

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM THE YOKING TEAM OF FCC AND GPC

We hope this document will help answer any questions that you might have. If you have a question or feedback, please reach out to a member of the Yoking Team or T.J., and/or Esther.

To stay up to date, visit www.fccsanangelo.org/about-us/yoking and keep up with email updates.

At www.fccsanangelo.org/about-us/yoking you will find a link to submit questions and/or feedback.

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Questions about the process:

1. What is the goal of the Yoking Team and what can we expect over the next six months?

- The goal of the yoking committee is to enter a time of prayer, discussion, listening, and discernment. We hope to determine the best way for FCC and GPC to move forward with the hopes of enhancing both congregations, finding new opportunities for growth and fellowship, and sharing facilities and resources. It is our hope to identify common agreements as to worship, mission, etc.

We will work to have openness while exploring how God could use us to best serve in our community and the world around us.

We view these six months as a trial period of experimentation in church procedures, business, and worship. At the end of six months, we will make a recommendation to FCC and GPC.

2. Who serves on the yoking committee and how were they selected?

- Session (GPC) and the church board (FCC- via the nominating committee) agreed upon the yoking committee members. The team consists of 4 representatives from each congregation plus a pastor from GPC and FCC.

GPC: John Ballard, Randy Gardner, Victor Probandt, and Rebecca Webb

FCC: Trish Aylor, Carla Hallman, Jon James, and Shirley Robison

Ministers: Esther Berg, T.J. Shoop-York

3. What outside help have we sought?

1. Suzanne Castle, consultant, who is experienced in this field of working with a “yoked” church. To learn more about Suzanne visit her website at www.suzannecastle.com
2. TJ and Esther who both have experience serving a yoked church.
3. Podcast (unstuck church)
4. Supplied resources from both denominations

4. What does “yoking” mean?

- Yoking can mean a wide variety of things but at its simplest form yoking is when two or more churches decide they are better together in accomplishing a mutual goal with sharing obligations but maintaining individual autonomy.

A few examples could include:

- Two congregations that share a building & share a pastor but maintain separate governing bodies.
- Two congregations that share a facility/building and have a pastor from each denomination.
- Two congregations that share a facility/building, pastor, and worship/Sunday school.

Another way of thinking about this question is, yoking can mean whatever we want it to mean, what works best for us.

5. Can two churches yoke and maintain different denominational identities?

- Yes, many yoked churches maintain separate denominational identities and/or connections with multiple denominations.

6. Does the Presbytery (GPC) and Region Office (FCC) know that we are engaging in a yoking conversation? Are they supportive?

- Yes, they have encouraged this experiment but would hold off on ratifying particular yoking until they learn more about what we believe God is calling us to.

7. What immediate changes should we expect?

- Exploration of worship styles, sharing of pastoral care, combined Sunday school options and other church activities. The goal is to explore various options to see what works and what doesn't. Feedback, both positive and negative, will be important to the success of this exploration.

8. Is there a difference between yoking and merging? If so, are we exploring both options?

- Yes, and we are exploring both (and all) options, although "yoking" is currently our primary model for exploration.
 - **Yoking:** Can be viewed as a spectrum of options; see above list.
 - As stated above, yoking is a model where individual churches maintain their denominational identity but establish some level of sharing of facilities, staffing, resources, finances, etc.
 - **Merging:** Is when two congregations "merge" together under one of the church names/governments and/or a new name; this option can include multiple denomination affiliations or a single denominational identity. Merging is a fuller joining of the congregations into one new entity that represents the best of both faith traditions.

- Listen to the Unstuck Church Podcast episode number 89 to better understand a few options.
- The difference between yoking and merging is that with merging the goal is to eventually assimilate with one church, one financial status, and one overall program of worship. It can be done with two different denominations but often is easier for two churches of the same denomination.
- At this point all options are to be considered upon prayerful consideration by both congregations throughout this exploration period.

9. What will be the financial commitment for both churches during the next six months?

- Money designated for GPC or FCC goes to that church/entity to use as needed based on the agreement upon church budget. Funds without a church designated will currently go to a joint mission fund.
- Building expenses during the yoking process will remain as they have historically functioned.
- FCC is financially responsible for the building.
- GPC will continue to give \$750 a month to FCC for the usage of the church building.
- Long term, the financial commitments of each congregation are undetermined. That will become clear as we proceed in the trial period.

10. At the end of six months if church leadership decides to move forward with yoking, what will happen? How and when will the Yoking Team communicate its conclusions, next phases, etc. to everyone of each congregation?

- Yoking will include not only church leadership but conversations and input from both congregations. Over the next six months, we will be exploring options for yoking and determining what the next steps are for whichever option or options are to be pursued further. Each church will have to decide whether to adopt any final recommendations and next steps according to their bylaws or higher authority requirements.
- It is consensus within the Yoking Team that transparency is critical to the process. Timely reports from the committee will be distributed to the membership as soon as each conclusion is agreed upon and a new "phase" is beginning or ending.

Questions about worship:

1. How will the next six months change worship (9:00 o'clock-contemporary and 11:00 o'clock – traditional)?

- Both worship times are open to members from GPC and FCC and both services will have shared involvement from pastors and other leadership.
- The primary exploration of worship order and components will happen during the traditional services with continued request of feedback (using printed cards) each week.
- The committee is experimenting with several different aspects of worship to find the most agreeable approach. This will continue until a consensus is reached. All changes made are to seek the best way forward for both congregations.
- Currently, we do not see much change for the contemporary service, however, we believe it is critical to continue to find ways to engage with members of FCC who actively worship at 9:00 AM.

2. What does this next six months mean for existing support staff (musicians, pianist/organist, and choir director)?

- Shared turf (shared responsibilities and representation from both congregations) with a willingness to explore new styles and songs.
- T.J. and Esther are working closely together to support and encourage all personnel while also seeking to improve communication among paid staff from FCC and GPC.
- Support staff will need to be as flexible as possible.

3. How can I share feedback regarding worship?

- Printed feedback cards in the bulletin each Sunday or contact any member of the Yoking Team and/or a pastor to share feedback.
- We anticipate several town hall meetings and small group discussions to occur over the next several months.

4. How will offering be handled?

- Designated gifts to a specific congregation will be processed through traditional means and non-designated gifts will be used for shared outreach approved by the Yoking Team; see back of the bulletin for more information.

5. Who will be the primary preacher?

- TJ Shoop-York with shared leadership from Esther and Sara through the yoking process.
- A typical rotation will include Esther and/or Sara preaching once every four to six weeks.

6. Will Sara (associate minister of FCC) still be given the opportunity to preach?

- Yes.

7. How will we handle church membership and baptism over the next six months?

- Membership will be open for people to join either FCC or GPC (the congregation and church government) of their choosing. Ministers will consult with those wanting to join and follow their wishes.
- For now, TJ will do believers' baptism for the FCC congregation and a representative from the Presbyterian tradition will do infant and/or believers' baptism for GPC.

8. How will we handle theological differences in worship, including creedal statements, baptism, and communion?

- We will explore different orders and components during worship with an intentional respect and understanding of the differences/preferences of both congregations. We will take feedback cards seriously and try to find the balance where we can.
- We hope to communicate with each other and allow space for difference. The committee seeks to balance, as best as possible, worship design.

Questions about programs, mission/outreach, and pastoral care:

1. What will mission/outreach look like?

- Undesignated money will go into a mission fund for both congregations. The Yoking Team will determine how the mission funds will be used as a joint mission project during the yoking process.
- The food pantry mission and any other historical mission commitments from FCC or GPC will continue.
- We hope eventually to combine mission efforts for a greater effect.

2. Who will be responsible for pastoral care?

- Shared by Esther, TJ, and Sarah during the yoking process.
- Elders and church members will continue to be expected to give care when appropriate.

3. Will our existing programs (outside of worship) be shared?

- Yes – all programming is open for ALL.

4. What can I expect for Sunday school?

- We will offer several options for adults and individuals can determine which class they would like to attend. We are strongly encouraging that members explore various Sunday school options, regardless of “traditional” church affiliation.
- Combined option for children based on age.

Questions about the role of a church member over the next six months:

1. What steps are in place to ensure a space for members from both congregations to be heard?

- Feedback cards.
- Ask questions and share thoughts with Yoking Team members and/or a pastor.

2. How can I share my feedback (celebrations, concerns, observations, ideas, thoughts, etc.)?

- Feedback cards, email, phone calls, in person contact to Yoking Team members or pastors.

3. What is the role of the session (GPC) and church board (FCC) over the next six months?

- To support the Yoking Team process and continue serving/running each congregation's church/governmental duties/finances/decisions during the process.
- Stay informed and offer input

4. What will happen to other leadership positions in the church (elders, cabinet, committee chairs, etc.)?

- This will be determined during the yoking process depending on the result.

5. How can I be most faithful throughout this process?

- PRAY! Ask, discuss, listen, be willing to explore and try new things. Have patience and be willing to negotiate and compromise.
- Look for ways God is leading, encourage input from members about concerns, be available to listen and share information, and work on building relationships between FCC and GPC.
- Participate!
- Get to know members of the other congregation and pray for an outpouring of God's grace through this process and the future.