

PROGRESSIVE • INCLUSIVE • COMMUNITY

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
• IN LAS CRUCES •





# CHURCH PROFILE

## First Christian Church Las Cruces, New Mexico

**Position Opening: Full Time Settled Pastor**  
**Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ**  
**Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest**

**November 17, 2023**

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*A Las Cruces community member asked someone where he worships. "First Christian Church" was his answer. The person responded "Oh! You're a member of that radical church!" We take that as a compliment.*

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## **1. POSITION POSTING**

LISTING INFORMATION

SCOPE OF WORK

COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT

WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?

### **1a. LISTING INFORMATION**

**Church name:** First Christian Church in Las Cruces DOC/UCC  
**Street address:** 1809 El Paseo Road, Las Cruces, NM 88001  
**Supplemental web links:** <https://www.fcclc.org>  
**Denominations:** [Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ](#)  
[Christian Church \(Disciples of Christ\) of the Southwest](#)

#### **United Church of Christ Contact Person:**

The Reverend Dr. Toni Hawkins Transitional Conference Minister  
**Phone:** 602-468-3830  
**Email:** [thawkins@uccswc.org](mailto:thawkins@uccswc.org)

#### **Disciples of Christ Contact Person:**

The Reverend Dr. Kim Fields-Haley, Regional Connection  
Minister for New Mexico, El Paso and West Texas  
**Phone:** 505-270-5825 (Cell/Text)  
**Email:** [kimfields-haley@ccsw.org](mailto:kimfields-haley@ccsw.org)

#### **Summary Ministry Description:**

We are an open and affirming congregation, and as such we welcome a Settled Pastor of any race, gender or sexual orientation. Following Christ's example, we offer all people the opportunity to discover and develop their gifts in God's love. Our church family celebrates diversity and freedom and engages in social justice. Our worship centers around the study of Scripture and weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. We understand that at Christ's table, there is room for everyone, regardless of where we might be in our journey. We find ways to worship, work, study, and make fellowship together while honoring our inclusiveness.

We are seeking a Settled Pastor who

- shares our passion for feeding the hungry, welcoming refugees, supporting the unhoused, and befriending LGBTQ+ neighbors;
- encourages our congregation to participate in vigils, protests, and political action for justice causes;
- presents sermons that challenge us and bring meaning to the passage for our world today; including humor where appropriate is a plus;
- engages in all aspects of Sunday morning worship;
- contributes toward a church culture of warmly welcoming the stranger;
- visits hospitals, in-care facilities, hospices, and homes;

- interacts with a local ecumenical pastoral group that is mutually supportive;
- engages with the New Mexico State University Interfaith Council;
- provides the congregation with tools to help us grow in numbers;
- brings his/her gifts of theological insight to assist us in our faith journey;
- facilitates achieving aspects of our Strategic Plan;
- remains in good standing with their denominational oversight group.

### **Our Mission Statement**

REACH OUT, REACH UP, REACH IN. We are here to help people know God, find freedom, discover their purpose, and make a difference in the community, near and far.

### **Our Vision Statement**

We believe that everyone matters to God. Therefore, we welcome all who need to find hope and healing. We seek justice for those without a voice. We are building an engaged, passionate, and spiritually diverse community. We are devoted to one another, and all creation. We help each other grow and celebrate the joyful witness of God's all-inclusive love through Christ Jesus.

### **Our Values Statement**

Our values are the five core values of Progressive Christianity, as outlined at [progressivechristianity.org](http://progressivechristianity.org).

Photographs (2022 and 2023)



Church Labyrinth and Pride Flag



Our booth at Las Cruces Pride Fest 2022



Prelude beginning service



Passing the peace



Communion served weekly

**What we value about living in our area:**

[Las Cruces](#), the second largest city in New Mexico, is a culturally and demographically diverse city of 115,303 residents in southern New Mexico. Las Cruces serves as a hub for Dona Ana County, which has a population of 223,337 people and growing. We enjoy abundant sunshine, breathtaking views of the Organ Mountains, the Chihuahuan Desert, and have countless areas for hiking, biking, and enjoying outdoor activities. New Mexico State University, Dona Ana Community College, and Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine provide excellent higher education opportunities. Performance and visual arts are well represented in our community: music, theater, painting, pottery, photography, and weaving, to name a few, that thrive in the beautiful setting of Las Cruces. We are 45 minutes from El Paso, TX and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. We are four hours from Albuquerque, NM and Tucson, AZ.

**Current size of membership:**

Our membership consists of 49 “family units”. In 2022, we welcomed 3 new members. We have a large number of people we refer to as “friends of the church”. These “friends” maintain an active interest in what we are doing, as well as actively participate in activities. Approximately 40 people are in our worship service each week. Additional people are watching on Zoom and [Facebook](#).

**Languages used in ministry:**

English is the language spoken by most members of our congregation. About 40 percent of the people in the Las Cruces community are bilingual in Spanish/English and 20 percent are primarily Spanish speaking. Our congregation would welcome a bilingual English/Spanish-speaking pastor.

**Position Title:**

Settled Pastor

**Compensation Level:**

Full Time

**Does the total support package meet conference compensation guidelines?**

Yes

**1b. SCOPE OF WORK**

We would classify ourselves currently as a family-size to pastoral-size church, with potential for becoming a program-size church, per Roy Oswald of Alban Institute.

**Core Competencies:**

We are looking for a Settled Pastor who is proficient and well-grounded in their theological perspectives and education. We would like our Settled Pastor to be comfortable with all age groups and be able to meet them where they are in their faith journey. We would like our Settled Pastor to provide pastoral care and theologically relevant sermons. (Though not a competency, it would be joyful to have a Settled Pastor with a sense of humor.)

Our congregation is very involved in the community through interfaith cooperation and partnerships with non-profit organizations. We are a vital congregation in our outreach and social and racial injustice ministry. We expect our Settled Pastor to lead us in faith and action, be involved, and support the determined directions of First Christian Church, including our recently discerned five year strategic plan.

## **1c. COMPENSATION AND SUPPORT**

### **Salary Basis:**

Cash salary, plus housing allowance, will be negotiated between the Board and the Settled Pastor. We are able to offer a minimum \$48,000 to start.

### **Benefits:**

- Salary plus Benefits
- Pension (14% of final negotiated compensation)
- Pastor is covered under the church's Worker's Compensation insurance.
- Health Insurance (3,450 to be applied to Pastor's health care plan of choice)
- FICA Offset
- Automobile usage reimbursed at IRS rate (log required, daily commute excluded)
- 2 days per month (24 days per year) for the first two years of employment. Increases thereafter (2.5 hrs/month years 3-5, 2.75 hrs./month years 6-10, 3 hrs./month year thereafter).
- Professional Expenses (\$1,600 per year for books, periodicals, workshop registration, etc.)
- Conference Meetings: Reimbursement of actual expense (food, lodging, transportation) for up to 2 meetings per year, up to \$1,200 per year.
- Sabbatical Expenses: Three-month Sabbatical after 6 years of service. Full compensation plus pension plus health care plus FICA offset during the three-month period of an approved Sabbatical period.

### **State any incentives:**

The church offers a three-month paid sabbatical after six years of the pastor's employment and two consecutive days off weekly. There is covered parking for the pastor outside the church office.

### **Comment on the residential/commuting expectations for your next minister.**

We wish the pastor to live within 10-12 miles of the church. The church is in a central Las Cruces location (near New Mexico State University) with ample housing choices within a reasonable commute. Many areas of Las Cruces are bicycle friendly, and many streets have a designated bicycle lane.

### **Other Non-Pastoral Local Incentives:**

In addition to incentives for the Settled Pastor, Las Cruces and the surrounding area also offers employment opportunities for family members, partners, and/or significant others. Along with several schools and higher education facilities, one to one and a half hour commutes to White Sands Missile Range, Fort Bliss Army Base in El Paso, TX and SpacePort America. The area also provides opportunities for career law enforcement: NM State police, Dona Ana County Sheriff's Department, City of Las Cruces Police, and Federal Border Patrol. Memorial Medical Center, Mountain View Regional Medical Center, Advance Care Hospital of Southern NM, Three Crosses Regional Hospital, as well as several clinics and senior care facilities, provide employment opportunities for medical and support personnel. New Mexico State University, Dona Ana Community College, Burrell College of Osteopathic Medicine and the local school districts provide opportunities for teaching and research.

**Describe peer and professional supports available for ministers in your association/conference:**

The church is affiliated with both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest in Fort Worth, Texas and the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ in Phoenix, Arizona. Each denomination offers educational, training, and mentoring support.

**1d. WHO IS GOD CALLING TO MINISTER WITH US?**

**Describe the ministry goals you envision your next minister co-collaborating with the congregation to achieve.**

We seek a Settled Pastor who will embrace our spirituality, congeniality, and kinship as a congregation.

We seek a Settled Pastor who will guide us in growing and maintaining our membership. We are a demographically diverse congregation that lives in a thriving university community with not only young families but active seniors who enjoy our multicultural diversity.

We seek a Settled Pastor who will help us maintain and expand our presence in community involvement and social justice. We take in our open and affirming stance, working within the system for documented immigrants, reaching out to the underserved veteran and homeless population, and providing space on our campus for community use.

We seek a Settled Pastor who will provide a theologically strong worship and communion experience that reflects both the UCC and DOC traditions. We want to continue growing and understanding our traditions. We want to expand our music ministry. We want to continue our strong Faith Journey Class (adult education) and look for new and challenging spiritual formation opportunities.

**Describe how your next Settled Pastor will support the congregation in its efforts to positively impact and engage the Las Cruces community.**

We seek a Settled Pastor who will help us:

- expand our engagement with those individuals and organizations in the Las Cruces community who are in pursuit of social, racial, economic, and environmental justice;
- befriend and join forces with the service agencies who share our building, including

[Backyard Farms](#)

[Weaving for Justice](#)

[St. John's Catholic Church of the Antioch](#)

[Al-Anon](#)

HIV/AIDS Food Pantry

[Mesilla Valley Swing Band](#)

[Mesilla Valley Jazz and Blues Society](#)

[New Word Drummers](#)

[Celestial Sounds Choir](#)

[Toad Hall Productions](#)



- grow into a more diverse community of faith by reaching out in Christ's love to those who feel estranged from God, dispirited in their faith journey, or disillusioned with organized religion;

enlist teens (along with their parents and siblings) from the Las Cruces High School located directly west of our building;

enlist newcomers from the senior housing complex to be constructed in the vacant lot directly south of our building;

enlist college students from the campus of New Mexico State University located 1/2 mile south of our building

reach out and collaborate with other area clergy to encourage ecumenical and interfaith understanding and collaboration.

### **Name specific language requirements or cultural sensitivities sought after in a Settled Pastor**

Members of our congregation speak English as their primary language. However, the U.S./Mexico border rests just 40 miles south of Las Cruces and strongly influences the culture of our community. Seventy percent of local residents identify as Hispanic and 40 percent are bilingual. Many Hispanic families have lived in multicultural Dona Ana County since prior to New Mexico statehood was established in 1912.

A Settled Pastor with a comfortable command of both English and Spanish would find relocation easier and his/her pastorate richer and more fulfilling among the peoples of beautiful southern New Mexico. A Settled Pastor also should be knowledgeable about complex border issues and share our compassion and advocacy for those currently crossing into the United States for humanitarian reasons.

A Settled Pastor who demonstrates cultural sensitivity and appreciation for the [LGBTQ+](#) community would also find him/herself at home with our congregation. All of our members and many of the organizations who share our space self-identify as LGBTQ+ or their allies, and we are committed to ensuring their emotional, spiritual, and physical safety among us.

### **Describe four areas of excellence from The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministry that your next Settled Pastor will display to further equip the congregation's ministry in these areas.**

## **ENGAGING SACRED STORIES AND THE TRADITIONS OF THE CONGREGATION AND ITS DENOMINATIONS**

- Exhibit an ongoing study, knowledge, and understanding of Scripture, bringing life to sacred stories in worship and witness;
- Preach thoughtful sermons, based upon a variety of accepted scriptural translations and secular literature, that inspire growth and change;
- Plan and guide worship services that evoke an experience of the Holy Spirit among us, especially as we celebrate weekly communion in the Disciples of Christ tradition.

## **CARING FOR ALL CREATION**

- Make pastoral calls to homes and medical facilities, and to those in crisis situations;
- Maintain thoughtful and compassionate counseling skills, with an understanding of how to promote positive mental health and wellness;
- Help the congregation engage in actively caring for our neighbors and for God's creation, working to ameliorate the earth's severe environmental crisis.

## **WORKING TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE AND MERCY**

- Practice the radical, welcoming hospitality of God with newcomers and members;
- Help build relationships of mutual trust and interdependence among us;
- Share leadership easily with teams working to carry forward our congregation's long-range plan;
- Engage the congregation in expanding its mission and outreach, drawing on the example of Jesus Christ to confront inequality, injustice and oppression.

## **DEMONSTRATE STRONG INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

- Practice self-care, appropriate boundary-setting, and life balance;
- Convey a demeanor marked by good humor, intelligence, kindness, imagination, and creativity;
- Bring excellent verbal and written communication skills.

## **2. WHO IS GOD CALLING US TO BECOME?**

### **Who is God calling you to become as a congregation?**

We are called to continue to provide meaningful worship and communion experiences, and to continue our involvement in congregational, community, and spiritual activities. We are called to pursue new ways to serve God, serve our members, serve our community, and increase our membership. We are called to continue to deepen our identity of being an open and affirming congregation.

### **Describe how God is calling you to reach out to address the emerging challenges and opportunities of your community and congregation.**

God is calling us to serve the community through social action and to serve the individual needs of the members through compassion. The recent congregational survey shows a value of the love of the congregation, the spiritual support, acceptance of all, having a place to worship, and finding solace when using the labyrinth. In the community, respondents value our social action focus and use of our building and property by many organizations. In essence, the church is there for its members and the members are there for the community.

## **3. WHO ARE WE NOW?**

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

- a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS
- b. 11-YEAR REPORT
- c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS
- d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING
- e. CHURCH FINANCES
- f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### **3a. CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS**

#### **Describe your congregation's life of faith.**

A recently developed vision statement declares...

*"We are actively reclaiming Christianity as an inclusive, expansive, and loving spiritual pathway."*

This vision means actively seeking spiritual development, individual education, social justice, and hospitality toward individuals as well as the congregation and our community partners to further the work of God's beloved community.

We live our life of faith by sharing our campus

With groups empowering & developing

- New World Drummers and Dancers
- Mesilla Valley Jazz and Blues Society
- Mesilla Valley Swing Band
- Toad Hall Productions.
- Celestial Voices

With groups offering support

- Adult Conversations Group
- Al-Anon
- St John Of Antioch Catholic Church
- Backyard Farms (a community garden initiative)
- HIV-Food Pantry

Our congregation, through our Faith Action Committee, offers opportunities for members to join other denominations and groups involved in community activism and fighting racial and social injustice. FCCLC partners with El Calvario United Methodist Church, to help documented immigrants. We have offered food, clothing, lodging and transportation to help them get to their sponsors in the United States. The involvement and support has grown to include 16 churches and many community organizations.

Members of FCCLC volunteer monthly, preparing and serving food at **El Caldito**, a soup kitchen at the Community of Hope. The Community of Hope is a support system offering a tent city, help for veterans, the underserved and homeless. This has been a monthly project of FCCLC for many years. During the 2022 Christmas season, our congregation collected 750 pairs of socks for the homeless living at the local City of Hope shelter.

Our past ministers have participated in an Interfaith Group working together to bring unity and understanding of all faith communities in Las Cruces. We are also a member of the Interfaith Campus Ministry at New Mexico State University.

There have been occasions where places of worship in Las Cruces have come together in prayer and support. One church had explosives set in its mailbox., Another, the Unitarian Church property, was defaced and the Interfaith Group and their congregations came together to pray and find solutions. *'In Remembrance of the Holocaust'* was an invitation to all church congregations to join with Temple Beth El to remember this horrific history. Other instances of coming together followed the shootings at mosques in California and in New Zealand.

Since FCCLC is an Open and Affirming Congregation, taking part in LGBTQ+ events such as marches, dinners, awareness demonstrations, Pride festivals and [PFLAG](#) events, demonstrates our commitment to the cause of equality and social justice.

### **Describe several strengths or positive qualities of your congregation.**

The Holy Spirit is most felt to be at work in our midst when a deep need of the community is brought forward for witness and, where possible, redress/reconciliation. Education and community development events, such as end-of-life concerns, stories of migrants/refugees, or addressing poverty and racism, have been deeply meaningful for both members of the congregation and members of the public. The congregation looks for ways to be welcoming to outsiders while recognizing that one place will not feel like "home" to all people. A name tag is created for all new-comers after their first visit. We look for ways to recognize, affirm, and nurture the gifts and callings of people of all ages and stages of life and faith. Within and outside of the congregation, we appreciate varied ways of understanding and expressing the Christian journey and Christian story, while seeking to alleviate the pain caused by some voices within Christian history.

### **Describe what worship is like when your congregation gathers.**

Members, friends and visitors enter the sanctuary through the light-filled atrium. There is a greeter standing by the doors to the sanctuary to greet worshippers and hand them our bulletin for service. Visitors names and contact information are requested as a continuing COVID protocol.

People enter a large open space at the back of the sanctuary. It is obvious that people relate well to each other as attested by the sounds of conversations and laughter. The atmosphere is definitely relaxed and social.

The front of the Sanctuary is raised a few steps higher than the back, accommodating a grand piano, choir space, a pulpit and a large cross. Beyond that area are three stained glass windows and a baptistry.

The Sanctuary houses a communion table on the main floor and about 100 comfortable, moveable chairs.

The table is always "set" as communion is a weekly celebrated sacrament in the life of First Christian Church. Both the offering and communion are led weekly by the Elders and Deacons.

All are greeted with a welcome by the pastor and then a prelude is played by the pianist announcing the beginning of service. Worship starts with the Call to Worship followed by a Gathering hymn. Lay leaders provide a unison prayer and then we are encouraged to pass the peace. A hymn of gratitude is played followed by a celebration of gratitude. Scripture is read by

the Pastor leading to their sermon. The communion hymn is played followed by the sacraments presented by Elders and Deacons. Prayers, announcements including messages about the community, invitations and activities lead to the Going forth hymn and postlude.. Coffee and goodies are available after the service where people gather in fellowship.

Leadership in worship is filled by a variety of people and the congregation appreciates worship styles that incorporate more than a focus on the sermon and/or communion. God is described in a variety of ways during worship.. There is a greater tendency to describe God as "loving Creator", he or she among other titles/attributes. We are currently registered as "Open and Affirming" with the UCC and are working toward designation as a "Progressive Congregation".?????

Our congregation appreciates sermons that are thought-provoking, sometimes humorous, inspirational, current, creative and relevant to our daily lives. On occasion, we have special music from our congregation, the community and visiting musicians.

### **Describe the educational program/faith formation vision of your church.**

We chose the vocabulary of Faith Journey to identify and expand our vision of what is customarily called Christian Education. Our Faith Journey is a lifelong journey of spiritual development. Within our congregation these journeys are diverse, multifaceted, and evolving through communicating with each other.

We are recognized throughout our city as a congregation whose members, leadership, and pastor collaborate with people of other faiths and spiritual traditions in ministries of compassion, peace and justice. These experiences of connecting with people of diverse worldviews are a powerful source for broadening and deepening our own spirituality. This is certainly a direction we would expect our new pastor to continue to take us, connecting and growing spiritually with families, adults, students and children.

### **Describe how your congregation is organized for ministry and mission. When it comes to decision-making, how many hours are spent in meetings per month? Think of a time when action had to be taken quickly, for example when a crisis or disaster occurred. How was that accomplished?**

We have experienced few crises or disasters in the last few years. We have worked with law enforcement, high school security, the city and other faith organizations to solve and resolve issues that were concerns. Vandalism, break-ins, theft, property destruction, parking and sign violations are a few of the potential issues.

There has been a Sexton living on site for many years. His apartment is next to the Church office. His primary function is to take care of the buildings and property, to watch the Church and the grounds. If a problem arises, he is to call the Board president, who in turn, depending on the situation, contacts the Board, Minister or escalates response to Emergency Services (911).

We have established two methods for taking quick action. We recently updated our digital media presence. As a part of the project, we created a system that we use for sending email blasts to the congregation and friends of the church that have opted for this content. We

broadcast our Sunday worship services over Zoom and FaceBook, a practice started during the COVID pandemic, and plan to continue well into the future.

We also implemented a process for calling emergency Board meetings when urgent issues arise. Our bylaws allow us to conduct business via email for urgent issues that are suited for this form of communication.

Our organization is led by a Board of Directors. Our Board consists of five officers and 2 members at large. The Officers typically serve a one-year term.

At this time, we have three standing committees to address the work of the church. We recently combined two committees – Mission Committee and Social Justice Response Team – into the **Faith Action Committee**. This committee coordinates the church's response to mission appeals and to emerging economic, environmental and social justice concerns in our community. They provide opportunities for members to be aware and involved in local and world needs. The **Worship Committee** assists the Pastor with planning worship over the course of the liturgical year. The **Events Committee** assists in planning internal events, and provides an outreach to the community by working to ensure our presence at community events such as the annual Pride event held in October. Other committees, teams or task forces are formed by the Board as the needs arise. One such committee currently at work is the Search Committee.

We are currently forming a Safety Committee to create policies and procedures to address safety concerns that could occur during gatherings at the church, including measures to ensure that adults and children are not subject to sexual harassment.

A Board of Elders provides liturgical support at Offertory and at Communion, as well as visiting members of the congregation who are not able to attend Sunday worship.

A Board of Deacons supports worship by setting up, assisting at Offertory and Communion and cleaning up following worship.

**Can you provide the next minister with a copy of an organization structure, bylaws and/or annual report to further explain the patterns of the church's activity and governance?**

Yes, we have an Organization Structure and By-Laws. As well as detailed Board and Congregational Minutes, Financial, Minister and Committee Reports. Our strategic planning process also identified the need to begin writing a comprehensive Policy and Procedures Handbook.

**3b. AN 11 YEAR REPORT IS NOT AVAILABLE BECAUSE OUR CONGREGATION WAS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST 15 YEARS AGO.**

Church#: 800308

Assoc: 784      Schedule: 0      First Christian Church      Las Cruces      NM      88001

| YEAR | MEMBERS | AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE | CHR ED/ FAITH FORM | CONFIRMATION | CONFESSION | TRANSFER OR REAFFIRM | DEATHS OR TRANS OUT | OTHER LOSSES | NET MEMBS ADDS-REMOVED |
|------|---------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|----------------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| 2009 | 0       | 0                     | 0                  | 0            | 0          | 0                    | 0                   | 0            | 0                      |
| 2010 | 126     | 75                    | 47                 | 0            | 0          | 12                   | 3                   | 0            | 9                      |
| 2011 | 125     | 75                    | 35                 | 0            | 0          | 7                    | 4                   | 4            | -1                     |
| 2012 | 126     | 55                    | 15                 | 0            | 0          | 7                    | 1                   | 5            | 1                      |
| 2013 | 127     | 70                    | 0                  | 0            | 0          | 4                    | 1                   | 2            | 1                      |
| 2014 | 132     | 60                    | 10                 | 0            | 0          | 5                    | 0                   | 0            | 5                      |
| 2015 | 98      | 50                    | 0                  | 0            | 0          | 3                    | 3                   | 34           | -34                    |
| 2016 | 99      | 48                    | 0                  | 0            | 0          | 4                    | 3                   | 0            | 1                      |
| 2017 | 100     | 50                    | 12                 | 0            | 0          | 2                    | 4                   | 1            | -3                     |
| 2018 | 62      | 40                    | 15                 | 0            | 0          | 3                    | 5                   | 41           | -43                    |
| 2022 | 47      | 39                    | 0                  | 0            | 0          | 3                    | 3                   | 0            | -1                     |
| 2023 | 49      | 38                    | 0                  | 0            | 0          | 0                    | 1                   | 3            | -2                     |

| YEAR | CURRENT EXPENSES | CAPITAL PAYMENTS | BASIC SUPPORT | TOT OTHER UCC GIVIN G | TOTAL OCWM | OTHER GIFTS | WIDER MISSIO N | BASIC SUPP% CURR LOCAL | TOTAL EXPEND | PLEDGES AND OFFERINGS |
|------|------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------|-------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 2009 | \$0              | \$0              | \$0           | \$0                   | \$0        | \$0         | \$0            | 0.00                   | \$0          | \$0                   |
| 2010 | \$130,063        | \$9,165          | \$0           | \$1,050               | \$1,050    | \$0         | \$1,050        | 0.00                   | \$140,278    | \$0                   |
| 2011 | \$127,699        | \$6,576          | \$1,562       | \$1,056               | \$2,618    | \$12,075    | \$14,693       | 1.22                   | \$148,968    | \$110,352             |
| 2012 | \$117,896        | \$19,120         | \$1,521       | \$2,203               | \$3,724    | \$3,041     | \$6,765        | 1.29                   | \$143,781    | \$109,767             |
| 2013 | \$124,774        | \$9,272          | \$1,500       | \$2,348               | \$3,848    | \$5,008     | \$8,856        | 1.20                   | \$142,902    | \$126,742             |
| 2014 | \$133,538        | \$16,514         | \$1,500       | \$5,080               | \$6,580    | \$4,997     | \$11,577       | 1.12                   | \$161,629    | \$109,208             |
| 2015 | \$126,618        | \$16,055         | \$1,680       | \$2,169               | \$3,849    | \$13,732    | \$17,581       | 1.33                   | \$160,254    | \$138,073             |
| 2016 | \$126,618        | \$0              | \$1,815       | \$2,043               | \$3,858    | \$0         | \$3,858        | 1.43                   | \$130,476    | \$0                   |
| 2017 | \$124,126        | \$10,091         | \$800         | \$2,545               | \$3,345    | \$4,135     | \$7,480        | 0.64                   | \$131,606    | \$156,448             |
| 2018 | \$125,126        | \$10,923         | \$1,056       | \$406                 | \$1,462    | \$6,627     | \$8,089        | 0.84                   | \$133,215    | \$111,211             |
| 2022 | \$151,023        | \$26,669         | \$1,498       | \$1,498               | \$1,797    | \$4,415     | \$3,986        | 0.45                   | \$139,216    | \$106,100             |
| 2023 | \$127,144        | \$0              | \$1,781       | \$1,781               | \$1,781    | \$275       | \$2,400        | 0.40                   | \$127144     | \$106,604             |

| % CHANGE  | MEMBERS | AVG WEEKLY ATTENDANCE | CHR ED/ FAITH FORM | TOTAL ADDITIONS | TOTAL REMOVALS | CURR LOCAL EXPENSES | TOTAL OCWM | TOTAL EXPENDITURE |
|-----------|---------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------|
| 2013-2018 | -51.18  | -42.86                | 0.00               | -25.00          | 1433.33        | 0.28                | -62.01     | -6.78             |

### **3c. CONGREGATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS**

**Describe those who participate in your church.**

|  |    | <i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i>                                 |
|--|----|---|
| Number of active members:                                | 47 | No-This # includes 4 homebound “participating members,” and 2 “associate members” |
| Number of active non-members:                            | 2  | No  |
| Total of church participants (sum of the numbers above): | 49 | No  |

Percentage of total participants who have been in the church: (of 65 participants)

|                                  |     | <i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i> |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|
| More than 10 years:              | 51% | x   |
| Less than 10, more than 5 years: | 15% | x   |
| Less than 5 years:               | 26% | x   |
| Less than 1 year                 |     |   |

Number of total participants by age: (of 65 participants)

| 0-11 | 12-17 | 18-24 | 25-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | <i>Are these numbers an estimate? (check if yes)</i> |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|--|
| 0%   | 3.5%  | 0%    | 3.5%  | 7     | 3.5%  | 12%   | 12%   | 34% | x  |

Percentage of adults in various household types: (of 60 participating adults)

|                                  |     | <i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i> |
|----------------------------------|-----|---|
| Single adults under 35:          | 2%  | No  |
| Households with minors:          | 4%  | No  |
| Single adults age 35-65:         | 2%  | No  |
| Joint households with no minors: | 80% | No  |
| Single adults over 65:           | 12% | No  |



Education level of adult participants by percentage: (of 60 participating adults)

|                     |     | <i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i> |
|---------------------|-----|---|
| High school:        | 3%  | x   |
| College:            | 52% | x   |
| Graduate School:    | 42% | x   |
| Specialty Training: |     | x   |
| Other (students)    | 3%  | No  |

Percentage of adults in various employment types: (of 60 participating adults)

|                                    |     | <i>Is this number an estimate? (check if yes)</i> |
|------------------------------------|-----|---|
| Adults who are employed:           | 39% | x   |
| Adults who are retired:            | 57% | x   |
| Adults who are not fully employed: | 4%  | x   |

**Describe the range of occupations of working adults in the congregation:**

Those currently working are in positions such as accountants, administrators, business owners, engineers, homemakers, medical professionals, teachers, ministers, and veterinarians.

**Describe the mix of ethnic heritages in your congregation, and the overall racial makeup.**

While most respondents to the Welcoming Diversity Inventory were eager to welcome diversity, the Board has not developed a strategy to move the needle towards diversity. Most of the participating members are Caucasian, there are few African-Americans and Hispanics.

**Has your congregation recently had a conversation about welcoming diversity, or do you plan to hold one in the near future (perhaps using, for example, the Welcoming Diversity Inventory)? Please note the date. Comment after the exercise:**

Here is a concise summary of our Welcoming Diversity Inventory (June 2018): Our members and leaders value diversity and are open to new ideas. However, we do not have a system of seeking outside advice and diversity training in place. We do very well in greeting people, however there is no system for greeter training in place. We are successful in providing diverse music and preaching opportunities. Our desire for diversity is high, but not reflected in our interaction with other denominations or in our educational program.

### **3d. PARTICIPATION AND STAFFING**

| Ways of Gathering   | Estimated number of attendees | Who plans each of the listed gatherings? |
|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Adult classes   | 8                             | Faith Journey Committee                  |
| Baptisms in 2022  | 0                             | Pastor                                   |
| Women's Organizations or Classes  | 0                             |  |
| Christmas Eve and Easter Worship  | 40/60                         | Worship Leader and Pastor                |
| Church Wide Meals   | 5                             | Members                                  |
| Choirs and music (one Sunday per month)   | 6                             | Worship Committee                        |
| Church based Bible Study  | 0                             |  |
| Communion ( <i>served how often?</i> ) Weekly   | 45                            | Deacons and Elders                       |
| Community Meals (El Caldito Soup Kitchen)   | 5                             | Members-at-large                         |
| Confirmation ( <i>number confirmed last year</i> )  | 0                             |  |
| Drama or Dance Program  | 0                             |  |
| Funerals (5 in 2018)  | 1                             | Pastor                                   |
| Intergenerational Groups  | 0                             |  |
| Outdoor Worship   | 0                             |  |
| Prayer or Meditation groups   | 0                             |  |
| Public Advocacy Work  | 3-4                           | Pastor & Faith Journey Cmte              |
| Retreats  | 0                             |  |
| Theology or Bible Programs in the Community   | 0                             |  |
| Number of Weddings Last Year  | 0                             |  |
| Worship (time slot: 10:15)  | 45-50                         | Worship Ldr, Pianist, Pastor             |
| Young Adult Classes or Groups   | 0                             |  |
| Youth Classes or Groups   | 0                             |  |
| Support: HIV Food Pantry, socks for homeless, Project Oak Tree, and both DOC and UCC Missions | most members                  | Faith Action Committee                   |

**List of clergy who are active in the life of First Christian Church**

| NAME                              | DENOMINATION | INVOLVEMENT |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| The Rev. Dr. Fredric A. Brightman | UCC          | Member      |
| The Rev. Lynn B. Brightman        | UCC          | Member      |
| The Rev. Patrick Crocker          | DOC          | Member      |
| The Rev. Dr. “Chuck” Harper       | UCC          | Member      |
| The Rev. Grady McCullough         | UMC          | Member      |
| The Rev. Sue Stefford-Grey        | PCUSA        | Member      |
| The Rev. Bruce Bergthold          | UCC          | Member      |

**List all current staff, including ministers. Exclude the position you are seeking to fill. Indicate which staff person serves as head of staff.**

| Staff Position       | Head of Staff | Compensation                             | Supervised By               | Length of Tenure |
|----------------------|---------------|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Extended Pulpit Fill | Yes           | Part-Time                                | Church Board                | Since 12/16/22   |
| Sexton               | No            | Part time hourly-<br>50-60 hrs per month | Property<br>Committee Chair | 20+ years        |
| Secretary            | No            | 20 hrs per week                          | Church Board                | 2 years          |

### **3e. CHURCH FINANCES**

#### LOCAL CHURCH Fiscal Year 2022

| Source  | Amount         |
|---|----------------|
| Annual Offerings & Pledged Giving             | 109,870        |
| Endowment Proceeds                            | n/a            |
| Endowment Draw                                | n/a            |
| Fundraising Events                            | 0              |
| Gifts designated for Specific Purpose         | 16,267         |
| Grants  | 3,150          |
| Rentals of Church Buildings                   | 20,420         |
| Rentals of Church Parsonage                   | n/a            |
| Support from related organizations            | 0              |
| Transfers from Special Accounts               | 0              |
| Capital Campaign (year 5 of 5) Pledged Giving | 14,834         |
| Special Sunday Offerings                      | 0 completed    |
| Memorials                                     | 1,159          |
| Miscellaneous                                 | 694            |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                  | <b>156,250</b> |

**Current annual expenses** (dollars budgeted for most recent fiscal year): see attached budget *Attach most recent church budget, spending plan, operating statement, or annual treasurer's report as shared publicly with the congregation, or – if your church does not pass an annual budget – list current budgeted expenses here.*

**Considering total budgeted expenses for the year, compare total ministerial support. What is the percentage?** 50%

**Has the church ever failed to pay its financial obligations to a minister of the church?** No

**Is your church 5-for-5, i.e. does it include each of the following contributions during the church year? (indicate those included during the most recent fiscal year)** We rotate five offerings between DOC and UCC each year. Note: This is shared with the corresponding DOC offering.

- Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM – Basic Support)
- One Great Hour of Sharing
- Strengthen the Church
- Neighbors in Need
- Christmas Fund

**In what way is OCWM (Basic Support) gathered?**

OCWM money is gathered through our offering and operating budget- If calculated as a percentage of operating budget, what is that percentage? 5%

**What is the church's current debt?**

- Total amount of loan debt: 0
- Reason for debt: N/A
- Are capital and other payments current? Yes

**If a building program is projected or underway, describe it, including the projected start/end date of the building project and the total project budget.**

No

**If the church has had capital campaigns in the last ten years, describe:**

| Year(s)   | Purpose                            | Goal     | Result   | Impact   |
|-----------|------------------------------------|----------|----------|--|
| 2012-2017 | Facility Upgrades and improvements | \$65,000 | \$90,000 | Safety, maintenance equipment, and cosmetic enhancements |

**Describe the prominent mission component(s) involved in the most recent (or current) capital campaign.**

We highlighted the ability to make unused space available to other community agencies, for example the HIV/AIDS Food Pantry.

**Does your church have an endowment? NO**

**What is the market value of the assets? N/A**

**Are funds drawn as needed, regularly, or under certain circumstances? N/A**

**What is the percentage rate of draw (last year, compared to 5 years ago)?** N/A

**Describe draw on endowment, if any, to meet operating budget expenses for the most recent year and the past five years:** N/A

**At the current rate of draw, how long might the endowment last?** N/A

**Other Assets**

Reserves (savings): \$88,286 general and \$63,6612 reserves (incl. held Memorial funds).

Investments (other than endowment): None

Does your church have a parsonage? No

**Describe all buildings owned by the church:**

Main Building: *Atrium, Sanctuary, Chapel, Kitchen*

Meeting Wing- *Meditation Chapel, Parlor and HIV/AIDS Food Pantry*

Office Wing - *4 Office rooms and an apartment for the Sexton*

2<sup>nd</sup> Wing - *Rented by St John of Antioch Catholic Church,*

3<sup>rd</sup> Wing – *Weaving For Justice*

2 Acres of land - *used by Backyard Farms for community gardens*

**Describe non-owned buildings or space used or rented by the church:** None

**Which spaces are accessible to wheelchairs?**

All spaces are accessible. All are on one level, doors are wide enough for wheelchair access, and there are no threshold barriers. Handicapped accessible parking is provided in front of the church.

**Reflection: After reviewing the church's finances and assets described above, what does this information reflect about your congregation's mission and ministry?**

Several years ago, the Board asked the Property Chair to complete a survey of the campus to identify deferred maintenance projects. The Board identified approximately \$250,000 worth of deferred maintenance and cosmetic improvements that would be needed to bring the property up to safety standards and to update the appearance of the sanctuary and other rooms on the property. There was much discussion about whether or not we should move to a smaller building. The Board and the congregation, as a whole, recognized that a large part of our mission in this community is to provide office space and meeting space to groups that meet the varied needs of the community. At that time the congregation undertook a five-year campaign to take us "Back to the Future". The focus of the campaign was making improvements in safety and projects that would extend the life of the building, e.g. new roofing, new air conditioners, sealing

the parking lot. While most of our budget is directed toward staff, a large part is directed towards maintaining the physical plant with the recognition that the physical plant serves many more organizations than just our congregation.

In 2023 our members passed a 5 year strategic plan which is attached. Our vision for the future seeks to leverage our historic strengths as a congregation while addressing the needs we see on the horizon for First Christian Church in Las Cruces. The strategic initiative that this plan has created is the result of communication, research, leadership retreats, conversation and discernment, prayer, and more discernment.

**A. How is the Budgeting Process done:**

The Annual Stewardship Campaign Committee reports campaign results to the Finance Committee, which in turn builds a budget, based on pledges and projected expenses (based on current year actual expenses). The budget is then approved by the Board of Directors and subsequently at a congregational meeting.

**B. What new ministry initiative has your church financed:**

- To make our unused space available to community organizations.
- To work toward eliminating social and racial injustice.
- *LGBTQ+ Initiatives such as Pride Festivals and Marches, PFLAG, films, dinner events and support groups.*

**3f. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

**Name one to three significant happenings in the history of your church that have shaped the identity of your congregation. Add the most important event in the life of your church in the past 10 years. Describe a specific change your church has managed in the recent past.**

We have introduced and carried out several changes and initiatives in our congregation.

1. First Christian Church partnered with Tierra Del Sol to solicit a loan from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to create Chaparral senior Housing which was completed in 1992. It is a low income senior housing facility, built on a 2.33 acre parcel, located at 2350 Nevada Avenue in Las Cruces. This is a separate corporation not owned by the church but has an Executive Board made up of FCCLC Members and others from the community.
2. Pat Puckett and Aletta Wilson attended the 1996 General Assembly of The Disciples of Christ Church (DOC) in Denver. They came back to the Church with the charge to address racial issues and to study the awareness and roles of Gays and Lesbians in Churches. For eight years the Congregation studied, discussed, debated and

learned the issues of racism and the process of becoming **Open and Affirming**. On Feb. 21, 2004, at a Congregational meeting, we voted to become an Open and Affirming Congregation. The majority voted yes with three members abstaining. As an Open and Affirming congregation we accept all into the full life and ministry of our Church, all persons including those of every race, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, and economic status.

3. As we had been receiving new members from the **United Church of Christ** (UCC) over the years, and because we were told that there was a possibility of that denomination starting a new church, we vigorously discussed approaching the UCC to see if they would want to make a covenant with us. In January of 2010, at a congregational meeting, we voted to request recognition as a covenant congregation of the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ. It passed unanimously. This was our most important event in the past ten years.

4. In May of 2023 we covenanted with the UCC Open and Affirming Coalition to be listed as an Open and Affirming Congregation.

**Ministerial History:**

|                     |           |   |
|---------------------|-----------|---|
| George Brown        | 1974-1984 | Disciples of Christ                                 |
| Frank Mace          | 1985-1993 | Disciples of Christ                                 |
| Lynn Ditto          | 1994-1999 | Disciples of Christ                                 |
| Charles Fisch       | 1999-2001 | United Church of Christ                             |
| Dennis Knotts       | 2001-2007 | Disciples of Christ                                 |
| Linda Mervine       | 2007-2017 | Disciples of Christ                                 |
| Donna Cavedon       | 2017      | Intentional Interim Pastor, United Church of Christ |
| Bethany Evans-Meier | 2019-2022 | United Church of Christ                             |
| Richard Feyen       | 2022-2022 | United Church of Christ Pulpit Supply               |
| Patrick Crocker     | 2022-     | Disciples of Christ Pulpit Supply                   |

**Comment on what your church has learned about itself and its relationship with persons who provided ministerial leadership:**

Both our clerical and lay leadership have been strong, compassionate and understanding.

We have learned our Church is a faithful, loving and activist congregation. We know we can make a difference and be a force for awareness and change in Las Cruces. We have learned to work together in a caring, friendly, loving, supportive and honest way. We have concluded that Linda Mervine, for ten years, held this congregation together with love, faith and gentleness until her retirement. Donna Cavedon, our current Intentional Interim Pastor, has had an important and positive affect on our Congregation's health and growth. Her personal faith, compassionate demeanor and sense of humor has endeared her to this Congregation. Covid hit with Bethany just



beginning her pastorate with us. She held us together with zoom services and individual meetings with members. As we began to exit those two years she was very effective in finding ways to gather safely.

However, in its history there have been conflicts and misunderstandings. The process to minimize conflict and upheaval in the Congregation is to address the situation quickly and directly. First the pastor or Board President is informed of the situation and suggests the parties involved discuss the problem among themselves to reach a consensus. If this doesn't work it is discussed in depth with the Board President. The President decides if he/she can resolve the situation or if he/she should discuss and seek advice with the Pastor and /or the Board. If there is no resolution, the Board is informed for a decision. If it is a very serious situation, it is brought to the Congregation for discussion and a vote.

**Has any past leader left under pressure or by involuntary termination?** No

**Has your church been involved in a Situational Support Consultation?** Yes.

There was a situation several years ago where the Executive Committee initiated a request for a Situational Support Consultation. (This was in consultation with the Disciples of Christ and long before the covenant with the UCC.) The situation was resolved before involving further support consultation.

**Has a past pastor been the subject of a Fitness Review while at your church?**

No.

**Who is our neighbor?**

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

COMMUNITY VISION

MISSION In Site Report

#### **4a. COMMUNITY VISION**

**How do the relationships and activities of your congregation extend outward in service and advocacy?**

**Financial Outreach:**

Our Pastor maintains a discretionary fund (in the form of food and gas cards) that is used to provide immediate support to individuals who present themselves to the pastor seeking assistance. The budget of the church as approved by the Board and the Congregation specifies that 5% of our income will be distributed among the following areas: El Calvario, United Methodist Church, Christian Church in the Southwest (Disciples of Christ), and Southwest Conference (United Church of Christ).

**Service and Advocacy Locally:**

We are an Open and Affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ. We are connected with the local LGBTQ+ community and we support projects of PFLAG. We sponsor a booth during the annual Gay Pride Festival. We serve as the fiscal agent and physically house a food bank for individuals who are living with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS.

Our Faith Action Committee was connecting with the Interfaith Alliance in order to respond to emerging needs within our community and will again when they return from COVID. Pastor or lay members meet with the NMSU Interfaith Group, an ecumenical organization for community involvement.

We provide office space or meeting space at no cost or less than market rates for several non-profit organizations that seek to meet identified needs in our community. Several years ago, when we were evaluating whether we still needed a physical facility as large as we have for the size of our congregation, we recognized that we provide a great service to the community by providing office and/or meeting space for these groups. The following nonprofit groups either rent or use our space: St John's Church of Antioch (Independent Catholic Church), HIV+ Food Pantry, Al-Anon, New World Drummers, Mesilla Valley Swing Band, Mesilla Valley Jazz and Blues Society, Weaving for Justice, Backyard Farms, Toad Hall Productions, and Celestial Sounds Choir.

Our recently updated FCCLC.org website informs and frequently attracts LGBTQ+ and other visitors to our Sunday services. In the past, we have received phone calls from LGBTQ+ individuals asking if we really would welcome them into our worship services and community. We assure them that at FCCLC, LGBTQ+ individuals are invited to serve as Deacons, Elders, and members of our Board of Directors and are welcome to partake in all church activities.

**Describe your congregation's participation in meetings, relationships and activities connecting the wider United Church of Christ (association/conference / national setting).****Service and Advocacy – Conference/Area:**

Several of our members participate on committees of the United Church of Christ Southwest Conference, and many of our leaders attended their Annual Meeting in El Paso, Texas in April 2023.

**Service and Advocacy -- National/International:**

Some members have participated in national and international conference meetings, such as the Disciples of Christ General Assembly, the 2015 World Parliament of Religions. Our Board does consider matters that come before national assemblies and weigh in on these issues when invited to do so by our denominations.

Many local churches love to tell the story of what they are doing in the community to transform lives. Some have identified certain aspects of their witness into the wider community using language shared with other UCC congregations. Check any statements below that apply to your UCC faith community.

- Accessible to All (A2A) -
- Creation Justice

- Economic Justice
- Faithful and Welcoming
- God Is Still Speaking (GISS)
- Just Peace
- WISE (mental health)
- Border and Immigrant Justice
- Inter-cultural/Multi-racial (I'M)
- Global Mission Church
- Open and Affirming
- Designations from other denominations

**Reflect on what the above statement(s) mean(s) to your community. Is your congregation interested in working toward any of the above statements of witness in the near future?**

It is important to the members of FCCLC that all God's people feel welcome, wanted and needed in our congregation. We have consciously worked to make our facility accessible to all within the confines of an older building. Since our adoption of an Open and Affirming stance, we not only welcome, but celebrate the lives and contributions of the LGBTQ+ members of our congregation, as we do all members. Our work with Border and Immigration Justice and Economic Justice are part of our identity, parts of which we are very proud. We are in the process of sending notes developed by the UCC on environmental issues, to members to remind them of needed action within Creation Justice. We are working on all of the other issues espoused by the UCC statements not marked above and will apply for recognition in the future.

**Describe your congregation's participation in ecumenical and interfaith activities (with other denominations and religious organizations, local and regional).**

We have a long tradition of working with other Christian denominations, Jewish, Islamic and Bahá'í communities in our region. In the past we have worked closely with other faith communities on the Hospitality Coalition, an alliance of 16 faith communities and the city of Las Cruces. During times of crisis we have come together to speak as one voice with other faith communities on social justice issues. Most of our pastors have been active in the Interfaith Alliance in our community, and attend/have attended a monthly interfaith clergy breakfast and a weekly dialogue with people of varied faith traditions: Bahá'í, Roman Catholic, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and Protestant. **COVID has stopped the meeting but we are intent on reinigorating this connection when we are able. New Mexico State University Interfaith Group asked our congregation to join their efforts in the university and wider community and our current Pastor will attend.**

**If your congregation has a mission statement, how does that mission statement compare to the actual time spent engaging in different activities? Think of the range of activities from time spent gathering, to governance, to time spent going out.**

Within the last year, our congregation developed the following mission statement *REACH OUT, REACH UP, REACH IN. We are here to help people know God, find freedom, discover their purpose, and make a difference in the community, near and far.* This mission informs our time reflected in our involvement in emerging social justice issues, e.g. equal rights and access for members of the LGBTQ+ community, supporting the humanity of migrants whether documented or not, giving voice to women's health issues, and providing an extravagant welcome to all we meet.

**Reflect on the scope of work assigned to your pastor(s). How is their community ministry and their ministry in and on behalf of the wider church accounted for in the congregation's expectations on their time?**

The congregation supports a balanced allotment of time for the pastor's ministry. While worship, pastoral care, and administration absorb the largest portion of time, the congregation encourages the pastor's participation in outreach to the community through membership in The Interfaith Alliance, other interfaith activities, as well as denominational activities i.e. board meetings, workshops, and annual meetings. It is expected that the pastor will be connected to the DOC and the UCC denominations.

**4b. MISSION In Site**

**Comment on your congregation's MissionInsite report with data for your neighborhood(s) or area. What trends and opportunities are shown?**

The New Mexico State University community and progressive middle aged and retired Christians who have recently moved to Las Cruces offer the best opportunity for sustained membership and growth for FCCLC. These two segments are well represented within a 5-mile radius of the church.

**How does your congregation's internal demographics compare or contrast to a) the neighborhoods adjacent to your church, and b) other neighborhoods with which your church connects?**

FCCLC is situated across the street from Las Cruces High School to the west. To the east is a large city park. Internal demographics of the congregation compare well to the larger community within a 5-mile radius of the church. However, they are not aligned with the adjacent neighborhoods, which tend towards housing for college students.

**How are the demographics of the community currently shaping ministry, or not?**

Our community is experiencing two predominant population trends:

(1) Slowly trending towards a younger majority Hispanic/Latino population and lower income. The City of Las Cruces recently implemented a minimum wage of \$12.00 per hour. This is a stark contrast to the state minimum wage of \$8.20 to \$8.80 per hour and the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour.

(2) In-migration of middle class, Caucasian retirees. Immigration issues are prominent as we are a border community and many families are directly connected to persons that are not fully documented for legal residency.

The weekly influx of immigrants is also shaping ministry within First Christian Church. Members of the congregation have worked with Project Oak Tree to provide overnight housing and transportation to newly arrived documented immigrants who are often dropped off by the government with little or no advanced notice. We have also worked with Operation Streamline to help immigrants. We still have members helping feed immigrants through El Calvario United Methodist Church when needed. Our congregants give generously to a donation station with clothing, toiletries and other items as needed. Recently, monies were raised to purchase cell phones for immigrants traveling on to connect with their sponsors elsewhere in the United States. Also, homelessness continues to grow within the Las Cruces community. The Community of Hope (a designated campus by the City of Las Cruces to serve the homeless and poor) is a response to this issue. FCCLC members respond to the above-mentioned needs by becoming involved in a variety of ways, such as El Caldito (Soup Kitchen within that campus).

### **What do you hear when you talk to community leaders and ask them what your church is known for?**

The community leaders who responded to our questions have always felt welcomed at FCCLC. They described the church as friendly, open minded, and generous with the use of space by offering the church to organizations for meetings and activities. The church has a history of being involved in social justice issues. The church has been aware and involved in the issues of Electoral District 2 in Las Cruces.

### **What do new people in the church say when asked what got them involved?**

The Elders' Survey informs us that new people are willing to get involved, but sometimes wonder how and where. Our leaders are perceptive when asking people to be involved according to their talents.

New people come to check us out (shopping around), often return and stay because of the warm and genuine welcome of church members. They also have visited the website and noted that we are Open and Affirming and involved in progressive issues.

## **5. REFERENCES**

**Request a letter from each reference. Attach the letters (up to three) as desired.**

### **Rev George Miller**

Executive Director  
El Calvario United Methodist - Immigrant  
Advocacy Center  
575-524-1230  
316 N Campo St, Las Cruces, NM

### **Christine Eber**

Coordinator, Weaving for Justice  
575-621-5999  
Las Cruces, NM  
[www.weaving-for-justice.org](http://www.weaving-for-justice.org)

### **Very Reverend Father Ronald Cathererson**

St John's Catholic Church of the Antioch  
1809 El Paseo Rd, Las Cruces, NM  
575- 621-0255

### **Rachael Ryan**

Owner/CEO  
Backyard Farms, LLC  
575-323-1471  
backyardfarmslc@gmail.com

### **Quotes from Letters of Reference:**

From Christine Eber, director of Weaving for Justice, a non-profit organization that displays and sells handwoven and embroidered textiles made by Mayan women in Chiapas, Mexico, and which has been a tenant at First Christian Church since January 2022:

Although we are a tenant, First Christian Church has treated us more like part of their church family and an integral part of their social justice mission. After a robbery in our store led to the loss of much of our inventory, the church board responded by helping us secure our store and inviting us to store textiles in an interior room of the church. Further, they forgave several months' rent until we could get back on our feet. "We can't thank them enough for the incredible support they have shown us."

From the Very Reverend Father Ronald Catherson of St. John's Catholic Church of Antioch, a congregation that has been meeting and worshiping in the First Christian Church building for 11 years:

Our congregation has been part of the ministries of First Christian Church for many years. We have been welcomed from the beginning... and seen as brothers and sisters in Christ, fully loved by God. First Christian Church ministries are all designed to help someone in need, whether it is those who are living with AIDS, being oppressed in other countries, living on the streets within our community, or visitors to our state in need of assistance.

From the Rev. George Miller of the El Calvario United Methodist Church, a mission partner since 2018 in helping immigrant families:

Since 2018, we have received an unprecedented number of immigrants at our southern border. First Christian's resources of volunteers and donations proved to be of critical assistance in making the local support operations successful. I can attest to the commitment FCC has to serve and provide justice with comprehensive, culturally competent character and work ethic.

From Rachel Ryan of Backyard Farms, a community partner since 2017. They began with the Urban Community Garden on church property where food for community food banks, soup kitchens, and food hubs is grown. "The Church has been very supportive of us and our mission to fight hunger in our community, with members of the church coming out to volunteer to help work in the garden during our volunteer days." "We have been invited to share our work with the Church Board at meetings and the church congregation during Sunday services. We are humbled and blessed by the churches' ongoing support of Backyard Farms and our efforts, and we look forward to continuing this relationship into the future."

**Describe a significant experience you have had with the church's ministry:**

The church had a film festival that was open to the congregation and the public. All the films dealt with relevant and important social issues that ranged from saving the environment to respecting indigenous people. Gardening for people in need, grandparents raising grandchildren, El Caldito (soup kitchen,) LGBTQ+ rights, Project Oak Tree (refugees and immigration), CAFE (Community Faith in Action), HIV+ Food Pantry and Singing Out (LGBTQ+ choral group) are named as being significant experiences in the life of the church.

**Additional Comments:**

All references responded with positive reactions about their involvement in various interactions with the church. For example: showing films, committee involvement, board membership, concerts, and community activities hosted by or at the FCCLC were all positive experiences and provided a feeling of accomplishment.

**CLOSING THOUGHTS**

CLOSING PRAYER

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION VALIDATION

**6a. CLOSING PRAYER**

Loving Spirit, teach us compassion to embrace the gifts you give.

In our differences, teach us to love fully and radically all of Your children, as their true and whole selves. Lead us with courage to be advocates for all people just as you sent your advocate through the Holy Spirit.

#### **6b. STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as pastors and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided information in this profile that accurately represents our church. We have not knowingly withheld any information that would be helpful to candidates.

As the committee charged with the responsibility for identifying and recommending suitable new Pastor for our church, we have been authorized to share the information herein with potential candidates. We understand that a candidate may wish to secure further knowledge, information, and opinions about our church. We encourage a candidate to do so, recognizing that an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for continuing and healthy relationships between calling bodies and persons seeking a ministry position.

#### **Which individuals and groups in the church contributed to the contents of this Local Church Profile?**

A Pastoral Search Committee was nominated by the FCCLC Board and elected at a congregational meeting. The Search Committee created a member survey distributed in May of 2023 to elicit members input with 27 respondents. Contributors to Local Church Profile included current Board members and Directors, committee members, church members and friends, retired pastors within the congregation, and Las Cruces community members. The Pastoral Search Committee summarized their' Survey and was editor and compiler of the Local Church Profile.

#### **Additional comments for interpreting the profile:**

We have provided an email with an attachment of the 2023 church budget.

We have provided an email with an attachment of the three pictures included in the profile.

We have provided an email with an attachment of the summary of the Local Church Profile.

We have provided an email with an attachment of the 5 Year Strategic Plan.

We have provided an email with an attachment of the 3 Reference Letters.

6c. VALIDATION BY CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION

The congregation is currently in good standing with the association / conference named.

Staff Comment:

To the best of my knowledge, ministerial history information is complete.

Staff Comment:

To the best of my knowledge, available church financial information is presented thoroughly.

Staff Comment:

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature:

Name / Title: Rev. Dr. Barbara Doerrer-Peacock, Associate Conference Minister

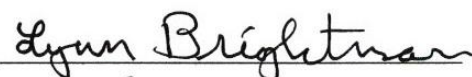
Email: bdoerrerpeacock@uccswc.org

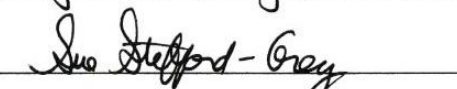
Phone: 602-468-3830 (o) 480-243-2796 (c)

Date:

Church Profile updated by:

Chairperson: Ralph Holmes 

Member: Lynn Brightman 

Member: Sue Stefford-Grey 

Member: Aletta Wilson 

Member: Julie Wojtko 





| <b>2023 Proposed Operating Budget - Exec Board - 01/21/23</b>   | 2022 Budget         | 2022 Actual         | 2023 Budget         |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>OPERATING INCOME</b>   |                     |                     |                     |
| Offerings, Members, Pledged                                     | \$88,820.00         | 94,143.68           | \$95,804.00         |
| Offerings, Members, Non-pledged                                 | 6,940.00            | 14,513.95           | 9,600.00            |
| Offerings, Cash   | 50.00               | 1,212.00            | 1,200.00            |
| Church Improvements / Maintenance                               | 14,240.00           | 16,267.00           | 10,496.00           |
| Special Day Offerings <sup>1</sup>                              | 1,800.00            | 4,690.00            | 2,400.00            |
| Building Use: Contract & Non-Contract                           | 12,420.00           | 20,420.00           | 19,980.00           |
| <b>Income Subtotal</b>  | <b>\$124,270.00</b> | <b>\$151,246.63</b> | <b>\$139,480.00</b> |
| <b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>                                       |                     |                     |                     |
| <b>Administration &amp; Property</b>                            |                     |                     |                     |
| Church Improvements / Major Maintenance                         | 14,240.00           | 19,618.63           | 10,496.00           |
| Administration: Copier; Office Supplies; Postage                | 4,341.99            | 2,282.65            | 2,510.92            |
| Property: Utilities (Electric, Water, Gas, Internet, etc.)      | 11,932.50           | 15,708.06           | 17,278.87           |
| Property: Minor Maintenance & Supplies                          | 5,061.73            | 4,529.85            | 4,982.84            |
| Property: Insurance   | 6,129.20            | 6,431.00            | 8,418.76            |
| <b>Administration &amp; Property Subtotal</b>                   | <b>\$41,705.42</b>  | <b>\$48,570.19</b>  | <b>\$43,687.38</b>  |
| <b>Personnel</b>  |                     |                     |                     |
| Minister: Salary + Housing + FICA Offset + Benefits             | \$71,737.54         | \$51,485.15         | \$0.00              |
| Extended Term Supply Pastor                                     | --                  | \$10,598.29         | 42,000.00           |
| Office Admin / Video Technologist                               | 5,028.00            | 15,397.13           | 16,511.04           |
| Sexton  | 5,577.00            | 9,390.00            | 10,222.33           |
| Worker's Comp Insurance   | 1,256.43            | 998.30              | 1,050.00            |
| Payroll Taxes on Hourly Employees                               | 426.66              | 1,896.25            | 2,045.10            |
| <b>Personnel Subtotal</b>                                       | <b>\$84,025.62</b>  | <b>\$89,765.11</b>  | <b>\$71,828.46</b>  |
| <b>Committee/Activities</b>                                     |                     |                     |                     |
| Supplies / Subscriptions (Servant Keeper; Zoom; Textedly, etc.) | \$700.00            | \$1,877.31          | 2,065.04            |
| Guest Speakers (Pulpit Supply)                                  | 900.00              | 545.96              | 600.56              |
| Evangelism: Advertising & Promotion                             | 1,500.00            | 541.31              | 595.44              |
| Regional Meetings/Conferences                                   | 350.00              | 180.54              | 350.00              |
| <b>Committee/Activities Subtotal</b>                            | <b>\$3,450.00</b>   | <b>\$3,145.12</b>   | <b>\$3,611.04</b>   |
| <b>Outreach</b>   |                     |                     |                     |
| Special Day Offerings <sup>1</sup>                              | \$1,800.00          | \$4,940.00          | \$2,400.00          |
| Tres Rios (DoC) <sup>2</sup>                                    | 1,601.00            | 1,488.00            | 1,781.00            |
| SW Conference UCC <sup>2</sup>                                  | 1,601.00            | 1,498.00            | 1,781.00            |
| Christ Action & Com Service: El Calvario <sup>2</sup>           | 1,601.00            | 1,488.00            | 1,781.00            |
| Other   | 150.00              | 0.00                | 150.00              |
| Green Chanber   | 125.00              | 129.00              | 125.00              |
| <b>Outreach Subtotal</b>  | <b>\$6,878.00</b>   | <b>\$9,543.00</b>   | <b>\$8,018.00</b>   |
| <b>EXPENSE SUBTOTAL</b>   | <b>\$136,059.04</b> | <b>\$151,023.42</b> | <b>\$127,144.88</b> |
| <b>ADJUSTMENTS</b>  |                     |                     |                     |
| Back-to-the-Future Loan Payments                                | -\$10,091.16        | \$0.00              | \$0.00              |
| Special Gift for Pastoral Support / 2023 Search Committee       | \$16,668.00         | \$5,000.00          | -\$8,000.00         |
| <b>OPERATING INCOME - EXPENSE (Suprlus/Deficit)</b>             | <b>-\$5,212.20</b>  | <b>\$5,223.21</b>   | <b>\$4,335.12</b>   |

**Notes:** <sup>1</sup>In and out (Pass-through)

<sup>2</sup>A percentage of Pledges + Cash Offerings spread among these outreach categories

18 October 2023

To whom it may concern:

Weaving for Justice is a non-profit organization that has been a tenant at First Christian Church since January 2022. We rent a space in one wing of the church where we display and sell hand-woven and embroidered textiles made by Maya women in collectives in Chiapas, Mexico and textiles collected throughout Latin America by individuals who generously donate them to Weaving for Justice to raise funds for scholarships for Maya youth in Belize, Chiapas, and Guatemala.

At our store we also host immersion groups organized by the Border Servant Corps to enable student and church groups throughout the nation to come to learn about the struggles of asylum seekers and refugees in our border region.

Although we are a tenant, First Christian Church has treated us more like part of their church family and an integral part of their social justice mission. This became especially apparent to us after a robbery in our store this past year which led to the loss of much of our inventory. The Church Board responded by helping us secure our store through paying for dead bolt locks and window bars. Until our store is completely secured, the Board invited us to store textiles in an interior room of the church. Beyond these important gestures of support, the Board forgave us ten months of rent in order to help us get back on our feet. We can't thank them enough for the incredible support they have shown us.

The Board also opens the Church Atrium and kitchen to us to hold our 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday sales and special events, such as our annual members brunch. As an all-volunteer non-profit membership organization, our annual brunch is an important way we thank local members and donors.

The Church has also invited Weaving for Justice and other renters to meetings throughout the year at which time we have shared our work and any concerns we may have. These meetings have facilitated a sense of community among the renters and church members.

First Christian Church has been a blessing to our organization. We hope to continue being able to call the church our home in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Christine Eber  
Coordinator, Weaving for Justice  
[www.weaving-for-justice.org](http://www.weaving-for-justice.org)  
575 621-5999

November 15, 2023



To whom it may concern:

Backyard Farms has been a tenant at First Christian Church since 2017. We began with the Urban Community Garden where we grow food for community food banks, soup kitchens, and food hubs. We also teach workshops to low-income families about how to grow their own food in our desert climate, growing food in containers in apartments, patios, balconies, and other space limited areas, making compost, making homemade biochar, and more. We recently expanded into four classrooms to begin hydroponic production to increase year-round food production capacity.

Many of the foods we produce are then sent to our freeze-dried processing center and made into healthy shelf stable foods that can be transported without the need for refrigeration to remote regions of our state to help feed some of our neediest populations.

The Church has been very supportive of us and our mission to fight hunger in our community, with members of the church coming out to volunteer to help work in the garden during our volunteer days. Working with a member from the church who was a Special Education teacher at the high school right next door, who was able to arrange to have the students come out and work in the garden for two days a week. The students loved this experience, in fact, one of the mostly non-verbal students kept asking "when can we go back to the garden again?" and the food they assisted in harvesting helped to feed 80 hungry families in our community. In turn, we also tried to give back to the church, we hired a homeschool family from the church to help in our greenhouse. And when the church's riding lawnmower broke down, we lent the church our mower and yard tools to use.

We have been invited to share our work with the Church Board at meetings and the church congregation during Sunday services. We are humbled and blessed by the churches' ongoing support of Backyard Farms and our efforts, and we look forward to continuing this relationship into the future.

Sincerely,

Rachael Ryan

Owner/CEO

Backyard Farms, LLC

[backyardfarmslc@gmail.com](mailto:backyardfarmslc@gmail.com)

575-323-1471



El Calvario United Methodist Church  
\*PO Box 2842\*  
Las Cruces, NM 88004

1 November, 2023

First Christian Church in Las Cruces  
Attn: Esther Devall [edevall@nmsu.edu](mailto:edevall@nmsu.edu)  
1809 El Paseo Road  
Las Cruces, NM 88001

Subject: Pastor Search letter of support

Dear Esther and beloved First Christian Church,

My name is Rev George Miller and I am writing as the Executive Director on behalf of El Calvario United Methodist Church and Community/Immigrant Advocacy Center, a 501(c)3 nonprofit operating in southern New Mexico and West Texas. El Calvario is currently a leader in providing humanitarian assistance to our vulnerable populations. Our Center finds itself well-positioned as a platform for research, education and advocacy for all vulnerable peoples.

In First Christian's case, we see your church as a mission partner in the world, with our particular relationship revolving around some of your members who have engaged in our common ministry of helping immigrant families since 2018. During this time, the United States received an unprecedented number of immigrants at our southern border, and First Christian's resources of volunteers and donations proved to be a critical assistance in making the local support operations successful.

The FCC volunteers displayed adaptability, pivoting from normal duties toward new tasks in helping provide humanitarian support to released asylum seekers. They took a lead role in welcoming, sheltering, clothing transportation, feeding, as well as providing medical, legal, social and other humanitarian services for these new neighbors in our community.

In your search for a new pastor, someone who can support a missional congregation would be helpful from our prospective. This would not only continue in mission partnership with us but also continue with those other community members and organizations with a common calling. This characteristic will confirm as well as continue to develop those areas for engagement in FCC's ministry field.

One significant experience for me, centered around the commercial kitchen where the ecumenical team, most often lead by a FCC volunteer, cooked and served over 10,000 meals per year helping feed 3000 men, women and children. This often provided their first nutritional meal in many weeks. Equally important was the hospitality displayed by the volunteer team which provided a much-needed,ed sacred platform of dignity and respect for our new neighbors to lift them up for their continuing journey in a new land.

The shared mission orientation allowed us to not only bring services to those not used to being served, but also a ray of hope which leads to access and connection with other vital services. I can attest to the commitment FCC has to serve and provide justice with comprehensive, culturally competent character and work ethic. Please call me if you would like further information at: (575) 524-1230 or email me at:[pastor@elcalvarioumc.org](mailto:pastor@elcalvarioumc.org).

### **Rev George Miller**

Executive Director

El Calvario United Methodist - Immigrant Advocacy Center

Office: 575.524.1230 | Direct: 360.674.9822

316 N Campo St., Las Cruces, NM 88001





# FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN LAS CRUCES | STRATEGIC PLAN

For Years 2023 through 2027

DATE ACCEPTED BY BOARD OF DIRECTORS: 17  
DECEMBER 2022

DATE PRESENTED TO CONGREGATION:  
January 21, 2023





## Forward

The purpose of this Strategic Plan document is to capture the Strategic Vision, Goals and Objectives of our church along with the Strategies to achieve them. This document was prepared by the church leadership. This group was composed of the Board of Directors, the Pastor, Deacons, Elders, and other interested church members.

The Board of Directors asked the author to develop a strategic plan for the church. A planning framework, described in this document, was used to guide the development of this plan. The framework starts with our church Mission Statement, the Vision, and plans for Core Values, Goals and Objectives, and Strategies. Each Strategy can be traced back to the Mission Statement to help ensure that each Strategy aligns with the Mission.

This plan represents an update to the previous strategic plan. This new plan was prepared using the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) planning process.

## How To Use this Document

The Strategic Plan is used by the Board of Directors, the Pastor, Deacon, Elders, and the church Membership at large. The plan is used to develop and document actionable Goals, Objectives, and Strategies to achieve their Vision. It is a guide to focus project planning activities and to communicate the Vision and Mission to the Membership to inspire, encourage, motivate, and engage their support. Implementation of the plan is a close collaboration of all leadership of the church. The Board of Directors evaluates the performance of specific projects and strategies on a regular basis to help ensure the goals and objectives captured in this plan are achieved.

This plan is used by the Membership to stay informed of our church's plans so that they know how best to support them. It is envisioned that members will work closely with the leadership to help each member use and apply this guide. This plan is also used by the Board of Directors and Stewardship Committee to formulate our annual budget to help ensure our budget and member giving aligns with the Strategic Plan.

The planning horizon for this plan is 5 to 10 years, though we very much consider the fact that our members numbers and focus can change. We also envision that this Strategic Vision and supporting Strategies will be used as a guide to help select our next Pastor – one with the needed competencies, and one who can easily align with this plan and be able to lead us on the same strategic path with a strong conviction.

*Jeremiah 29:11-14a – “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and*

*pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord...*

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## Executive Summary

Imagine a circular dance of three people, each of them moving in unity and purpose, each giving and receiving in the moment of the dance. Imagine even more, that there is space for you to enter into the same dance, a place for you to belong, in step with the hosts, and to celebrate life in the dance.

Early in the church's life the term "perichoresis" was used to describe this dance. The literal meaning "to make room for" or "go forward" it describes the relationship between God, the Christ, and the Spirit, and by claiming our place as a Christian, we are invited into this holy dance.

Over the years, First Christian Church in Las Cruces, has gone forward in faith through worship, learning and service. We have always made room for God and our neighbors. We have seen our ministries grow, and our ministries shrink. And we have struggled to understand the changes and pressures of a changing society.

Our church has danced, ever in step with God, Christ, and Spirit, moving forward in mission, making room for new members, new and different ministries, deepening our connection to the community by sharing our facilities. We have offered hospitality and hope to those who are close, and those who live far away but feel a part of us. We have done this through our generosity and acts of service.

Our vision for the future seeks to leverage our historic strengths as a congregation while addressing the needs we see on the horizon for First Christian Church in Las Cruces. The strategic initiative that this plan has created is the result of communication, research, leadership retreats, conversation and discernment, prayer, and more discernment.

It will be the responsibility of the leadership and congregation to monitor the progress of this strategic plan. The action items outlined underlying the strategic initiatives will be assigned to respective leaders and committees for refinement and action. However, each member of the congregation has an active part in ensuring the success of the strategic plan.

These strategic initiatives have emerged through our conversations and discernment. They can be summarized as strengthening relationships, making connections, and building foundations. These initiatives began with a discussion of the Board of Directors concerning the condition of our facilities. The buildings were built nearly 50 years ago and are showing their age, with increasing maintenance, accessibility, and size issues. In order to find solutions to our needs and issues, it was recommended that a congregation wide discussion on our mission, vision, and values needed to happen. From that came a renewal of our strategic plan.

## **Strengthening Relationships**

*God calls us to love ourselves and our neighbors. As a family size congregation, we need to find a way where relationships with God and people can be developed and strengthened. Some ways that relationships can continue to be strengthened have been identified. We can:*

- Show more joy in how we worship
- Offer a variety of ways to learn and serve throughout the week.
- Be unafraid and open to new people and ideas with many opportunities for fellowship, to create a sense of unity.

A common theme in our discussions was the need to revitalize our education ministries. This initiative will serve as the basis on which we, as a congregation can more fully connect with God, while reestablishing the relationships within our congregation and those who come as visitors. The expectation of a more engaged congregation is a stronger commitment to stewardship – the giving of our talents, time, and treasures – and growth in our average weekly attendance.

## **Making Connections**

*God calls us to share the Gospel of Christ's love for us. Effective communication in a visual information age is critical to proclaiming what God is doing through the church. Some of the methods of making connections can be:*

- Building an effective communication capacity through our web site, Facebook, and other social media outlets.
- Using outreach to the growing parts of our community, both within the city, the county, and region.
- We evaluate our opportunities to be at public events
- We seek out new worship opportunities.

At the heart of the plan is the method in which First Christian Church will communicate with our neighbors and within and among the congregation to ensure our messaging is consistent and relevant. The changing demographics of the south El Paseo neighborhood in the coming years, as well as a constantly changing student body at NMSU and Las Cruces High School creates an opportunity on which our focus of outreach can create a sustained growth in First Christian's membership. We listen to our members, and we have an obligation to respond to changing preferences for worship styles and types of worship to ensure we are making connections.

## Building Foundations

*God calls us to be good stewards of the gifts that we have received. A congregation is entrusted with property, resources and ministry that deserve our best attention and faithful shepherding. We use our planning to build strong foundations on which we can be good stewards of our gifts through the:*

- Development of a comprehensive master plan for our facilities, to become more accessible to a variety of uses, and different physical limitations. Or to find suitable facilities.
- Continued refinement of a comprehensive plan to manage our financial resources.
- Evaluation of our programming and ministries on a regular basis
- Creation of outreach programs with community organizations and educational institutions to meet the spiritual, mental, and ecological health of our greater community.

The use and alignment of our building and resources, both financially and spatially, needs to support this vision, and will be critical to its success. Therefore, this plan specifically addresses those core infrastructure needs on which our ministries are based.

We are entering a time of change, and ready to move forward again, seeking the blessing and guidance of God, Christ, and the Spirit. We began a strategic plan 5 years ago and recognized there was much to be accomplished. Some of those plans have been met, and more were identified for the next few years. Our strategic plan serves as the next steps in our loving dance with God and our neighbors. It's a living document for a living church.

## Mission, Vision, Values

The strategic planning process affirms the mission and vision and values of our community. The strategic priorities that we have set to accomplish the vision and reconfirms values to maintain as First Christian Church in Las Cruces works towards meeting the priorities.

## Mission

A mission statement sets out why First Christian Church in Las Cruces exists, its purpose and who it is doing this for.

The mission of First Christian Church is to:

**REACH OUT, REACH UP, REACH IN**  
**We are here to help people know God, find freedom,**  
**discover their purpose, and make a difference in the**  
**community, near and far.**

This mission calls us to strengthen relationships with God, ourselves, and our neighbors. We help those we touch in the life of our community to find their spiritual passion, to create a purposeful life, and to be one with the creation we live in. We make connections by serving each other in a spirit of love and reach out in love to help create a more connected city, county, and region. We build foundations with our community, by giving of our resources to create a community where all are truly welcome on their life journey.

## Vision

A vision is an ideal state for First Christian Church in Las Cruces, where we want to be in the future.

The vision of First Christian Church is that:

**We believe that everyone matters to God. Therefore, we welcome all who need to find hope and healing. We seek justice for those without a voice. We are building an engaged, passionate, and spiritually diverse community. We are devoted to one another, and all creation. We help each other grow and celebrate the joyful witness of God's all-inclusive love through Christ Jesus.**

## Values<sup>1</sup>

Our Values are how we want to live in community. Values are the source of guidance and what we stand for. They are a timeless statement of who we are and will seldom change. Pending formal adoption, First Christian Church in Las Cruces, is committed to following the Values of Progressive Christianity.

1. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS FOUNDED ON THREE PRIMARY CALLS WE SEE THROUGH JESUS.

**To love God, to love our neighbor, and to love ourselves.**

2. THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IS OUR WAY OF BEING FAITHFUL TO GOD. BUT IT IS NOT THE ONLY WAY.

**Christianity is the truth for us. But it is not the only truth.**

3. LOVE OF GOD INVOLVES ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE, NOT JUST HUMAN LIFE.

**Care of the Earth and its ecosystems is an expression of Christian faith and stewardship.**

4. LOVE OF NEIGHBOR MEANS EXTENDING KINDNESS AND CARE...

To those in our family and in our local and global communities.

Further, **love of neighbor includes affirmation of the LBGTQ community, immigrants, people of other faith traditions and even those who are enemies.**

5. LOVE OF SELF MEANS ENGAGING IN SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

**Worship, prayer, music, study of the Bible and other literature feeds the mind, heart, and spirit.**

6. WE BELIEVE IN THE "PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS."

**We are all ministers of the Gospel, not just ordained clergy. As a result, we can all be in relationship directly with God through worship, study, prayer, and service to others.**

---

<sup>1</sup> The six core values of Progressive Christianity have been taken from these web sites:  
<https://progressivechristianity.org/the-8-points/>  
<https://www.bethelbeaverton.org/progressive-christianity>

## Summary of Accomplishments from Previous 5 Year Plan

It is useful to include at the beginning of our strategic plan, key accomplishments achieved during the previous 5-year planning horizon. We have:

- **Met the spiritual needs of our members. Have a vibrant, active, effective group of Elders.** This action objective has been accomplished by renewing membership in the Elders group. New expectations and methods of being an Elder has been created.
- **Met the spiritual needs of our members. Increase diversity of religious expression during worship service.** The action objective of this item is still an on-going process. Diversity has been added by using sacred texts in addition to scripture. Changes in expression of the Divine in our prayers also reflects a greater reflection of diversity.
- **Met the spiritual needs of our members. Offer adult education that is consistent with our vision and mission.** The creation of affinity groups, and on-line book studies has increased our education opportunities.
- **Used the building to fulfill our mission and vision.** Using this objective, we have increased our diversity of groups renting space and using our grounds. We are currently at a 100% capacity of use, but still find time and space for community organizations to use our facilities during the week.
- **Demonstrated true community. Be accessible to those seeking a new church home.** This strategic objective is being met by planning revisions to our web site. We are in the process of joining affiliated groups that are Progressive Christian organizations. Our advertising outreach will be focused on relocation guides, and other outreach materials during community events, such as Pride. First Christian Church has also been invited to be part of the Inter Faith Council at New Mexico State University.

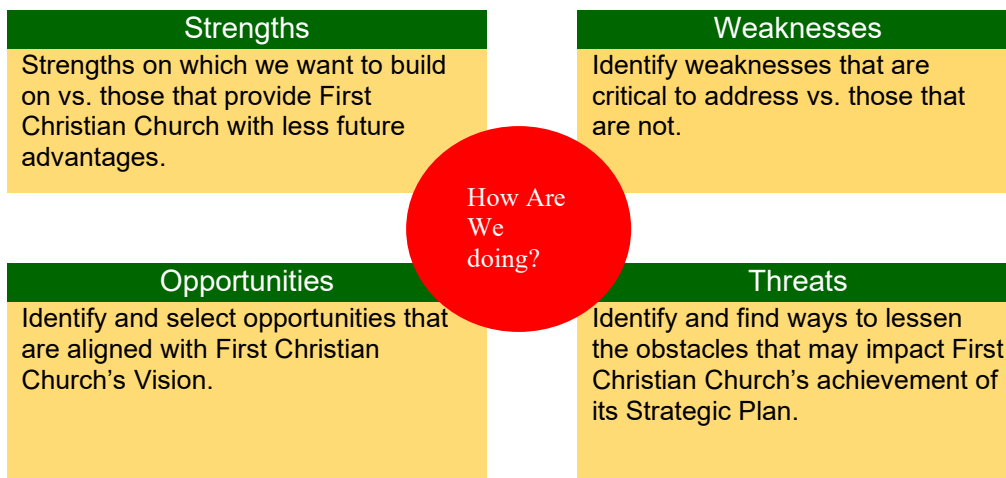
Activities that had significant progress and/or were completed, are not carried forward into the current strategic plan. Activities that were not completed in the last planning horizon were studied using the STOP, START, CONTINUE plan. They were evaluated for the ability and interest of the congregation against the mission and vision statement. Some have been incorporated into the new strategic plan, while others have not been carried over. There are times when established ministries and goals have fulfilled their purpose and should be celebrated when they end.



## Current State Analysis

A current state analysis is a review of everything that impacts First Christian Church – either positively or negatively. It is an exercise that considers all assets and opportunities for the church. It also identifies gaps or vulnerabilities that could impede our success. This kind of analysis is always incomplete – we can never know everything nor predict the future. However, it is also a useful tool to consider the environment that can affect the success of our efforts. It is also the basis for our risk assessments.

### INTERNAL ANALYSIS



### EXTERNAL ANALYSIS

What follows is a summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were identified in our discussions. The following items are not in a ranked order.

#### Strengths

First Christian Church in Las Cruces is blessed with many strengths. These include our passion for our mission, our love and support for each other. Also, a passion for Social Justice. It is important to recognize and acknowledge these gifts and celebrate the strength of our church community. These include:

- Relationships with our neighbors (the city government, county government, educational institutions, land developers)
- Location offers many opportunities to support local agencies
- Stable and experienced leadership
- Committed membership
- Mission driven congregation

- Improving community involvement and input
- Good communication and accountability
- Large, centralized property
- Pride in ourselves and our place in the area

### Weaknesses

First Christian Church in Las Cruces has areas where improvement is needed. Some items can be addressed by the Board of Directors and committee and ministry leaders, and others will require the entire congregation. Weaknesses can be changed – they are not fixed qualities. Some of our weaknesses identified include:

- Sometimes ineffective communication between leadership and membership
- Some inefficiencies in our on-line presence
- Limited funding
- Reacting without a plan
- Huge ambitions and modest means
- Lack of increasing membership
- Lack of commitment to long-term projects
- Lack of comprehensive policies and procedures
- Top-heavy organization
- Facilities that have accessibility issues
- “Curb appeal” of our facilities
- Worship equipment and materials that limit our creativity

### Opportunity

At times there are changes in the environment that we operate in. It is important to recognize these changes and take advantage of opportunity. These include:

- Economic development through partnerships and grants with our neighbors
- Facilities and worship grants and funding through the region and denomination levels of the Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ
- Changes in community and neighborhood demographics that make our worship and community attractive
- Opportunities for new facilities
- Changes in structure to increase accountability and reduce disconnectedness between leadership and congregation
- Increased invitations to participate in the greater community (i.e., Interfaith Student Council at NMSU)



## Threats

Threats are those things that First Christian Church has no or little control over. That does not mean that we are helpless. It means that we have to take purposeful steps to mitigate the negative impact of those threats. These include:

- Changes in economics that result in lack of funding, unemployment, reduction of financial stability, and forcing of sales of land and other assets.
- Fire, flood, and other natural disasters
- Neighborhood economic development that impacts our property and values of our assets
- Continued loss of membership versus growth opportunities
- Increased in detrimental conservative values within the community

## Our Strategic Vision

Our vision is rooted in the principles reflected in our mission statement, that we help people know God, and find freedom and discover their purpose. Part of our conversations when we began planning was to look at church growth, local demographics, and changes in our culture. Congregations across North America are getting smaller and older—and this trend is increasing with each generation. First Christian Church is no different.

More than half of the U.S. population is simply not interested in joining a church or being part of a congregation like many of our older generation grew up with and love very deeply. The last few years of the Covid Epidemic, and possibilities of more to come, has changed the way people gather spiritually and socially, and has impacted the church as a whole. Based on valid and widely accepted research, approximately 60% of the people around us are not going to come to our church no matter what we do or how well we do it simply because of the *steeple and pews* church environment and the way we do church. We have to include the changed perceptions of Christianity as a whole due to some extreme opinions and involvement of conservative Christian organizations demanding blind obedience to their leadership and unwavering social rules and norms, rather than allowing God to meet people where they are. In addition, the growing Millennial Community (those born in the 1980's and into the 1990's) are a very different culture requiring new methods and ways of showing them the love of God through Christ Jesus, and the church.

One of the best ways to continue to be relevant to this generation is to establish new ways and environments where people can gather to seek God and simply be in the presence of the Holy. There will always be worship at First Christian Church, exploring new forms of worship and gathering will reach those in need.

## Our Strategic Goals

Through the strategic planning process, we considered our strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. We then looked at expected results. We also received input from the congregation in varying forms. We have identified the following goals based on this planning and discernment of where God is leading us. These goals are long term goals; the appendix, which is included, shows individual objectives and measurable aspirations, and expected results. Those objectives are arranged by mission and ministry areas, and contain 60, 90 days: 1-, 3-, and 5-year timelines.

1. Align staff resources to accomplish our vision of ministry and prepare for future growth.
  - a. Establish a committee to identify our needs for growth and identify qualities in Interim and Settled Pastoral staff.
  - b. Advertise and recruit pastoral candidates in coordination with the regional offices of the Disciples of Christ, and United Church of Christ.
  - c. Identify assignments and goals for long-term administrative staff
  - d. Identify and establish Policy and Procedures Handbook for Board of Directors, Deacons, and Elders, and staff to provide consistent work, training, and long-term growth.
  
2. Grow the number of active and engaged members in our congregation to target weekly worship attendance of 200 people over the next five years. An increase in our membership will be measured by overall attendance, financial support and increased giving of time and talents. We will accomplish this growth through these primary strategies:
  - a. Commitment to equipping small ministries to strengthen relationships with God and one another.
  - b. Evaluation of time and structure of existing and/or new worship services and worship styles.
  - c. Focus on effort on engaging younger members and families with young children.
  - d. Focus on diversity of membership by generational, social, needs-based and LGBTQ+ affinities
  - e. Defined process to reach inactive or disengaged members.
  - f. Expand our ministry to specifically targeted areas, i.e., the east mesa of Las Cruces, and student population of NMSU.
  
3. Engage members to become more active and connected. The basis for engagement is to develop and/or strengthen relationships through fellowship/socialization opportunities, intergenerational programming, programs, worship, etc.

- a. We will measure this item by increases in attendance, giving, participation, and service.
4. Explore and create new methods of ministry, church, and worship expression to reach the broader group of God's people in the local area.
  - a. Use research and development for testing new methods of ministry, church, and worship expression.
  - b. Explore the *Fresh Expressions*<sup>2</sup> transformational movement and if effective seek implementation.
5. Establish a communication plan, both internally and externally, and assign resources to ensure information is disseminated consistently and appropriately
  - a. Design informational pamphlets and programs so that they are consistent with our logo and meet our vision and mission statements.
  - b. Plan participation in all available public and community gatherings when possible.
  - c. Design and implement a web presence that disseminates information to the membership and community in a timely manner.
    - i. Include mission, vision, core values
    - ii. Simple navigation to in-person and on-line worship opportunities
    - iii. Ability to engage in participation in service opportunities
  - d. Enhance social media accounts to provide information and interaction with our community.
  - e. Consistent plan for print information, and call-lists for members that do not have social media, or text messaging.
6. Establish a financial strategy to provide for stable funding of programs and services that First Christian Church strives to offer in perpetuity. The resources will include, but not be limited to, annual giving, bank financing, capital campaign, endowment, planned giving, and focus on effort on stewardship.
  - a. We will define financial targets on which our financial strategy will be measured, including level of cash reserves, debt service coverage, and other financial ratios.
7. Develop a master property and facilities plan that aligns our buildings and resources to the practical needs of our mission and vision. We will repurpose our buildings and property to best use our resources. Progress on a master plan will demonstrate our successes with this initiative.
  - a. Identify changes in worship space to operate safely and meet our ministry needs.

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<sup>2</sup> The Fresh Expressions movement began in England in 2004 through a report of the Church of England about the state of the church in that nation and the need for a new direction. Fresh Expressions makes space for leadership and pastors to use both traditional services as well as innovative forms of church to live out Christ's mission. One does not replace the other, but rather creates a mutual benefit for both—a "mixed economy of church."  
<https://freshexpressions.com>.

- b. Remodeling of worship space to provide greater accessibility of all members and friends renting our spaces so that all can fully participate.
  - c. Identify changes in worship space to allow for greater variety of worship services.
  - d. Identify projects that will enhance the exterior of our buildings and facilities and upgrade accessibility.
  - e. Upgrade sound and visual equipment to enhance services and provide visual and hearing for those in need.
  - f. Construct a multi-purpose *place to gather* building with a large, open meeting space for faith-based worship and learning as well as community programs and outreach events. Plan for and consider future development of the property.
8. Establish a process for ongoing evaluation of our programming and ministries to ensure faithfulness to God's vision and alignment with our strategic plan.

## Appendix A – Church Structure Methodology

Whether you have an existing structure, or nothing currently exists, there are essential steps to sequentially put in place to ensure you have a church that has organizational alignment and health from the beginning.

When talking about structure, the real topic is framework. 'Structure' is the people, programs, and processes of the church. Another way of explaining structure is the who (your staff and volunteers), the what (your events and activities) and the how (your policies and systems). The church structure answers the key question 'what is your church building?'

1. A healthy church has a structure that helps the church steward a culture – this builds in a way that will see success.
2. Healthy church culture is derived from values implicit and explicit in a clearly defined vision and mission.
3. Vision needs to be prophetic, in the sense of showing His heart and shaped by His words. That can take the form of prophetic words, aspirations, or shared passions in the hearts of the leadership team.
4. The mission needs to be a fundamentally call to a people or a place, derived from the Great Commission, so the church is in no doubt what exactly that church called to do.
5. Church strategy is simply prioritizing the activities that fulfil the mission, advance the vision, create the culture, and develop the structure.

If these five aspects line up, you have organizational alignment – all aspects of the church have a shared, unified and focus aim. We can measure this through what I call the church organizational health. If the church is weak in organizational health, then one or more of these aspects will be ineffective or in opposition to what your stated purpose is.

An effective church organizational structure that works is the one that helps and doesn't hinder your efforts. Many churches have an established structure, but it isn't fit for purpose. The structure is meant to serve your vision and culture, so it needs to be organic and dynamic, ready to change when God does a new thing.

A church organizational structure that works brings a number of things:

1. It provides a mission-centric framework.
2. It focuses the use of resources toward the vision.
3. It creates space for culture to grow.
4. It changes in line with strategic development.



If the structure is unhealthy or ineffective, resources will not be maximized, or the church will be program-driven, process-led, or politically led instead of being mission-led.

Adapted from ***5 Principles for Church Organizational Structure – By Anthony Hilder***. <https://anthoyhilder.com>

## Appendix B – The Growth of a Church Member

1. We begin with **comfort** as we develop our relationship with God
2. From comfort, we move to **connection** as we begin to embrace the people and values of our community
3. Through our connection we become aware of the **cause** as we begin to see our Christian life in the greater context of the mission of the Church.
4. The cause brings us to a place of **commitment** as we decide to play our part in the greater context.
5. Once we begin to get committed it is generally only a short time before life will send **crisis** our way as our commitment and faith is tested.
6. Through crisis we move to a place of **conviction** as our core values are firmly established.
7. Finally, through a life driven by our convictions, we reap a lifestyle of **consistency**.

**Observation:** Many people are stuck at the first 2 stages. People desire for comfort and connection, but never move to being committed to the cause. It would be easy to think that commitment to the cause is the climax of our spiritual walk, but until our commitment is tested and we respond with conviction, we lack the consistency that is needed to truly walk as a thriving church member.

*Adapted from: **Insight—Lead the Change** by Corey Turner.*

## Appendix C – Monitoring and Evaluation of Plan

| Initiative                                       | Strategy  | Action Steps  | Strategic Goal | Responsibility                          | Timeline   |
|--|---|---|----------------|---|------------|
| 1.1 Meet the spiritual needs of our members      | Increase opportunities for fellowship, socialization, and programs.         | 1. Education on what being a member does for me.<br>2. Teach church history and by-laws                           | 2, 3, 6, 8     | Pastor, Elders, Board of Directors      | 1 year     |
| 1.2 Have a vibrant active group of Elders        | Define a clear process to reach inactive or disengaged members.             | 1. Visitation and outreach education.<br>2. Improve learning<br>3. Initiate outreach to Zoom members              | 3, 6, 8        | Pastor, Elders                          | 1 year     |
| 1.3 Worship Service                              | Evaluation of existing/new services and styles to target additional members | 1. Add new music from Open Sources<br>2. Start/stop service on time   | 4, 8           | Worship Committee                       | 3-6 Months |
| 1.3.1 Increase diversity of religious expression |   | 1. Use progressive readings within the service<br>2. Offer varied Approach to Communion                           | 4, 7, 8        | Worship Committee                       | 3-6 Months |
| 1.3.2 Amplification Changes                      |   | 1. Explore Hearing loops and new microphones  | 7, 8           | Worship Committee, Technology Committee | 1 year     |
| 1.4 Visitor follow-up and retention              | Actively pursue visitor retention and conversion to membership              | 1. Create guidelines to follow-up on visitors<br>2. Create visitor welcome packets<br>3. Create Greeting ministry | 2, 5, 8        | Pastor, Welcome Committee               | 6 months   |

| <b>Initiative</b>                          | <b>Strategy</b>                                       | <b>Action Steps</b>   | <b>Strategic Goal</b>  | <b>Responsibility</b>                                      | <b>Timeline</b>              |
|--|---|---|------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 1.4 Revise printed and digital materials   | Identify resources to effect                          | 1. Revise Brochures<br>2. Revise web site<br>3. Revise signage  | 3, 5, 7, 8             | Technology Committee, Worship Committee, Welcome Committee | 60 days, 1 year for web site |
| 1.4.1 A Vital Outreach program             | communication plan                                    | 1. Find other community websites to link with<br>2. Connect with NMSU LGBTQ+ Center<br>3. Link with Convention and Visitors Center listings<br>4. Continue connections with Chaparral Senior Housing Board of Directors | 2, 3, 5, 8             | Technology Committee, Worship Committee, Welcome Committee | Annual                       |
| 2. Determine "right size" Budget           | Develop a financial resource plan                     | 1. Seek budgets from comparable for our size congregation.<br>2. seek out DOC/UCC Guidance documents.<br>3. Define "financial stability".<br>4. Define a plan for growing financially.                                  | 6, 7, 8                | Board of Directors   | Annual                       |
| 3. Relevancy of programming and ministries | Periodic evaluation of our programming and ministries | 1. Define a plan in which our programs and ministries will be evaluated on a routine basis to ensure faithfulness to God's vision   | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 | Board of Directors, Pastor, Elders, Committees             | Annual                       |

| Initiative  | Strategy   | Action Steps   | Strategic Goal | Responsibility                               | Timeline   |
|---|--|--|----------------|--|--|
| 4. Facilities tied to ministry and Mission/Vision | Develop plan for feasibility of building replacement of facilities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Examine all facilities for compliance with safety standards and long-term maintenance</li> <li>2. Create comprehensive maintenance plan for accessibility, and use.                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Open altar area for versatile use</li> <li>b. More lighting on the altar area</li> <li>c. Install television monitors replacing projector and screen</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Enhance curb appeal.                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Create New signage</li> <li>b. Remodel landscaping</li> <li>c. Parking lot maintenance</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Create Comprehensive building replacement plan based on congregation membership                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. evaluating use of lot space and surrounding development.</li> </ol> </li> </ol> | 2, 4, 6, 7, 8  | Board of Directors, Committees, Congregation | Annually<br>6-months for building examination.<br>6-months for maintenance plan<br>1-year for plan and interior changes<br>2-years for curb appeal<br>2-years for replacement plan<br>5-years for building replacement initiative. |

## Appendix D – Communication Plan -- PENDING