF THE CHURCH.....	10
<i>Worship and music</i>	10
<i>Education and mission</i>	11
<i>Public engagement</i>	13
CONGREGATIONAL STUDIES AND SURVEYS	13
SECTION III: DISCERNING THE ASSETS OF THE CONGREGATION	14
THE CHURCH STAFF	14
GIFTS OF THE MEMBERSHIP	14
THE PHYSICAL FACILITY	15
FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND LIABILITIES	17
SECTION IV: DISCERNING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY	17
A CONGREGATION AT THE CROSSROADS	17
DETAILED DEMOGRAPHICS, UTILIZING THE MISSIONINSITE DATABASE	19
THE CITY AND ITS NEEDS	19
SECTION V: DISCERNING THE CALL FOR A PASTOR	21
THE VOICE OF THE CONGREGATION	21
THE SHAPE OF THE CALL	22
DANCING INTO OUR CALL	22
APPENDIX I: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSES	23
APPENDIX II: BUDGET AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION	23
APPENDIX III: COMPILATION OF MISSIONINSITE DEMOGRAPHICS DATA	23

Section I: Introduction

A church at the crossroads

As 2020 began, First & Central was, by most accounts, in a stable place and feeling optimistic. The Rev. Dr. Doug Gerdts had completed his 16th year as pastor. A targeted mission study ("Vision 2020") completed in 2019, with a high level of congregational participation, revealed high satisfaction with the church and church leadership as a whole, revealed some healthy differences of opinion around how we allocate resources, named challenges (such as a lack of young families and children and lack of ethnic and racial diversity), and set out specific actions to address those challenges, which Session had begun to take.

On March 1 the congregation celebrated the 100th anniversary of the merger of First Presbyterian Church (Wilmington's first Presbyterian congregation) and Central Presbyterian (a 19th-century offshoot of another congregation), the culmination of two years of preparation and special events. U.S. Senator and member Chris Coons delivered the sermon, the choir and congregation sang a new hymn commissioned for the event, and the church celebrated with a festive luncheon in Memorial Hall, looking fondly on its past and with hope toward its future.



The anniversary gala luncheon

When Session met on March 9, the pronouncement of a pandemic required us to put in place safety and hygiene protocols to be used in upcoming church services, but by that Friday the governor recommended a complete shutdown of public gatherings, and we complied. Rev. Gerdts quickly prepared a means of worshipping from home, recording a short, one-person liturgy and homily. Session began meeting regularly by Zoom, sometimes twice a week.

On April 2, at the end of one of these called meetings dealing with the pandemic, Rev. Gerdts announced, quite unexpectedly, that he was leaving to take a position as transitional pastor in New Jersey, with his last active Sunday on May 21. Session worked quickly to set up the church for transitional ministry, and added a mid-week online prayer gathering and a short outdoors in-person worship service on Sunday mornings, to help keep the congregation connected. Worship with the traditional liturgy moved to a pre-recorded format with music, led by a talented group of retired pastors associated with the congregation. We have been unable to hold an appropriate farewell for Rev. Gerdts.

Then, on May 25, George Floyd was choked to death by a kneeling Minneapolis police officer. The country was again shaken to its core by another brutal example of the injustice felt by people of color, in this nation that professes that all people are created equal. The immediate response in Wilmington included several peaceful protest marches, but on Saturday, May 30, a protest turned destructive, and Wilmington felt the turmoil of so many cities that night. The damage was greatest just blocks from our doors, a blow that called us to make an immediate response. A few members of Session took the initiative in pairing with another downtown congregation, the Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew (SsAM), in holding a silent walk for justice and peace, first on the auspicious “Juneteenth” date of June 19 and then on subsequent “first Fridays” each month.

As the work of this task force began, the church was still shaken by these aligned events. The church was not just at a crossroads, but at an inflection point, where even reestablishing the trajectory of the past seemed the wrong course. In this environment, the task force (under the guidance of our interim pastor, the Rev. Dr. Sam Massey) undertook a deep examination of the church, its vision, and its mission. Guided by faith, and with the support of a talented interim pastor and a dedicated Session, we have sought the bold path.

New Vision, New Mission

As we reached the point of drafting this report, team members considered putting new vision and mission statements into a few words: working phrases that might someday coalesce into authorized language capturing the essence of a new First & Central. While we considered a few ideas, and developed some key phrases that made their way into this report, we felt it better to leave the work of crystallizing our new mission to the next administrators of the church.

To be fair, there is much good in the essence of the 2019-era life of First & Central. As affirmed by the Vision 2020 report and our own recent research, members are rightfully proud of being an open, accepting church, in keeping with our 25-year-old motto: “A Church Without Walls that Welcomes Without Limits.” Our legacy of high-quality preaching and highly-regarded music programs are foundational to the church’s identity. We hold to our progressive tradition of full inclusion of LGBTQ+ membership as a More Light congregation and a founding member of the Covenant Network. First & Central extends hospitality to our unhoused neighbors in both opening the church on Saturdays for Winter Sanctuary and supporting local mission that provides for the poor and marginalized children of God.

And yet there is some creak in the bones of these mottos and brands. We are not the church we were 25 years ago, and we most certainly will not be that same church 25 years hence.

The work of the Transition Task Force, then, was to undertake a mission study that reached beyond our recent past and into a short-term future. A new pastor must be willing to aid in our transformation, a change that has already begun.

The Process

In advance of his arrival as Interim Pastor, the Rev. Massey guided Session toward selecting a team of six persons to become this task force. At its November 2020 meeting, Session elected a talented and energetic team, but we also recognize that this is a team skewed toward an older population and sadly lacking in racial diversity. (We hope that this can be remedied in election of a Pastor Nominating Committee.)

The Transition Task Force members are:

Terry Dykstra is the retired executive director of the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Baltimore, and served as a volunteer mission-coworker in Kenya for eight years alongside her husband, the Rev. Dr. Lyle Dykstra.

William Hathaway and his wife, the Rev. Dr. Alison Halsey, are both PC(USA) pastors who retired, moved to Wilmington, and became active within the congregation in 2018.

Mark Olson was ordained as a ruling elder in 1986 and has been a member of First & Central since 2009. He is a semi-retired lawyer, has served New Castle Presbytery in a number of roles, and currently chairs First & Central's Finance Committee and is President of the Board of Trustees.

Sarah Ryan is a former elementary school teacher and an education consultant who has been a member of First & Central for thirteen years. She and her husband, Rob Wieman, have three children (now 22, 20, and 17) who grew up attending First & Central. Sarah has taught Sunday School, served on the children, youth, and parenting committee, and chaired a committee that created a vision for an urban mission program.

David Teager, serving as chair, is an elder who joined the church not long after joining its choir with his now-husband, Stephen Fugate. A PhD chemist, David's career has been largely in pharmaceutical R&D. He currently chairs the Membership Development Committee and maintains the church website.

Jeanette Price Zipf is a lifelong member of the church, was ordained as a deacon and elder, and has served on nearly every board and committee, including nine years as Clerk of Session. She is retired from a career in communications, and for the last thirty years worked in the visitor services and education divisions at several local museums and gardens.

The team met regularly from mid-November 2020 to April 2021, both as a committee of the whole and in two subcommittees. After an initial period of prayer, study, and reflection, the task force worked on gathering the information needed for this mission study, as shown in the three next sections of this report.

The ongoing work was presented at the annual meeting of the congregation on February 21 via Zoom. The program included a 20-minute break-out period, where facilitators sought reaction to the presentation. Response from the congregation (see Section IV) was very positive, such that the task force felt ready to prepare the Mission Study Report.

The Discernment

Here we are, Lord. First & Central is at an inflection point: we will need to change. We have been catapulted into considering a new way of doing things that we don't begin to understand.¹ It feels like a shock to our system. We are trying to map out the new territory.

The faith we share is strong. We are ready to do some probing, some real exploration, some hard questioning. We actually can cope with change because we trust in God's guidance. Our members have been called to bring their adventurous spirit to the discussion because the landscape of faith demands it. We want to proclaim that, after 100 years, we are still here for a reason.

First, we must open ourselves to the diverse communities that surround us. We might describe what we need as something like a conversion experience: we must open ourselves to the potential of the Gospel. Such conversion is a matter of developing what Toni Morrison calls a "dancing mind." Dancing minds move through the new creation gracefully. They are rigorous and open as they engage the head, heart, and legs.

We are not solo hikers in the wilderness of faith. Emilie Townes¹ says that the beloved community provides occasion for conversion as we become friends of people with different experiences, ideas, and cultures—as we enlarge our vision of God and the world through openness to new perspectives and people. God meets us in community and gives us strength to ask the hard questions we need to ask in order to dance.

As First & Central changes, we will engage with our neighbors in the surrounding community and with other churches, friends and strangers alike; we will think larger, bigger, wider—and recognize that we will find God there, in new forms of service and in new forms of worship. We will continue to be a place of welcome, but our

¹ Portions of this section were inspired by Benjamin D. Wayman, "[Imagining the future of theological education](#)" with Emilie Townes, Justo Gonzalez, Sam Well, Rowan Williams, *The Christian Century*, vol. 138, no. 4, February 24, 2021.

beloved “church without walls” must open even wider to embrace the community that surrounds us. By doing the hard work of facing hard questions, we develop legs to dance.

We recognize that First & Central has heard this call to change before, even as recently as the Vision 2020 study. The past year has made the call impossible to ignore. The work of change can be painful, but it can be beautiful. Following the Spirit requires discernment. It requires courage. We believe First & Central is up to the task.

We encourage the Pastor Nominating Committee to bring us a pastor who is equal to that task.

Section II: Discerning the mind of the congregation

The church from its founding

First Presbyterian Church was founded in 1737, the same year as the Borough of “Willingtown.” The fledgling congregation built an iconic, one-room structure in 1739 just south of 10th Street on Market Street. A burial ground followed, as well as a manse, and by 1838, the congregation had outgrown its first home. A second First Presbyterian Church was built at the corner of 9th and Market. The original building, fondly known as “The Little Church,” was moved in 1918 to a site on the Brandywine River, now a landmark in the Midtown Brandywine neighborhood. Our congregation has worshipped there once a year in recent times, connecting us to our past.



Central Presbyterian was organized by New Castle Presbytery in 1855 at the request of members of the Hanover Street Church, itself an off-shoot of First Presbyterian. The new church (at left) at 8th and King Streets flourished, increasing its membership from 91 to 250 in just seven years.

In 1919, New Castle Presbytery approved the merger of the two congregations, supporting the stated need for the union “in order to prevent duplication of work, duplication of expense, and ‘to do a bigger work in a better way.’” After all, the congregations were only a few blocks apart. On March 3, 1920, the two congregations worshipped together for the first time. Planning began for a new building at 11th and Market, which was dedicated in October 1930.

In the 100 years since that first worship service together, First & Central has remained an active, progressive congregation. Yet times have not always been easy; you may read more of our history on our [website](#). In the past four decades, we have survived the loss of three beloved pastors: by accidental death (Tom Thorne, 1977), by prolonged illness (Vin Harwell, in 2001), and now by unexpected departure (Doug Gerdts).

The legacy of recent years

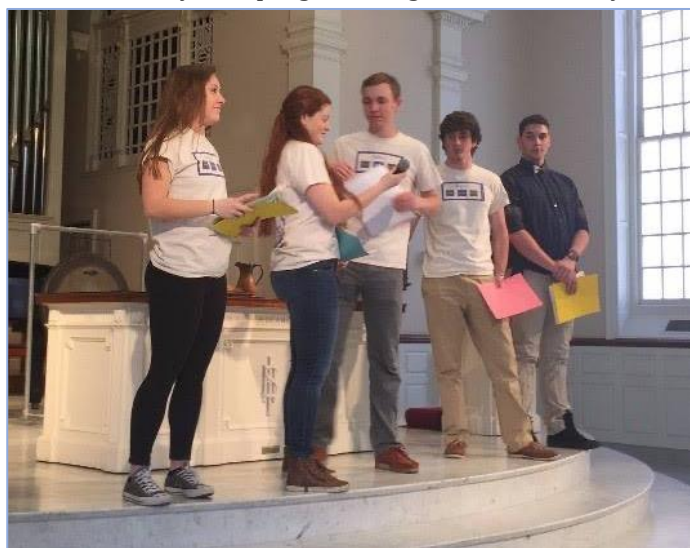
Vin Harwell was a talented minister, building up the congregation by bringing in new members, many of whom were not previously Presbyterian. During his time the church underwent two significant renovations: installation of the current [pipe organ](#), and reconfiguration of the sanctuary chancel, office, and meeting-room spaces, including installation of an elevator and other changes to make the church ADA-compliant.

With Rev. Harwell's illness and subsequent death from cancer, the congregation entered a very difficult time. The search for Vin's successor was halted by the Presbytery, which stopped short of giving an Administrative Commission original jurisdiction but which worked to keep the church together. The departure of the Associate Pastor allowed the pastoral search to continue, resulting in the call to the Rev. Doug Gerds.

Doug came to us as a second-career pastor, who put his first-career experience in the hospitality industry to good use. The clouds of dissent were quickly dismissed. Membership began to recover at a time when most congregations were shedding members, making First & Central a notable success story in PC(USA) circles. Doug completed a Doctor of Ministry degree, with a dissertation focusing on urban ministry.

During this time the church, for the first time in very many years, was a one-pastor church. Some roles typically given to an Associate Pastor were taken by a succession of a part-time pastor, a seminary student, and finally by Kaci Clark-Porter, a seminary graduate who came to New Castle Presbytery with her wife, Holly, under the Presbytery's [FIRST](#) program (now inactive). Kaci and Holly were ordained at First & Central in a joint ceremony in 2015, which we believe was the first joint ordination of female spouses in PC(USA) history. Kaci was ordained as the Associate Pastor, serving part-time.

During this period, we maintained many well-attended programs, including programs for youth of all ages. From 2003 to 2018, youth programming included Sunday School, an Orff instrument music program, confirmation



The youth groups leads a worship service in 2017.

classes, a youth group for middle and high school students, and a Christmas Eve Service designed for families with children. Each summer, the youth group took part in a weeklong mission trip. Adult programming included both a Women's Spirituality Group (weekly) and a Men's Group (monthly); adult mission trips to Louisiana, Texas, West Virginia, and Cuba; and a "Mission at Home" program, providing carpentry services to Wilmington residents in need. We also maintained our close relationship with [Friendship House](#), providing food and shelter on Saturday mornings during the winter to those experiencing homelessness, providing meals for their Epiphany House residents, and participating in annual fundraising walks.

Around 2015 the church received an unexpected bequest of \$1.4 million from the Walker family. A study group sought discernment for how best to use these funds, which led to plans for renovating parts of the church, notably the kitchen and Memorial Hall. The work was to be funded largely through a capital campaign, the first in the modern church's history, in order to protect much of the Walker bequest. While the campaign goal was not met, the construction project, reduced somewhat from its initial plan, was completed in 2017.

In 2018, Doug requested that Session reduce his own hours to part-time, while increasing Kaci's to near full-time, a move that puzzled many church members. The congregation began to voice some unease about the succession plan for both Doug (then about 60 years old) and Minister of Music David Schelat, although both

assured the congregation that they were not expecting to retire soon. In late 2018, Session directed a small group, with the Rev. Bill Hathaway as consultant, to begin mission study known as Vision 2020, seeking to discern the path for the church in years to come. Prior to the completion of this work, in the spring of 2019, Kaci announced she and Holly were leaving to serve as co-pastors of a church in El Paso, Texas, their home state. This brought some doubt to the clarity of the Vision 2020 report, as we were now a single-pastor church, and were not immediately making plans to replace the Associate Pastor. Session and the congregation restored Doug to full-time status. The report was submitted in July 2019, and Session began working on its recommendations.

As a people of God, we do survive. On March 1, 2020, we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the congregation with a joyous worship service and festive lunch. Senator Chris Coons offered a sermon on the Hebrews text of “running the great race,” our theme for the anniversary celebration. Little did we know that in two weeks, the world would change and the energy and anticipation of our future would be put on hold. Still, we continue to seek our mission to our neighborhood and beyond. We have great physical assets and a membership that is small and mighty, continually seeking “to do a bigger work in a better way.”

The people of the church

First & Central is not a neighborhood church (see Section IV below). While the building is in the city center, surrounded by commercial property and predominantly Black neighborhoods, we are a predominantly white congregation, yet with more racial diversity than many, with African-American and Latinx members. We are not titans of industry, nor underprivileged, but are largely educated, middle-class, and aging. (See table below.)

On a typical Sunday (looking back to early 2020), the choir of about 22 voices comprises nearly 25% of the worshippers during its singing season. Most choristers are church members or friends. The Sunday worshipping congregation is about 20% gay or lesbian, almost all of whom are couples or spouses. (We note that the congregation continued to ordain gay and lesbian members even during the days of “Amendment B.”) Slightly more than half (about 55%) of the membership is female. While we have many long-term (even cradle roll) members, we have also had a somewhat transient population: new arrivals to the city who work in the commercial center may join us and then either move to another city or find a closer church home in the suburbs.



Receiving new members, 2017

Approximately 65 members are ordained as elders, deacons, or both. Elders and deacons, both those currently serving on Session or in reserve, are committed to committee work. We are blessed to be a congregation that attracts retired clergy; currently six are regular attendees. In recent years five seminarians have spent time under our care, not including the Rev. Clark-Porter; three have now been ordained as Ministers of the Word and Sacrament and the fourth graduates from seminary this spring. In particular the Rev. Shannon Hanson maintains ties to First & Central, being ordained by the Presbytery to a Ministry of Reconciliation.

When the pandemic hit, we were participants in the Presbytery’s “[Unglued Church](#)” project and had identified ourselves as a Matthew 25 congregation. We anticipate resuming these initiatives when pandemic restrictions subside. Elder Rourke Moore, at [Community Presbyterian Church](#), has been a colleague in this work.

Our PC(USA) demographics for 2019 appear incomplete, but the [data](#) for 2018 are correct, giving a view of the ethnic and racial make-up of our congregation. The current age breakdown is below. Note that the Session made a purge of the rolls in 2019, shown in the drop in membership. As noted in the history section above, the church did see a rebound in membership in the late 2000s, but growth slowed and has reversed in the subsequent decade.

Age distribution	2018	2021
25 years or younger	19	8
26-40 years	50	30
41-55 years	26	28
56-70 years	53	57
Over 70 years	59	41
Total active members	207	164

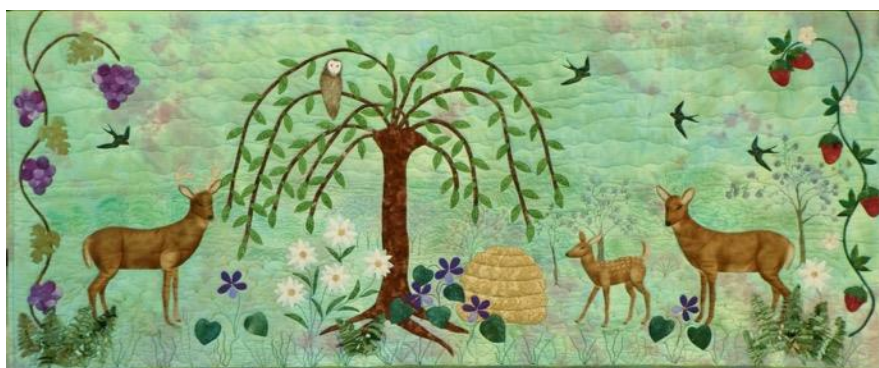
Sunday attendance for 2020 is, of course, not measurable as in typical years. Prior to that the Sunday attendance has been, for the academic program year, consistent at near 50% of the number of active members. (That is to say, in 2019, average Sunday attendance was 85-90.) As our church community is close to the beach, summer attendance is generally lower, with attendance in the 60s. On the other hand, the 100th anniversary service in 2020 had 147 people in attendance.

For 2020, we can note the number of views of worship services on YouTube. These have typically been reaching 65-100 views, but numbers have dropped recently. A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols presented at Christmastime has reached 217 views. The Sunday morning prayer service added during the pandemic has consistently seen 20-25 attendees, whether held outside or inside (socially distanced seating). Attendance (via Zoom) at our Explorers Forum education series has actually increased during the pandemic, both due to convenience of attending by computer and the engaging series being offered.

The worship and mission life of the church

Worship and music

A quality worship program is vital to the membership of the church, continually receiving the highest praise from members and the highest calls to maintain what we do so well. Preaching is, of course, the primary component of worship, but there is no doubt that the musical offerings (including robust singing of hymns) is also a cherished aspect of worship. Sunday worship follows the traditional liturgy on most Sundays, with occasional days for atypical services, such as Healing and Wholeness worship experiences or Hymn Festivals. The candlelight Christmas Eve service is a highlight of the year. The pulpit and lectern are decorated by bespoke liturgical paraments for each season, and the sanctuary now displays "Christ in the City," a large-scale quilted artwork commissioned for our anniversary jubilee, featured on page 2.



The communion table hanging for ordinary time, one of a set of commissioned liturgical artworks.

While some may describe the musical offerings as “traditional” or “classical,” there is broader variety. An anthem by Maurice Duruflé or Heinrich Schütz may be offered on the same Sunday as a rousing African-American spiritual. All will be presented well, but the spiritual is more likely to be accepted with applause or a hearty “Amen!” David Schelat and the choir are deeply dedicated to offering a glimpse of the divine during worship. The musical selections regularly include new works by David himself, who is not only a gifted conductor and performer but a recognized composer. Mr. Schelat also provides guidance when requested on the selection of hymns, which is the responsibility of the pastor. We are familiar with Taizé chant practices, and incorporate multi-cultural responsive singing regularly. The church enthusiastically embraced “Glory to God,” the newest Presbyterian hymnal, and has used many of the newer hymns it contains.

Members of the congregation and choir serve as liturgists, a role that has taken on higher importance during the pandemic, as many of these same people are leading the added Wednesday evening and Sunday morning gatherings. We have not yet determined if these additional gatherings will continue beyond pandemic times, although some continuation is likely.

In normal times, Sunday worship involves a heart-felt passing of the peace (more hugs than handshakes), and an engaged time of fellowship over coffee and treats, brought into the sanctuary after service. We are known for our welcome, and visitors may find it difficult to depart before being besieged. The attendance registers in the pews contain information to help visitors become engaged in worship, should the format is unfamiliar to them.

The Chancel Choir, and the broader music program under the aegis of Market Street Music, deserve special mention. Many local professional and amateur musicians agree that it is one of the finest choirs (not just among church choirs) in the region. It is supported by the talents of four contracted soloists; this number was as high as eight not very many years ago. Talented amateurs, several of whom had previously been paid soloists, make up the rest of the group. Pre-pandemic the choir numbered 22 singers, nearly the seating capacity of the chancel. During the first two months of summer, an all-volunteer Summer Choir offers an anthem. Many of the



Chancel Choir singers also belong to Mastersingers of Delaware, the professional-amateur choir led by Mr. Schelat as the flagship artist for Market Street Music. Market Street Music, a separate incorporated organization, includes the Center City Chorale, some of whose members have later moved into the Chancel Choir and then the membership of First & Central. That choir performs four times a year at the Thursday Noontime Concerts, a long-standing musical arts series offered to downtown workers. First & Central supports Market Street Music by providing David Schelat’s salary, and rehearsal and performance space for the artists.

The church’s worship ministry has also included monthly labyrinth walks, using a full-size Chartres-pattern labyrinth painted on canvas and set up in Memorial Hall. This ministry has its own [Facebook](#) page. This program had been suspended during the renovation of Memorial Hall, and was suspended by the pandemic, with regular participants encouraged to continue this meditative practice at home.

Education and mission

The church’s adult Christian formation series is known as Explorers Forum. This has long been a point of excellence in our church life, quite distinct from what many might expect from “Sunday School.” Organized in a series format, topics include occasional Bible studies along with deep-dive discussions with church members

and community leaders (including Wilmington's mayor) about their life experiences, conversations about race and inequality, and studies of doctrine and history. Collaborative events in Christian formation have brought guests such as Marcus Borg and Sister Helen Prejean to First & Central for weekend events.

Regular Bible study, using the week's lectionary readings, are held on Tuesday mornings. Pre-pandemic, these were held in local coffee shops (at right), but they have continued on Zoom.

The church has offered Christian formation for children in years where there have been enough children to warrant the programming. This was a responsibility of the Rev. Clark-Porter; when she left there was no one appointed to carry on the program, as indeed there were few eligible children. Youths have been given opportunities to take confirmation classes, either at First & Central alone or in conjunction with other nearby congregations. During the regular worship services, the pastor or pastors typically offered a time with children, inviting them to the chancel steps or the front pew for a lesson.

Mission work continues, and has been enhanced in recent years following completion of the most recent renovation. First & Central has provided significant financial and volunteer support for [Friendship House](#), offering Memorial Hall and a cadre of volunteers for its Winter Sanctuary program on Saturday mornings, providing hot drinks, homemade cakes and pastries, games and reading materials, and an opportunity for fellowship to individuals experiencing homelessness. Men's and women's groups alternate on providing meals for Epiphany House. Volunteers also provided "Tasty Tuesday" lunches to students in the [Urban Promise Academy](#) when it was located in the building; "fourth Sunday hunger offerings," in part, supported a breakfast program for these at-risk students. A men's group has provided and delivered monthly lunches to a day care center in the central city area; volunteers read to individual students at a charter school in a low-income neighborhood. The church also has a decades-long ministry delivering Meals on Wheels.



In recent additions to our outreach ministries, First & Central took the lead in organizing and chaperoning dances in Memorial Hall, inviting LGBTQ+ youth from northern Delaware and beyond for two events. The success of these two events was noted by the Down Syndrome Association of Delaware, which has now held adult and [kids' dances](#) for its programs here. We provided cooking and life skills classes for youth aging out of the foster care system and to young adults with Down Syndrome as part of our "[Corner Table](#)" initiative (picture at left). Some aspects of this in-house mission work were set up as a separate non-profit entity called Urban Immersion. One program of Urban Immersion was to be our "[Corner](#)"

initiative, housing visiting workgroups for weekend or weeklong stays while they do mission work in the city. Unfortunately, we had difficulty recruiting either youth or adult groups. We have not abandoned our hope for that program, but we believe we need a paid staff member to oversee recruitment and program administration. Obviously, the pandemic has put a temporary halt on these programs.

Public engagement

The church's current [website](#) was launched in 2015, replacing a site at a different URL. It has been refurbished in recent years, and the Membership Development Committee plans a deeper renovation of the website for summer 2021. The website contains links to a Facebook page and to the YouTube [channel](#) that holds recent (pandemic-era) worship services and archives of some of the recent Zoom series for Explorers Forum. We are not yet active on Instagram, Twitter, SnapChat, etc.; another elder is currently enrolled in a university program to learn more about public engagement with social media.

The music program, operated by [Market Street Music](#), certainly qualifies as an outreach ministry for the church, bringing visitors through our doors and supporting the ongoing vitality of the church and the city. Our newly-added First Friday Walks provide additional visibility to the community, with members carrying an identifying banner on the walks. Most recently, a "Show Love" project of tying colorful ribbons to the church fence brought a festive look to the church for Easter 2021.

Congregational studies and surveys

Over the past nine years, we have engaged in ongoing self-reflection and focused efforts to discern our purpose as a downtown church and to envision and commit to ways in which we can better serve the downtown Wilmington community going forward. In 2012, the Walker Mission Fund Task Force was formed to envision how to use a large bequest to the church to create mission projects that would: actively engage members of the congregation and the community at large, produce meaningful change, and enable an active ministry. In 2014, the Task Force recommended two projects, which became the "Corner" and "Corner Table" initiatives described above. These recommendations led to the capital campaign for renovation of the kitchen and Memorial Hall.

In 2019, the Vision 2020 Task Force surveyed the congregation to assess strengths, opportunities, and challenges, which they outlined in the Vision 2020 report. In early 2021, after Doug's departure and nine months of the pandemic, the Transition Task Force surveyed the congregation again, to determine whether members' perceptions and/or needs had changed. This survey comprised six narrative questions, some of which were two- or three-part questions giving respondents an opportunity to express why they felt a certain way. Fifty-three responses were received, some representing several members in a household. The responses were analyzed in order to determine whether members' perceptions and/or needs had changed, and to learn what qualities members were looking for in a new pastor.

The results from these two assessments show the congregation continues to take pride in our 1) high-quality music program, 2) welcoming nature, 3) inspiring preaching, and 4) commitment to social justice. We very much want to maintain these strengths into the future. However, the congregation feels ready to embrace some changes. We see opportunities to partner with other churches and organizations to better serve those in need and to advocate for social justice. We also see opportunities to attract young professionals moving to Wilmington. We realize that we face a major challenge in attracting new members—particularly more ethnically and racially diverse members, younger members, and families with children—and understand that we may need to make changes to attract more members.

As the congregation looks to the future, its four primary goals are: 1) attracting more members, 2) providing greater use of our building for outreach to the community and social justice work, 3) ensuring that people who walk through our doors experience a strong sense of welcome and belonging, and 4) becoming known for our inclusivity and commitment to social justice. Both the task force and the membership have voiced some creative

ideas for how we might accomplish these goals, and we have begun to act on one or two particular ideas. Several of these ideas are explored in Section IV. We hope that a new minister can lead us in that process.

In the meantime, we are actively pursuing our commitment to social justice. Since the fall, our adult education programming has focused on developing our awareness of systemic racism. Discussions during these sessions have continued to develop the congregation's sense of a call to new action.

A more extensive summary of responses is contained in Appendix I.

Section III: Discerning the assets of the congregation

The church staff

In addition to the pastor/head of staff, the church is currently staffed by a full-time minister of music, a part-time building manager and building care assistant (neither with benefits), a part-time office manager (with benefits), a part-time financial secretary (without benefits), and additional part-time employees for building care or childcare during worship or events. Their pictures are shown on our [website](#).

Minister of Music David Schelat has served First & Central since 1986 in a full-time capacity. His many gifts were described briefly above. During the pandemic he has been given additional responsibility in creating the liturgy for most of the recorded worship services.

The office manager position has been held by Joanne Reinbold since 1984, for most years as a full-time position, but decreasing in hours in recent years to part-time responsibility. As she is retiring this summer, this position is being evaluated for what new roles a full- or part-time employee might take on. Session is likely to consider filling this role on a temporary basis, allowing the incoming head of staff to develop the staffing model for the church. Ms. Reinbold has also been the administrator of the church's labyrinth ministry.

The building manager, Andrew Coleman, reports to the pastor and is responsible for all building operations and related activities, including ordinary repairs and maintenance. His duties include monitoring and maintaining major systems, preparing the sanctuary and other spaces for worship services and events, coordinating and overseeing use of the building by outside groups, and maintaining the cleanliness and appearance of the building's exterior and interior spaces. Andrew has held this position for 5 years (having previously been a part-time assistant), accepting the position after the untimely death of his brother Gerard Coleman, who served for nearly 25 years. Mr. Coleman serves part-time, along with building care assistant George Russell and additional hourly employees for weekend and evening coverage as needed.

The financial secretary role held by Stephen Fugate since 2015 is a part-time position, responsible for receiving, depositing and maintaining records of financial contributions to the church. The financial secretary maintains the church's accounting systems and works with outside vendors to manage payroll functions. Working with the Finance Committee of the Session, the financial secretary prepares periodic financial reports, assists in preparation of the annual budget, and maintains relationships with investment account managers.

Childcare assistants, who report to the Worship Committee of the Session, provide nursery and childcare services as required during worship services.

Gifts of the membership

The Session, which also serves as the Board of Trustees, consists of twelve ruling elders, of whom currently eight are female and three are male with one vacancy (as of March 2021). None are persons of color; one is gay. Most of those on the Session have been members of the congregation for ten years or more and bring a wide variety of gifts and skills to the church's work, as educators, businesspeople, physicians, and lawyers. Elders of First & Central have been well-represented among committees of New Castle Presbytery.

The Board of Deacons comprises six individuals; four are female, two are male, and one is a person of color. Two are in same-sex marriages. All have been members of the congregation for five years or more, with gifts that include experience as educators, businesspeople, and physicians.

First & Central has been (and will be again when public health conditions permit) a congregation with numerous volunteer opportunities, many of which are described in the Outreach and Mission section above.

The physical facility

First & Central is blessed to own its building, dedicated in 1929 on land that previously held a large residence. The building has always been well-maintained. A renovation in 1994, funded largely by a bequest, reduced seating in the sanctuary in order to expand the chancel, with installation of a new speaker system and microphones. First-floor office and parlor spaces were reconfigured, and an elevator was installed (along with exterior ramps and improvements to restroom facilities) to make the building ADA-compliant.

Since 2016, the building has undergone significant renovations and systems upgrades. The social hall was modernized, a commercial kitchen was installed, and dormitory facilities, with showers and laundry, were constructed for up to sixteen “mission trip” workers. The boilers were replaced in 2017 and water lines were replaced or upgraded at the same time. The pandemic allowed for painting the sanctuary, setting up scaffolding to make repairs to the ceiling and install new WiFi transponders, and completing an extensive list of minor repairs and upgrades. In 2021 the pipe organ will receive its suggested 10-year periodic maintenance, keeping it in exemplary condition. Simply put, the building is maintained in a first-class state of order and repair.

The first-floor sanctuary has seating for about 420, including a balcony area, in affixed wooden pews (shown below during the Clark-Porter ordination). The pipe organ and a well-maintained Steinway grand piano are located in the chancel, with a choir area seating up to 24 singers. The sanctuary is well-lighted and its acoustics are excellent. It has been used frequently for musical events, including both instrumental and large choral performances, using our own risers as needed. First & Central has been the preferred performing venue for the Wilmington Children’s Chorus and the Rainbow Chorale (Delaware’s LGBTQ+ choir) for many years.



Also on the first floor are a chapel (with separate entrance), reception rooms, ADA-compliant restrooms, the nursery, and the church office. The exterior steps to the sanctuary are impressive; there is an accessible entrance to the narthex from the 11th Street side.

The social hall, Memorial Hall, is located below street level and as noted above, was completely renovated in 2016–2017. It can be set up with tables and chairs for church events such as Deacons’ lunches and congregational meetings, or used for other social events such as receptions, labyrinth walks, and the LGBTQ+ and

Down Syndrome Association dances also noted above. It is outfitted for audio-visual presentations and equipped with a small stage and projection screen wall. Several classrooms and a wood-paneled library are located on the same level. The renovated kitchen (below) was designed for use as both a working and a teaching space.



Kitchen (left) and Memorial Hall (below)

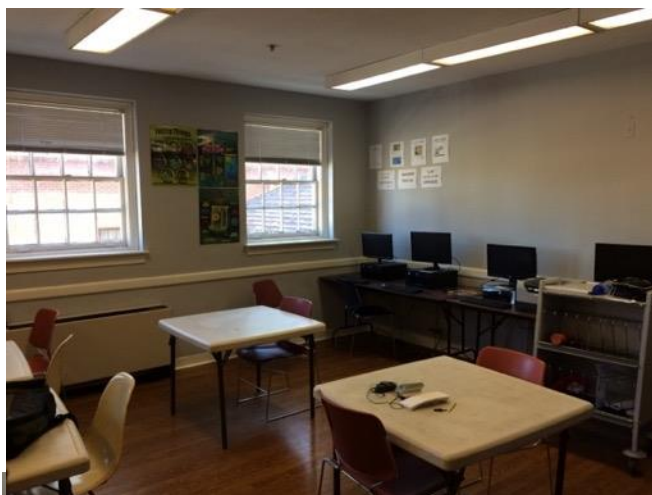


The second and third floors of the building contain offices, classrooms, and choir rehearsal space. The second-floor offices are used by the pastor and staff members, while the third floor classrooms have been used for after-school enrichment programs and in recent years by the Urban Promise Academy, a full-time charter high school for inner city youth. The Urban Promise Academy relocated in 2020, so this space is fully available for innovative uses.

Perhaps the most significant limitation of our property is the lack of parking. Metered parking can be found near both the main entrance and a side entryway, and the owner of the adjoining property graciously permits First & Central the use of its surface parking lot for Sunday worship services and many, but not all, other events; conflicts on performance nights are often unavoidable. All in all, our parking is generally adequate but the perception that parking is not generally available may limit public participation in some events.

The building footprint occupies almost the entire real property parcel. A walkway connects the rear of the church building with the front sidewalk and an alleyway provides access to parking for staff automobiles. The rear entry was reconstructed during the 2017 renovation to make this entry more attractive to those arriving from the parking lot. There is virtually no other useable space.

Third floor classrooms (below)



Financial resources and liabilities

First & Central is blessed to have at its disposal the income of five investment accounts which the congregation established using the proceeds from the sale of its predecessor church properties. The trusts are structured as “total return” trusts (and as such are restricted by state law) which distribute an annual amount equal to a fixed percentage (4%) of the average value of the trusts’ assets over a three-year period. The distributions from these trusts comprise a significant share of the church’s operating budget: approximately 55% in 2021. First & Central has also benefitted from several substantial bequests over the years, including the Walker bequest noted above, which is held as a separate investment account. These bequests, which were unrestricted, have been used to supplement the operating budget and to pay for extensive capital improvements.

Congregational giving has been, and remains, at an unhealthy level. In 2019, congregational giving contributed only 34% to the church’s income; and in 2020 (with expenses significantly reduced by the pandemic), congregational giving accounted for 44% of the church’s income. In 2021, congregational income comprises only 31% of the budgeted revenues, with the number of contributing household units falling below 2020 levels even, while the average amount contributed by each household increased.

The capital campaign in 2016 fell substantially short of its \$1 million target. The congregation contributed at the level that was projected by the campaign planners, but several anticipated larger gifts did not materialize. Funds from an unrestricted bequest were used to make up the shortfall.

In 2021 only about 5% of budgeted expenses are directed toward Christian formation and to mission and outreach activities; staff compensation, building-related expenses, and worship and music expenses consume more than 95% of the church’s budget. Note, though, that this does not take into account the significant work in mission and outreach activities by First & Central members or their off-budget financial contributions. The Epiphany House dinners, charter school lunches, and Winter Sanctuary refreshments mentioned in the discussion above are supported exclusively by members’ voluntary contributions, as are the “Hunger Offering” received on the fourth Sunday of each month and “Giving Tree” efforts during the Advent season. These special contribution categories have taken in more than \$5,000 annually over the last three years, not including gift cards, etc.

First & Central is financially stable. Income from trusts and anticipated withdrawals from the Walker Fund will supplement the operating budget at a level sufficient to maintain the congregation’s current staffing, activities, and mission in the near- and medium-term future (barring unforeseen needs for major building repairs or a severe and sustained economic downturn). But living into the active, mission-centered future we aspire to will require the congregation to express its commitment through increased financial support. Thus, our primary financial challenge lies in educating the congregation about the significance of responsible financial stewardship as an expression of our mission and what we say we believe. It is a project that will require time, attention, and effort.

Appendix II provides details of the church’s budget and its investment accounts.

Section IV: Discerning the needs of the community

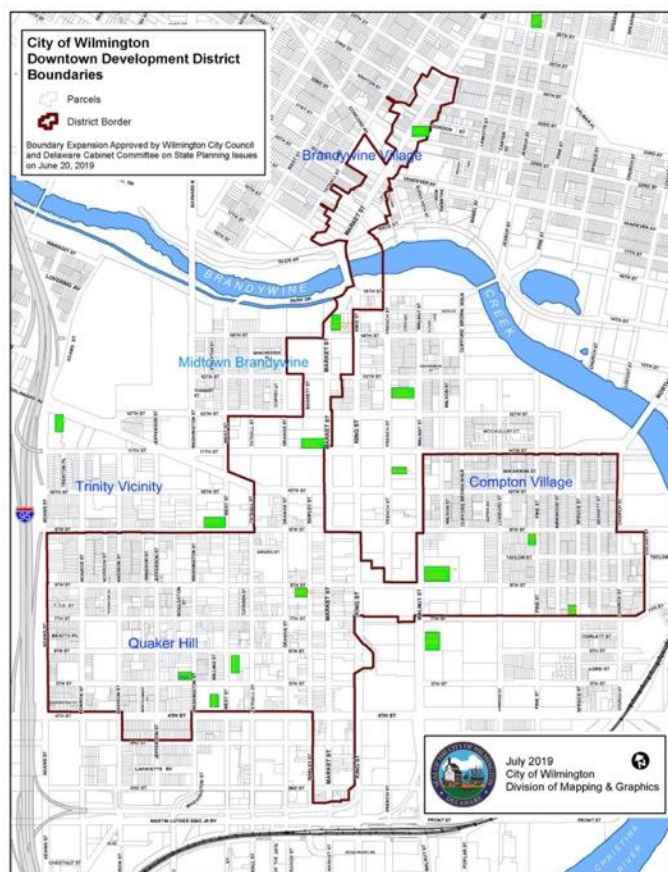
A congregation at the crossroads

First & Central Presbyterian Church stands on Market Street, on a corner of Rodney Square, the city’s most formal park square. This places it along the spine of the city’s commercial district, surrounded by the “glass and steel”² centers of banking, government, science, and hospitality. The downtown arts district, including the Grand Opera House and the Delaware College of Art and Design (DCAD), is a few blocks away.

² This makes reference to the church’s 250th anniversary hymn by Sylvia Dunstan, “Through the Heart of Every City.”

For simplicity, downtown Wilmington (between I-95 and the rivers) can be logically divided into four quadrants, based on the intersection of Market and 9th Streets (with First & Central at 11th Street). These four quadrants, covering about 1 mile square, can be defined, roughly, as the Trinity/Midtown Brandywine quadrant, the Upper East Side, the Lower East Side (including Compton Village), and the quadrant comprising Quaker Hill.

The city of Wilmington has defined a [Downtown Development District](#) (DDD, map below, with larger version at [link](#)), which comprises some of the four city quadrants defined above, as well as a portion of Brandywine Village that borders a few blocks of Market Street north of the Brandywine River. Projects in this district are eligible for economic incentives (grants and low-rate loans, etc.).



Notably *not* surrounding the church is any residential neighborhood; only a handful of our members reside within the church’s zip code. The Midtown Brandywine neighborhood, a few blocks to the northwest of the church, is the least dense quadrant of the center city. Midtown Brandywine is also the neighborhood with the highest concentration of LGBTQ+ residents, particularly gay men, in northern Delaware.

The commercial spine itself has seen a significant increase in residential real estate in the last decade or so, as commercial properties are converted to condominiums for purchase or rental. This development has brought a vibrancy to downtown that had not been seen in many decades, despite some concerns of suburbanites that crime is a problem keeping them away. [The Queen theatre](#), rescued from ruin and now used as a performance space for musical acts, even got some use during the pandemic as the press location for the Biden election and transition teams. Some of Wilmington’s finest restaurants are now on the Market Street spine, including the newly refurbished flagship restaurant of the Hotel Du Pont, Le Cavalier.

Beyond this downtown sector, the greater Wilmington area stretches into southeastern Pennsylvania and northeastern Maryland and across the river into New Jersey. Our congregation is drawn from all of these areas, spread over thirty ZIP codes. We are a “downtown church,” which we take to mean that our members come some distance to find a congregation that represents some of the ethnic, sociological, and cultural diversity of our region.

The problems of inequity faced by our urban center are not unique to Wilmington. While changes in city and police department leadership have led to some improvement in recent years, systemic problems persist. Wilmington has felt the pain of extreme civil unrest in 1919 and 1968; the summer of 2020 was a painful reminder that the struggle against systemic racism continues.

During the latter decades of the 20th century, many downtown church congregations left or closed³, leaving primarily the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Quaker Hill and the cluster of white-predominant mainline churches

³ See “A long history of ideas” at <https://www.delawareonline.com/story/news/politics/2021/03/24/national-park-i-95-delaware-what-planned/4702276001/>

in the northwest quadrant, including First & Central, Grace United Methodist, Trinity Episcopal, and Saint Andrew's Episcopal. (In 1996 St. Andrew's merged with St. Matthew's to become Saints Andrew and Matthew, a racially diverse congregation.) The map above shows notable churches in green.

On the other hand, Wilmington is home to a stable economic base of business and government functions. The boom in the credit card banking industry in the mid-90s benefited the city at a time when its standard-bearer of commerce, the DuPont Corporation, was decreasing in vitality. While the courthouse operations across Rodney Square have moved to a new location in the Lower Market (LOMA) neighborhood, office real estate near the church has adapted, with some office buildings being refitted for residential purposes. While many cities across America are seeing a contraction in urban residency, Wilmington is projected to grow modestly. Even so, weekday and weekend foot traffic is light outside the dining/entertainment corridor of Market Street.

We hold a prime location, yet this location keeps us separated from the city around us. We may proclaim that we are "A Church Without Walls," but there are walls around us that we did not erect. We seek ways to break through them. We invite in downtown workers to our popular Thursday Noontime Concerts, and we invite those experiencing homelessness to a warm, friendly hall for a few Saturday hours in winter, but we feel pulled to do more in sharing Christ's love with our neighbors.

Detailed demographics, utilizing the MissionInsite database

We used access to the [MissionInsite](#) database to examine the city in further detail, with particular attention paid to the neighborhoods of the DDD described above. Additional neighborhoods were defined geographically to provide comparisons between nearer neighborhoods and ones further away.

These neighborhoods are not targeted specifically for potential membership, but to help clarify the needs of the church's environs. The disparities on display are great. A spreadsheet containing selected data from these defined neighborhoods, and in contrast with data for municipal Wilmington and greater Wilmington, is provided as an appendix to this report. A few key highlights, showing the significant disparity between our two nearest neighborhoods, are detailed here.

Area/quadrant	Population (2019)	White residents	per capita income	Owner-occupied	5-yr population change
Brandywine Village	1,682	45.0%	\$38,650	46%	+8.6%
Upper Eastside	2,698	5.4%	\$16,380	36%	+8.2%
Wilmington city	73,191	27.8%	\$26,700	49%	+2.1%
Greater Wilmington	256,151	57.9%	\$35,500	68%	+1.6%

The Latinx population of Wilmington is concentrated in neighborhoods across I-95 to the southwest; only the Quaker Hill quadrant in downtown exceeds 10% Latinx residents, with whites in the minority of the three major racial-ethnic groups in that neighborhood.

As noted above, the population of Wilmington is predicted to grow over the next five years, while the downtown neighborhoods show as much as an 8–9% increase. This is certainly due to redevelopment of commercial properties into housing, a potential source of growth for the church and its mission, as these are likely to be younger people, generally not yet married, with a drive for social justice and yet unconnected to a church.

The city and its needs

During our time of discernment, we, as a group and as individual members in contact with area faith leaders and businesspeople, identified numerous avenues where our capabilities and capacities might intersect with the changing world around us. Some of these projects have the potential of being revenue-generating or at least revenue-neutral. A few of these ideas are described below.

Working together on social justice

The congregation has identified social justice advocacy and outreach as something we both care deeply about and for which we believe we should become known. We also realize that, as a smaller church, we can effect change at a deeper, more systemic level if we collaborate with others, as shown by our support for, and work with, Friendship House. We have collaborated with various downtown churches in the past, but have not partnered in a sustained way for a large project in recent memory. We hope to change this. We have recently begun collaborating with Westminster Presbyterian Church and the Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew to advocate for peace and justice and raise our awareness of systemic racism. We are also open to partnering with other churches from other denominations and more diverse congregations, such as Hanover Presbyterian, Grace United Methodist, Trinity Episcopal, and Ezion-Mt. Carmel United Methodist Church. With God's help, we can begin to transform the neighborhoods of downtown.

New residents, new housing

The area near the church will be experiencing some revitalization with three or more building sites for apartments (converted from commercial property) bringing in new residents, increasing the population of those aged 25 to 55. If we wish to reach this population as potential members, then we will likely need to offer more diverse worship experiences: different times, different formats from our Sundays at 11.

The arts community

One downtown [initiative](#), a collaboration between governmental, non-governmental, and commercial organizations, seeks to energize the creative district in the city. An aspect of this initiative is creation of [residences](#) for artists with studios—specifically first-time home-buyers—within a few blocks of our church. Artists could help us create innovative worship experiences, or they could use the spaces for gallery displays and art sales.

First & Central already has a solid reputation in presenting performing arts, especially music, and we should continue that ministry. We could also expand into visual and dramatic arts, poetry, or even dance. Prior to the pandemic, we had already agreed to participate in Wilmington's "First Friday/Art on the Town" events, which could now nicely correspond with our monthly Walks for Justice and Peace. Our worship services might present additional opportunities for presenting artistic endeavors.

The kitchen incubator

A related initiative, a nascent collaboration between religious, non-governmental, and commercial organizations, is that of creating a kitchen incubator at nearby Grace United Methodist church. The facility at Grace could support up to ten culinary entrepreneurs, using a commercially licensed kitchen to launch enterprises such as food trucks, catering, or specialty baking. First & Central is already engaging in this collaboration as a potential satellite kitchen to serve additional clients, or in using the church for office or storage space for these clients. We note that (in normal times) Rodney Square holds a weekly outdoor Farmers' Market, which could provide a sales opportunity for kitchen incubator clients.

Inner-city education

Most of our nearby neighborhoods have a predominantly Black population, with educational and religious organizations already in place. These institutions are thriving, vital organizations populated with talented individuals serving the Black community. Central Baptist Church and its East Side Rising programs, the Kuumba Academy, Howard High Technical School, Freire Charter School, and the Christina Cultural Arts Center—all might be opportunities for collaboration. After-school tutoring, music, art, food, and nutrition classes could be offered at First & Central. We already have a reputation for collaboration, in hosting the Urban Promise Academy (high school students) for seven years, and, prior to that, a preschool connected to Wilmington Friends School. Adolescents from Urban Promise

Academy and other surrounding organizations could be paid to help with the program, with monetary support from the Presbytery and elsewhere.

The LGBTQ+ community

We can lean into our progressive reputation and make our voice even louder in our support for LGBTQ+ adults and questioning youth (and their allies). While the adult LGBTQ+ population may well be dispersed throughout the area, there is a core population in the neighborhood nearest the church. Because of the success of the LGBTQ+ Prom at the church, we plan to develop this opportunity for ministry. The United Way of Delaware has a vibrant [PRIDE Council](#) of young people with 300+ youth on Facebook. The [Encircle](#) organization in western states could be a model for our ministry, offering our facility as a “safe space” for adolescents and/or young adults. A local group, [The Village](#), could be an ally. We recognize that our stance on these issues may put us in disagreement with other denominations.

Continue and strengthen our established ministries

We should continue our Corner Table ministry with youths aging out of foster care and Down Syndrome adults, our Winter Sanctuary program in collaboration with Friendship House, using the sleeping area for summertime mission project workers, supporting the Wilmington Children’s Chorus, and maintaining ties with the Urban Promise Academy. During this interim/pandemic time, it is important not to lose our ties to these programs. As well, the Explorers Forum series should continue its deeper exploration of social justice issues, empowering our membership to support the programs above.



Jigsaw puzzle table at Winter Sanctuary

Section V: Discerning the call for a pastor

The voice of the congregation

Reflecting on the congregation’s responses to the mission study survey establishes a fairly clear call for the next pastor. In particular, the final question asked the congregation “**What kind of leadership and personal qualities are you looking for in the next pastor, and why are these important to you?**” Responses to the survey are summarized by the following:

The congregation at First & Central Presbyterian Church has been blessed by many thoughtful, well-educated and highly capable ministers. We value acceptance and belonging and living our faith through a commitment to social justice. We value an intentional, well-orchestrated worship experience and challenging and inspiring preaching that ties Scripture to current issues and events. We know that moving forward, our current members are aging, and we need to reach out to the more diverse community outside our doors to attract new members. We also want to partner with other churches and organizations to provide more effective, ambitious community outreach and social justice advocacy.

With this in mind, we are looking for a challenging and inspiring preacher and social justice advocate, who is also a relationship builder and a change agent. We want someone who can connect with and lead a diverse group of people, and who can forge relationships with community members, community leaders, and other churches. We also want someone who can bridge new and existing ways of doing things and lead us in new directions. We do not expect this person to act alone. We have very talented and capable members and we would like our pastor to develop and encourage lay leadership and inspire members to be involved in church initiatives.

Indeed, when our own task force was asked to consider the narrative questions contained in the Ministry Information Form⁴, we could do no better than the summary above. We wish to live more fully into the teaching of Matthew 25: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

The shape of the call

The role of the incoming pastor is that of Solo Pastor, a role whose responsibilities include:

- Preaching thoughtful and thought-provoking sermons
- Managing the church as head of staff, moderating the Session and Deacons, and
- Ministering to the congregation in ways beyond the responsibilities of the Deacons.

The pastor, though, will also serve as a leader of the congregation as it sets its path for the future. In recognition of the church’s position at an inflection point, we considered several options defining the next pastor’s primary leadership role:

1. A caretaker (chaplain) pastor who will minister to the church membership, guarding the endowment so that it sustains the existing church on its likely glide toward a quiet demise some years down the road.
2. A bold, innovative pastor who will push the church toward a bold new trajectory, perhaps staying only a few years but setting up the church for a stark confrontation of its future. This could be a possible role for a stated pastor rather than a called pastor, serving as change agent.
3. An innovative pastor, yet one who will take some time to establish the long-range plan for ministry in the community.

We believe the Pastor Nominating Committee should strike a course on the third path, seeking a pastor who will expand our ministry in the ways explored above, and beyond. We invite Session and the PNC to discern the will of the congregation in seeking its next pastor.

Dancing into our call

The Holy Spirit is stirring within First & Central, and we are called to the dance. The leadership is in a moment of conversion—dreaming dreams, transforming. The apprehension that gripped us at the thought of change has turned into enthusiasm about possibilities. Fear has turned into faith. We know there will be difficult decisions ahead, but we believe that we are capable of joining in God’s mission, running with perseverance the race that is set before us. This spark of faith is evolving into an expression of love—the love of an inclusive God—where we recognize ourselves and our neighbors as God’s beloved.

We see our calling, our mandate, as pursuing justice; caring for the poor and the disenfranchised; and cooperating with our neighbors to build a beloved community—a community where there is equal opportunity for a good education, employment, adequate housing, and faithful health care, where everyone is cared for, absent of poverty, racism, ecological devastation, and hate.

We desire to live into God’s hopes and dreams.

⁴ Narrative questions from Ministry Information Form:

1. What is the congregation’s or organization’s vision for ministry? Additionally, describe how this vision is lived out.
2. How do you feel called to reach out to address the emerging needs of your community or constituency?
3. How will this position help you to reach your vision and mission goals?
4. Provide a description of the characteristics needed by the person who is open to being called to this congregation and/or organization.
5. For what specific tasks, assignments, and programs areas will this person have responsibility?

Appendix I: Survey questions and summary of responses

The first document provides the most common themes from responses to the six open-ended survey questions. The second contains comments raised during the breakout discussions at the annual meeting of the congregation.

A complete set of the survey responses is available but is not included here.

[Survey response analysis document link](#) (Word)

[Annual meeting breakout notes](#) (Google spreadsheet)

For supporting information, see the [Vision 2020 report](#). (PDF)

Appendix II: Budget and financial information

The linked document shows the financial reports (operating income and expenses) for 2019 and 2020 (actuals) and for 2021 (budget).

[Document link](#) (PDF)

The investment accounts contain the following balances as of 12/31/2020:

PNC (two accounts)	\$2,659,025
Wells Fargo	\$1,455,668
Wilmington Trust (two accounts)	\$4,122,131
Total trust accounts	\$8,236,824
Walker Fund	\$1,547,339
Total investment assets	\$9,784,163

Appendix III: Compilation of MissionInsite demographics data

Data were collected from MissionInsite in early 2020, comparing geographic areas and examining various output reports to identify the most helpful data for our demographic analysis.

The “Maps” tab of the attached file shows the ten geographic areas selected for analysis in an exploded view. The main data tab collected information from the “ExecutiveInsite” and “FullInsite” analyses from MissionInsite for these neighborhoods, along with output data for (roughly) the Wilmington municipal area (city limits) and for Greater Wilmington. Some data fields are shaded using conditional formatting to show high/low ranges, allowing visualization of disparities. Totals and weighted averages are also calculated and displayed in light blue cells.

After the first sets of data were collected and analyzed, MissionInsite released an updated data set for 2020. A few key reports were generated using the new data, which showed only a little change from the 2019 data. A few cells show comments for notable differences. The MissionInsite reports are archived for further analysis.

[Document link](#) (Excel)