

**Vision First Steps Task Force (VFSTF)
Final Recommendations to Session
May 19, 2008**

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Brief update on St. Thomas' progress towards the Vision
- 2) Clarifying points/principles when considering new projects/programs
- 3) Specific project recommendations: We believe we need a limited number of proposed projects that would significantly focus the congregation on Vision outcomes and that would be balanced between internal focus ("transformed by faith") and external focus ("transforming through service").
- 4) Other organization and support recommendations: There are several initiatives that we believe the session should address including the formation of an on-going Vision support and accountability group.
- 5) Other discussion items

PROGRESS ALREADY MADE TOWARDS THE VISION

- Continued signs of increased participation in church activities
 - Increased small group participation
 - Children's CE attendance increasing
 - Broad support for new ideas
 - Committees and individuals actively moving toward the Vision
- Weekly "Anticipating Worship" emails from Rev. Larry Spencer
- Pastor Nominating Committee off and running
- 90-Day Devotional Prayer Book
- New Sunday Schedule for Worship/CE/Fellowship initiated on May 4
- Wacky Wednesdays in God's Big Backyard program this summer
- Investigating partnership/mentoring opportunities
- Increased support of Juvenile Justice Ministry
- Continuing major concern - resources are stretched

CLARIFYING POINTS/PRINCIPLES WHEN CONSIDERING NEW PROJECTS/PROGRAMS

- Prayer emphasis
- Is this event or program an outreach opportunity? Target for the whole church in 2012 should be growth each year towards "50/50" (internal vs. external) program mix. Does our mix of money, staff, and resources reflect our Vision?
- Add one/drop one: We don't have the resources to add large, incremental amounts of Vision-related programs and staff and continue to do everything that we currently are doing. If we add this new project, what should we drop?
- Does this project/program leverage internal synergies and external partnerships?

VFSTF Final Recommendations to Session - May 19, 2008 (Cont'd)

- Remember: “different” is good; “different” is visionary
- How much energy/resource/commitment is there?
- Think small first. What is the expansion potential?
- How do we describe what “success” looks like?
- Does it encourage individual and committee ministry initiatives?
- Does it have a clearly defined completion date?
- Is it a substantive project?
- Will it be perceived by the congregation as “doing something to make a difference”?
- Will it generate excitement?
- Has a communication plan been developed?
- Is there a mechanism in place for evaluation and mid-course correction?

SPECIFIC PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Given church resource limitations, we believe only 2-3 projects should be launched initially. “Keep it simple; do it well.” These projects are meant to be synergistic across multiple committees.

- 1) Encourage internal personal and congregational growth (“transformed by faith”) by developing a well-defined “Discipleship Roadmap” for the congregation:
 - The roadmap will lay out in detail what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and would involve multiple dimensions of the disciplines of our lives such as prayer, Bible study, worship, mission, use of time and talents, stewardship, and outreach/evangelism. It would have specific steps/stages in the development of a disciple (from a beginning one to a mature one) on which every member of the congregation could “map” growth towards being more like Jesus in our daily lives.
 - Once this “roadmap” is developed, then we would need to develop programs, or opportunities, for each of us to walk the roadmap as we mature as disciples. It is a long-term program that must be deeply and consistently communicated to the congregation as a “way of life” for our church.
 - Key aspects of the roadmap may include:
 - Regular feature in the newsletter defining what it means to be a disciple and encourage our members to eagerly pursue the goal of discipleship
 - A series of sermons to support and expand on the basics contained in the newsletter features.
 - It is envisioned that the Evangelism Committee would lead this effort with support from Adult Ministry, Worship, Communication and other committees as appropriate.
- 2) Encourage external services so that others might experience transformation (“transforming through service”) by providing a program based on the community’s needs where every member

VFSTF Final Recommendations to Session - May 19, 2008 (Cont'd)

can contribute. We hope that this will be a natural transition of God's Big Backyard (the summer Wednesday evening program for children and youth) to a program starting this Fall that would provide classes/activities for the congregation and the broader west Houston community.

- We recommend that Session form a committee by August to evaluate the potential for a follow up to the summer program and the feasibility for expanding the program using experience, surveys, and participant assessments from Wacky Wednesdays. It is envisioned that the committee would consist of members from Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Adult Ministry, Fellowship, Property, Communication and other committees as appropriate.
- 3) Expanded small group ministries with evangelism emphasis to include homes or other off-site venues. It is envisioned that the Adult Ministry committee would lead this effort with support from Children's Ministry, Youth Ministry, Evangelism, Communication and other committees as appropriate.

Potential other projects

- Enhance the food pantry to expand mission and evangelism opportunities
- Address traffic concerns with the driveway on the west side of building
- Longer range: work with other organizations to develop a Memorial Assistance Ministries (MAM) branch in our neighborhood

OTHER ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Create an On-going Vision support and accountability group

- We recommend forming an on-going Vision Support Group ("VSG") of 4-6 members that would include two Session members. This group would continue to refine and expand areas of the VFSTF recommendations as well as address other areas of Vision implementation as the Session directed. It would also develop and recommend Vision accountability processes for the Session to use.
- Rotating membership (one session, one non-session rotating annually)
- Hold periodic Vision Essential Elements of Ministry workshops to facilitate communication and sharing of ideas across committees
- Group would continue through the Vision period (2012)

2) Develop a long-term property and facilities plan

- Existing (Spring 2009)
 - Maintenance requirements
 - Usage optimization according to Vision requirements
- New (Spring 2010)
 - Possible new structures/buildings/areas on current site
 - Satellite sites

3) Organizational effectiveness

- a. Recommend that Session under leadership of the Moderator reevaluate the existing **Committee Structure**

VFSTF Final Recommendations to Session - May 19, 2008 (Cont'd)

- Develop an energetic **Evangelism** effort
 - Build up the Evangelism Committee
 - Develop method(s) to convince members we are all called to evangelism in one way or another
- Rebuild the **Youth** program
 - Expand and re-energize the Youth Committee
 - Leverage the successful team formula in Children's Ministry to the Youth program
 - Form a short-term support group to develop a strategy to rebuild the youth program
 - Encourage youth participation in God's Big Backyard (weekly summer program)
 - Encourage family events with Children and Youth Ministries
- Enlarge and refine the **Communications** area
 - Develop an overall plan to address internal and external communication needs - absolutely required for us to achieve our Vision
 - Form a "Communications Corps" consisting of a designated person from each ministry area who would provide material for communications efforts
 - Conduct a church-wide communications survey and ask members how they want to receive information and give feedback
 - Update and reformat the church website, newsletter, bulletin boards and all other methods of internal communication
 - Help congregation to start thinking in terms of sharing church activities with the public via the media
 - Work very closely with other ministries to assist them in their external communications efforts

OTHER DISCUSSION ITEMS

- 1) Communication with the congregation re: First Steps Task Force progress and that recommendations have been to Session
- 2) Dissolution of Vision First Steps Task Force

APPENDICES

- A) Quick Hits – A Recommendation to Session (August 13, 2007)
- B) Christian Educations & Worship Report and Recommendations (January 24, 2008)

APPENDIX A

Quick Hits – A Recommendation to Session

STPC has been blessed with a new vision for 2012. Born of out of months of prayerful, spirit-filled, hard work by the Vision Task Force and Vision Process Group, the vision has enjoyed a high degree of initial acceptance and enthusiasm. The First Steps Task Force recommends a series of short-term actions to the Session to continue the momentum of the vision. These “Quick Hits” were developed to cement the vision into the church and to assist in shifting the thought processes within the church to be continuously vision driven.

What is a “quick hit”? Something that can be done or started by November 1, 2007 that supports the objectives below without a major, short-term consumption of resources (time/talent/ money).

What are the specific objectives of the “quick hits”?

- **Display Session/Staff/Task Force commitment**
- **Promote Vision Understanding in the congregation**
- **Encourage /promote member involvement**
- **Display progress towards vision**
- **Celebrate/recognize visionary acts.**

Recommended quick hits (not necessarily in prioritized order):

- **Display session/staff/task force commitment to the Vision (DC) –** One concern that was raised in the Town Hall meetings was “are we truly committed to this vision?” The following actions will demonstrate we are:
 1. ✓ Tie Session committees 2008 plans and budgets to the vision (e.g., determine how each committee’s plans will move the church toward the vision).
 2. ✓ Separate the Evangelism Committee from the Membership Committee and recruit additional Evangelism committee members.
 3. ✓ Participate and support PDAP-led after school program with volunteers.
 4. ✓ Adopt and publish these “quick hits” approved by session.
 5. Interact more frequently with WHCC.
- **Promote Vision Understanding in the congregation (VU) -** The following actions will help us to continuously “cast the vision” in each thought, word and deed within STPC:
 1. ✓ Include the vision statement on every piece of communication including all worship items, newsletters, emails. Anything that the church issues will be “branded” with our vision and mission.
 2. ✓ The Session and committees will meet with the First Steps Task Force with the purpose of increasing the understanding of and commitment to the STPC vision.
 3. ✓ Expand the Communication Committee membership and capabilities to handle both STPC internal and external communications needs.
 4. Begin Session meetings with a review of the vision and explicitly discuss how key decisions support the vision.

APPENDIX A (Cont'd)

5. Survey members of the congregation on their "information delivery preferences" and re-vamp all of our communications methods accordingly (e.g., email option for newsletter, website usage preferences/needs).
- **Encourage /promote Member Involvement (MI)** – One of the keys to a successful vision is “that each and everyone of us has a vital part to play.”
 1. ✓ Determine the process for identifying who’s doing what and how everyone can be encouraged to participate where they can contribute.
 2. Participation of children and youth in a leadership role during at least one worship service per month.
 3. More use of the screen in the sanctuary during both worship services (vision statement, announcements, scripture readings, hymns, etc.).
 4. Investigate the feasibility of a “Secret Pals” program (e.g., prayer, send notes of encouragement) for both internal and outreach children (Meadow Wood, Latch key/TASK, etc.). There is a need to check legal requirements and background checks.
 5. Distribute the results from the Stewardship campaign time and talent inventory to the Session committees and encourage follow up.
 - **Display Progress towards vision (DP)** – The following tangible, vision-related activities or actions will help the church and community realize we are moving forward with the vision:
 1. ✓ In the combined worship services between now and November 1, continue progress in balancing contemporary and traditional worship styles.
 2. Paste “Transformed by Faith” song into front of hymnals and sing it frequently.
 3. Initiate planning a Stone Soup Party for community outreach.
 - **Celebrate/Recognize Visionary acts (RV)** – It is important to honor and acknowledge those making the vision happen:
 1. ✓ Publicize vision-related accomplishments especially in worship but also in the newsletter, bulletins, website, and “V-Grams” (short, public statements or emails, notes, etc.)
 2. Vision update by Session and FSTF at the September 23, 2007 congregational meeting.

We understand that doing all of the above, in addition to the other things going on in your areas, is a major undertaking. As such, we’ve identified ten items that we think will have the most impact with a “✓” and strongly recommend that you make the completion of these activities your highest priority.

First Steps Task Force
August 6, 2007

APPENDIX B

St. Thomas Presbyterian Church
2012 Vision: *Transformed by faith, transforming through service.*

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & WORSHIP REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**From the Vision First Steps Task Force
As amended and adopted by the Session 1/24/2008**

Vision for Christian Education and Worship at St. Thomas

- Worship services that enable all to have meaningful worship experiences, that energize the congregation, and that are attractive to visitors including those who have not attended church previously.
- Educational programs that allow and encourage everyone to grow in their faith.
- A schedule that allows individuals to attend both a worship service and Sunday school and that allows for children, youth, and their families to worship together with the whole congregation.

Current Assessment

- Sparse attendance at each of the two current services may be of concern to visitors and discourage their return.
- A number of people have observed an increased energy level when the congregation worships together in a single service.
- The current Worship/CE schedule can limit participation in both worship and Sunday school and limit opportunities for families to worship together.
- CE personnel are stretched thin with the current schedule
- Church leadership desires an increased participation of children, youth, and adults in educational faith development and an increased participation of children and youth in worship.

Proposed Recommendations

The 1st Steps Task Force proposes two things that we believe will move the Sunday morning experience closer to that described in the St. Thomas vision:

1. Offer a single “St. Thomas Sunday Worship Service” that includes elements from both of the existing services (for example, music, bulletin format, how various elements are presented). The specific elements and formats for these single services will be developed by Interim Pastor Larry Spencer, Music Director Wendy Ostien, and Interim Contemporary Music Director Brent Ward in consultation with the Worship Committee and its help with ongoing feed-back, assessments, and suggestions. The goal is to provide worship for our God in ways (1) that enable all members and visitors alike to be in better communion with our Lord and each other, and (2) that are “inspirational and uplifting”¹ for all.

¹From St. Thomas Presbyterian Church Vision

APPENDIX B

We encourage those planning the Sunday worship service to be open to new ideas and to attempt to develop a new, cohesive service rather than one that is merely a composite of our two existing services. As an example, we would love to see the two music styles integrated so that resources (both vocal and instrumental) are shared. Further, we encourage an expansion of the number of special and/or different offerings through the year to enrich worship for our members and attract other interested potential members (for example, various musical offerings such as blue-grass and jazz, guest liturgists like Jennifer Klein Salyer, liturgical dance, drama, etc.).

To those ends, The 1st Steps Task Force recommends the following:

- a. Adoption of the following schedule for Sunday morning:
 - i. 9:30-10:30 Sunday School
 - ii. 10:30-11:00 Coffee Connection
 - iii. 11:00-12:00 Worship Service
 - b. That this new schedule be in place as soon as is feasible. A task force consisting of Larry Spencer, as Moderator, Marion Cornwell, Kay Cronk, Wendy Ostien, Paul Rieke, Brent Ward, two non-staff representatives from the Worship Committee, and one non-staff representative from each of the CE committees will determine when the new schedule will begin. The 1st Steps Task Force will offer support and assistance as needed and requested.
2. The 1st Steps Task Force further recommends that not later than the 2nd quarter of 2008, the Session form a task force that will explore how to create a worship service(s) that will “nurture seekers and new believers”¹ and Christian education offerings that will help us fulfill our mission to “make disciples” as part of our nurture of “seekers” and “new Christians.”

It is our expectation that we shall use the best resources from the denomination, local experts on cultural needs and symbols, and volunteers of area unchurched people from the groupings we are trying to serve.

It is also our expectation that we will retain both music director positions to assist with the Sunday service and with the development of the future service(s).

Further, we assume that it may take a year or more to determine what new or different worship and educational approaches, if any, would best enable our outreach.

¹From St. Thomas Presbyterian Church Vision