

**Pilgrim Church
Strategic Planning Group
2023 Focus Group and Survey Results
April 12, 2023**

In May 2022, Parish Board approved the formation of a Strategic Planning Group (SPG) to identify priorities for Pilgrim Church's Christian mission for the next five years. As part of its work, the SPG held two focus groups in fall 2022 of Pilgrim Church's congregation and friends to help it understand better their aspirations for the Church. The themes that emerged from the groups included the importance of Pilgrim Church's youth programs and the Church's inclusiveness, acceptance, and warmth, opportunities for community service and Intergenerational projects, and Ecumenism. The focus groups identified Covid and exhaustion as important reasons for the recent decline in congregational engagement.

Using the information gathered from the focus groups, the SPG designed and distributed a survey to Pilgrim Church's members and friends in January 2023 to ascertain "Who God is calling Pilgrim Church to be in the years ahead" and "How members would like to be involved." Ninety-four people responded to the survey. About half live in Sherborn, and the other half live in neighboring towns.

Although the response rate was relatively high, only 14 percent of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 50, and 22 percent had minor children living in their household. Because the sample size of younger respondents (13 responses) is small, we caution against making definitive inferences from the data.

Pilgrim Church: Today

The most important (rated as "important" or "very important") activities of Pilgrim Church to respondents varied by age group. Table 1 indicates all respondents under the age of 50 see providing "an opportunity for my children to develop spiritually" as important, whereas 92 percent of the group feel celebrating important Christian religious holidays and having a place to turn when times are difficult are important. Eighty-five 85 percent see Pilgrim Church as an important place to pray and reflect, and 77% feel the opportunity to spend time with familiar friends in a Christian faith community is important. Sixty-nine percent value participating in community outreach and service activities.

Respondents between 50 and 70 indicated that Pilgrim Church is a haven for them. Over 80 percent see it as a place to "pray and reflect/a spiritual oasis," "celebrate important Christian religious holidays," "mark important personal events," and "turn when times are difficult." This group also sees Pilgrim Church as a place to meet new people, spend time with familiar friends in a Christian faith community, and participate in community outreach and service activities. Fifty-six percent rate praying/worshiping in person at 10 a.m. Sunday worship service as important, whereas 24 percent see worshiping virtually as important.

Respondents over the age of 70 have very similar responses to those between the ages of 50 and 70. The notable exceptions are that the older group rates Sunday worship services (in-person or virtually) and worshipful music as more important than the younger groups.

Two respondents expressed concern over the Church focusing more on social service activities rather than worship/faith development.

Pilgrim Church: Tomorrow

As shown in Table 2, survey respondents under the age of 50 see the most important activities that Pilgrim Church might offer as being social action opportunities to help others, holiday events, and educational panels and interest groups on current events and other topics.

Respondents over 50 indicated they are most interested in social action opportunities to help others, while those over 70 also showed interest in educational panels and groups on current events and other topics.

Four respondents suggested offering informal worship services at times other than Sunday morning.

Communication

Table 3 indicates survey respondents primarily get their church “news” from emails and the eWord. Secondly, they hear about events from the pulpit or Worship bulletin on Sunday. The Pilgrim Church Quarterly Newsletter and website are also important.

Table 1: What are the most important (rated as “important” or “very important”) activities of Pilgrim Church?

	Under the Age of 50	Ages 50-70	Ages Over 70
To pray/worship in person at 10 a.m. Sunday worship services	62%	56%	78%
To pray/worship at 10 a.m. virtual (Facebook, YouTube, and pilgrimsherborn.org) Sunday worship services	33%	24%	38%
To enjoy worshipful music	62%	59%	89%
To pray and reflect/a spiritual oasis	85%	82%	83%
To celebrate important Christian religious holidays (i.e., Christmas and Easter)	92%	82%	86%
To pray/worship outside of a traditional Sunday worship setting (e.g., Bible Study, Retreat, other)	31%	31%	35%
To provide an opportunity for my children to develop spiritually	100%	79%	64%
To meet new people in a Christian faith community	54%	70%	68%
To spend time with familiar friends in a Christian faith community	77%	78%	78%
To participate in community outreach and service activities and volunteering, including intergenerational activities	69%	79%	75%
To mark important personal events (Baptisms, weddings, funerals)	62%	82%	78%
To turn when times are difficult	92%	85%	76%

Table 2: Pilgrim Church offers many ways for its members and the community to worship and be involved. The Strategic Planning Group is exploring new opportunities. How interested (rated as “important” or “very important”) might you and your family be in the following activities?

	Under the Age of 50	Ages 50-70	Ages Over 70
Worship service in addition to the 10 a.m. Sunday service	17%	6%	3%
Social action opportunities, including multi-generational opportunities to help others, including supporting the hungry and unhoused, and refugees	67%	48%	69%
Educational panels and interest groups on current events and other topics	42%	31%	54%
Ongoing group activities: book or film groups	33%	23%	33%
Ongoing support groups: parents of young children, parenting teenagers, divorced and recently widowed	36%	25%	24%
Exercise classes, such as yoga, walking, and classes before work	9%	16%	9%
Food groups, including men’s breakfasts, potlucks, and dinners for eight or twelve people	18%	30%	36%
Holiday events: Christmas caroling and additional children’s and adult activities for Christmas and Easter	59%	26%	32%
Additional youth activities (beyond Sunday school, confirmation, and youth groups)	27%	10%	14%

Table 3: What are the best ways to communicate events and activities (rated as “important” or “very important”) at Pilgrim Church to you?

	Under the Age of 50	Ages 50-71	Ages Over 70
Announcements from the pulpit or Worship bulletin on Sunday	67%	47%	68%
Physical notices, bulletin boards, and signs at church	25%	23%	30%
Emails/eWord weekly newsletters	100%	91%	78%
Pilgrim Church Quarterly Newsletters	64%	66%	65%
Pilgrim Church website	50%	52%	31%
Facebook	9%	29%	8%
Instagram	18%	16%	3%
Twitter	8%	6%	0%
LinkedIn	8%	3%	0%
Next Door	17%	10%	0%
Hometown Weekly	0%	16%	8%
Text Alerts	18%	32%	28%
Phone calls	0%	19%	33%
Banner at the Sherborn “split”	25%	42%	33%
Bulletin board at the post office and local businesses, such as Roche Brothers, car repair shop, library, etc.	8%	23%	8%