

# **REPORT TO THE CONGREGATION**

## **First Christian Church – Greeley, CO**

Our Future Story Team has now completed its initial future story that will be used in developing our ministry plan with the help of Hope Partnership. Here is a summary of the hi-lights from the work so far:

### **What we learned as our current condition:**

- Our church has a great facility that is underutilized by both the congregation and the community.
- We spend a lot of time developing relationships with each other, but as a whole, little time developing our spiritual lives or conducting missional services.
- We lean heavily on our pastoral staff to do ministry in our church and community and see opportunities for all of us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our world.
- We noted the demographics of the community around us has changed and we have been slow to adapt to those changes. There is a discernable relational gap between First Christian and the neighborhoods around us.
- We noted that we have measured success as large attendance and stable finances rather than effectiveness of ministry programs.
- We noted that there was nothing but opportunities for growth in our spiritual lives and in our engagement with our community. We have everything that we need to be effective; a great staff, good facilities, and a wonderful congregation.

### **Our Future Story:**

#### **First Christian Church of Greeley 2021 Future Story**

Tony Delgado hurried to pick up his granddaughter, Andrea, at the First Christian Church Kid's Day Out program. He and his wife, Isabel, were raising their four grandchildren themselves and were glad to have a Christian preschool right in their neighborhood. The two middle children often went to the church's after-school program where they received help with homework and had fun playing games and hanging out with other school-age children. Tony and Isabel had been overwhelmed when the children came to live with them two years ago, but had found encouragement and hope at First Christian. The Delgado family praised God every day for the difference the church was making in their lives.

Church members had reached out to the family when the children first moved in with their grandparents and were in need of clothing. Since First Christian partnered with Maplewood Elementary School, where Ezekiel and his brother Isaac attended, the school notified the church of the family's needs. Members of the congregation

responded generously with clothing and even financed a shopping trip with money from their Right Here, Right Now Fund. The oldest grandson, Miguel, used a wheelchair, and it was a huge relief to the Delgados when members of the church came to their house on one of the church's service days to build a ramp up to their front door.

Money had been very tight for a few months, and Tony and Isabel received much needed help with utility bills from the RISE organization that was housed at First Christian. They encouraged their niece, Desiree, to enroll in the Getting Ahead Program at RISE, and she was making great progress toward building a better life for herself. She had even begun attending the church's Coffee Break group for young adults that the associate pastor led at a local coffee shop. She was excited about growing closer to God as she built relationships with other young people who were continuing their faith journeys after high school.

Last spring when the Delgados received a post card in the mail inviting them to breakfast and an Easter egg hunt at First Christian, they decided they would like to become better acquainted with this caring congregation. Church members greeted the family with welcoming smiles, tasty burritos, and Easter baskets for the children. The younger grandkids enjoyed the hunt, and when Tony and Isabel received a second post card inviting the children to Vacation Bible School that summer, they knew their grandkids would be in good hands learning about Jesus along with other neighborhood children.

One day while dropping off the two younger children for VBS, the couple noticed a poster outside the fellowship hall advertising an upcoming series of workshops covering such topics as financial planning, coping with loss, managing stress, and parenting teens. Isabel looked at Tony and they both knew they could benefit from some of these workshops. They wondered if they could talk Miguel into attending the two sessions for youth on handling peer pressure and being smart with social media. Other signs announced a Saturday afternoon Bible study on "Living the Christian Life" and a faith concert Friday evening. There were also sign-up sheets for a sewing class, a support group for single parents, and a pinochle club for seniors. An invitation to a "housewarming party" in the church basement caught their eye. Apparently the church had recently repurposed some of the rooms downstairs to be available for emergency housing and were requesting donations of furnishings and linens for the kitchen, living and sleeping areas, bathrooms, and new shower. Tony and Isabel could tell this church was committed to sharing their building with the community.

The pastor invited the Delgados to the Wednesday Praise and Promise service where the VBS kids would sing along with the praise band and perform skits of stories they had learned in Bible school. Tony and Isabel hadn't been to a worship service in years, but realized they missed being part of a community of believers. They appreciated the compassion and energy of the church members and decided this might be a good place to find their way back to God. Familiar with the church building and acquainted with several members of the congregation, they felt comfortable walking into the beautiful sanctuary for the evening service. They were pleased to see the diversity of the

congregation, and Miguel was thrilled there was a place for his wheelchair up toward the front of the sanctuary where he would have a good view of the VBS program.

Tony noticed a brochure in the pew describing the beliefs of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He was intrigued when he read that disciples “are free to follow their consciences guided by the Bible, the Holy Spirit, study and prayer.” Being part of a church where he could ask questions and share opinions with fellow Christians traveling their own spiritual journeys appealed to him. Here was an opportunity for the whole family to grow in their faith within an accepting and caring faith community.

Seeing the announcements on the screen, Isabel was impressed by the number and variety of mission projects listed, both locally and globally, and noted one or two she thought they could help with. The church was planning a community picnic for the neighborhood in September and was organizing a World Communion Day observance at a nearby park in October. They also shared God’s Word with the community through a weekly radio broadcast of the Sunday morning worship service and regularly hosted a Sunday afternoon worship service for residents at the Meadow View assisted living facility. The youth were serving dinner at the Guadalupe Shelter for the homeless that coming Sunday, and the younger children were collecting donations for the local food bank’s Backpack program for school children. Not only that, but plans were underway for an all-church mission trip to Oklahoma to help with disaster relief after a recent devastating tornado, and church members were supporting a project to drill a water well in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. On their way to the sanctuary, the family had walked past photos of children the church was sponsoring in Haiti, India, and Zimbabwe. Isabel had already seen Jesus in the faces of the people they had met, but she could tell this congregation wasn’t confined to the walls of their building; they ventured outside the church to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus as well.

The Delgado family felt the love of God in the joyful music and inspirational message about how the Holy Spirit could transform their lives. The VBS kids sang with gusto and their stories were both amusing and moving. The congregation was as delighted as Tony and Isabel with Andrea’s portrayal of a complaining Martha bustling around preparing dinner for the pint-sized Jesus and disciples. It touched Tony and Isabel that the people at First Christian embraced Andrea as one of their own. They could see that these people had a heart for others and were passionate about sharing the Good News of God’s love.

When Laura, a long-time member of First Christian, had walked into the sanctuary for Wednesday worship, she immediately spotted Tony and Isabel, whom she had met at the recent health fair hosted by the church. She noticed they had children with them and knew the kids would enjoy participating in Sunday school and the active youth program. Summer church camp was coming up soon and several of the children were old enough to participate. Church camp and mission trips had been life-changing events in her son and daughter’s lives that had ignited their passion to follow Jesus. The relationships they built with other young Christians at camp had helped them navigate through the challenges of their teen years and were still an important part of their lives. Laura made

a mental note to introduce the Delgado family to the youth pastor and some of the young adults who helped with the youth program. As she enjoyed the presentation by the VBS kids, she thanked God for the renewed spirit flowing through the church and out into the community.

Five years earlier, Laura and the rest of the congregation had embarked on a journey through Hope Partnership to discern God's plan for First Christian Church of Greeley. Praying and working together, they asked God for direction and listened with open minds for his answer. Hearing a call to mission, they imagined possibilities and embraced opportunities to share themselves and their abundant blessings with others. Proud of their iconic church with the shape of "praying hands," it was an adjustment to recognize the building as God's church, not just their church, but with open hearts and open doors, they committed themselves to serving the needs of those around them.

Laura's soul rejoiced when she walked into the church any day of the week and saw it filled with activity. Laughter rang in the hallways, and she could feel the joy and hope that told her God was at work at First Christian. Laura was excited to think, "What next, Lord? What else can we do to share your Good News with our community and beyond?"

### **SUPPORTING EVIDENCE:**

- Interviews with key leaders in our community indicated these specific needs (in addition to many others):
  - Give young people hope
  - Help facilitate transportation for things such as healthcare, education, and groceries
  - Utilize assets to facilitate better meeting community needs
- A review of ways in which we spend our time shows that we favor relationship building activities, but not faith growing.
- A review of demographics indicates a change in the makeup of the neighborhoods near us that isn't necessarily reflected in our congregation. Further review indicates that First Christian can bridge existing gaps with missional programming.
- A review of the Missional Continuum shows that we behave like a membership organization rather than a mission focused congregation.

### **Where do we go from here?:**

- Accept this story as a vision and starting point for us to work together to become a vibrant church dedicated to doing the work of God. Many parts of the story will be

familiar to us, but other parts will require us to think differently and be able and willing to make some adjustments and changes.

- We start making our story happening by starting to live out the spirit of the story! We have already started by better utilizing our facility with different community groups using the building including a Spanish speaking church.
- We will continue working with Hope Partnership to develop a capacity plan on how we can begin making more of the future story come to life with the church becoming the hands and feet of Christ.
- Hope Partnership will be assigning a consultant to work with Lynn on how to make the story come to life.
- Pray on what your role will be in helping FCC Greeley refine the story and make it a reality.