

Opening Doors to Serve Christ

2018 MISSION/VISION STUDY OF SAPC

A Brief History

South Aiken Presbyterian Church (SAPC) in Aiken, SC, has been opening its doors to serve Christ since 1955. SAPC is the daughter congregation of First Presbyterian Church, also in Aiken, and it was founded to address the rapid growth on the south side of town, growth that resulted from the construction of the Savannah River Nuclear plant, one of the major employers in the area. In addition to the Savannah River Nuclear plant (now commonly referred to as the Savannah River Site), other employers include Kimberly Clark, Owens Corning, Hubbell, University of South Carolina Aiken, and Bridgestone Manufacturing. Over the years, SAPC has benefitted from new members who have come to Aiken to work from all over the United States. Many of these members came and stayed, making Aiken their home and our church family, their church family.

In its 63-year history, SAPC has been blessed with a diverse and inclusive congregation of people and with leadership from ten installed pastors, three associate pastors, and two parish associates. Its last pastor enjoyed a rich tenure of nine years. Under his leadership, all debt was retired and the church added a full-time Director of Christian Education and an Associate Pastor to the staff to address congregational needs. Additionally, SAPC's relationship with its kindergarten was strengthened through a weekly chapel service lead by pastoral staff and a committee appointed by the Session to increase communication between the church and the school.

SAPC is currently staffed by a full-time intentional interim pastor and a part-time Director Children's Ministry. The Session recently voted to eliminate the Associate Pastor position so that the church could align its finances and staff with the size of the membership and current mission goals.

Members of SAPC rejoice in its rich past and vibrant present. They look forward to the future that God has in store, including the call of the next installed pastor.

Mission/Vision Study

In order to plan for the future and call the person with the right skill set to lead it, SAPC engaged in a period of intentional discernment. Part of this discernment process was to form a Mission/Vision Task Force (Task Force/team) composed of two Elders, two Deacons, and three members of the congregation at-large, including a youth representative (for a total of 7 members). Task Force members were: Brent Hager, Greg Burkes, Melissa Major, Andrew Goslen, Angela Clifford, Corey Glenn, and Lisa Lader. We were charged with clarifying SAPC's current position and projecting what God is calling the congregation to do in the future.

SAPC's intentional interim pastor was hired to lead the Task Force through this process with the support of the Session and a transitional committee under the supervision of the Committee on Ministry (COM) of Trinity Presbytery. We began our work in May and met every Sunday afternoon after worship for one hour throughout the summer. These meetings were open to the congregation, and some members did sit in on occasion to observe the process. Our methodology included the following elements:

1. A demographic study (Who is our neighbor?)
2. Self-reflection - Part A. (In what ways is our church interacting with and reaching our neighbor?)
3. Self-reflection - Part B. (What could we do better to further our mission to reach our neighbors with the resources that we have available?)
4. A current description of our church, how we currently worship, and how we are organized (Who are we in the present?)
5. What do we believe God is calling us to do?
6. Given our study and the congregational input received, what qualities and skills do we want our next pastor to have in order to lead us into the future that we imagine?
7. Closing insights/summary

In furtherance of its work and to insure congregational input, the Task Force created a questionnaire that was initially distributed to participants in adult Sunday school classes in July 2018 and later to small groups and members of the church as a whole. One of the purposes of the questionnaire was to get a clear and current picture of how members of the congregation view SAPC. Surveys were distributed and collected on a rolling basis throughout July and August. Approximately 125 surveys were returned, which represents a high percentage of active attendees. As the surveys came in, we captured the data via Excel software and identified and interpreted trends. To access the raw data collected from responses to the survey [click here](#).

The survey questions were as follows:

1. When was this church the biggest blessing in your life?
2. How did you come to be a part of this church? Were you (please circle the best response)
 1. invited?
 2. a walk-in?
 3. someone with family connections?
 4. other (please specify)
3. What do we do well at South Aiken Presbyterian Church? What is our best ministry?
4. Where does SAPC need to improve? What areas of ministry need attention?
5. Based on your previous comments, what skills does our new pastor need to have?
6. In order to find out what is going on at church, what would you respond to or use: (circle all that apply)
 1. church website
 2. text messages
 3. email
 4. traditional mailings
 5. automated telephone calls
 6. Facebook or other social networking sites
7. How would you describe our church to someone who had just moved into your neighborhood?
8. What events/activities, in addition to worship and Sunday school, would you participate in?
9. How can our church be more invitational?
10. What keeps you coming back to this church?

11. If approached, would you be willing to serve on the Pastor Nominating Committee? If so, please print and sign your name below:

PART ONE

A Demographic Study: Who is our Neighbor?

We began our discernment process with a Bible study on Luke 10:25-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus' question of "who is my neighbor" is relevant to SAPC's current and future mission. As noted in our introduction, SAPC was intentionally planted on the south side of town to minister to new arrivals who would become part of the Aiken community. We know the community is SAPC's mission field, but we wanted to probe further to learn how SAPC can be more effective in its outreach.

To do this, we used resources from the Aiken Chamber of Commerce, a demographic study from the University of South Carolina Aiken (USCA), and a demographic study provided by Percept Demographic Group. (Percept Demographic provides neighborhood statistical data to congregations) The Percept document *First View* can be accessed via this [link](#). Additionally, the Task Force benefitted from the presence of a real estate professional, who was a member of the team, and was able to tap into her resources. She provided a large graphic map with color-coded push pins ([map](#)) that provided the location of each of our members' homes and indicated the neighborhoods in which they reside. This visual aid gave the team key insights about our membership and the neighborhoods that we need to reach for Jesus Christ.

Initial Impressions

SAPC's Location is Favorable for Future Growth

Studying the graphic map provided by our real estate professional, the team had two initial impressions. First, by way of blessing, SAPC is favorably located for current and future growth. The SAPC campus faces two major roads in Aiken and covers the entire block between them. The front of the property faces Whiskey Road, a major thoroughfare that connects to practically all other roads in Aiken. On Whiskey Road, one will find business, churches, and city landmarks including the H. Odell Weeks Recreational Park, one of the best-known recreational facilities in our town. SAPC's property is directly opposite this major landmark. The back of the property faces Silver Bluff Road, which is also a well-traveled. A major landmark on Silver Bluff is Aiken Public Safety Station Two, a City of Aiken fire/police station. The station is the church's next door neighbor. Silver Bluff Road is also home to neighborhoods that face SAPC's family life center.

Its central location to residential developments, businesses, and major landmarks will continue to be important to SAPC's efforts to attract new members and reach out to the community. It is blessed with visitors who find it precisely because it is centrally located.

SAPC's Congregation is Geographically Dispersed

Our second initial impression was surprise at just how physically dispersed yet also concentrated the congregation is. People who actively attend SAPC's church services are, for the most part, from six neighborhoods, but these neighborhoods are spread over a fairly large geographic area. This distribution will affect SAPC's future. For example, if SAPC chose in the future to organize

small group meetings in peoples' homes (which other churches are doing to foster growth), it will have to be mindful of geography and distance and not assume that a group can easily get together for fellowship. Why? We learned that some neighborhoods that have people of similar age are miles apart and that would make gathering more challenging and less practical. Having said that, SAPC's geographical diversity is typical of Aiken and affects all congregations on Whiskey Road.

The Neighborhoods That Feed SAPC Reflect Housing Needs/Choices That Will Influence the Way It Communicates

SAPC is fed by retirement communities, by neighborhoods with "starter homes" for middle class families, and everything in between. The same graphic map that helped our team understand the geographic diversity of the congregation also helped us understand that SAPC will need to better target its communications. It makes no sense, for example, to send Vacation Bible School applications to members who reside in retirement communities. It does make sense, however, to send those same members a call to volunteer for VBS. Likewise, we know which neighborhoods are populated with families with young children and can therefore target our VBS communications to them.

After these initial impressions, the team identified other, equally important data germane to the church:

1. The neighborhood closest to SAPC (right next door) has no member representation. This caused us to wonder about the church's outreach to them. We found that the church does invite their children to Vacation Bible School and First Fridays/Parents' Night Out, but it otherwise has little interaction with them. We know that the neighborhood is transient and has many renters. As such, SAPC may not be inviting enough to attract them or perhaps the individuals and families who live there simply do not associate with a church.
2. Each of the neighborhoods that feeds SAPC has people in them who do not attend a church and may be waiting for an invitation. The demographic study provided by the Percept Demographic Group (see *First View*) pointed out that while the community is deeply religious (more so than average), 40% of the population in Aiken County alone does not identify with a church. This provides opportunity.
3. A young mother, who is an educator and a member of the Task Force, told us that some of her friends would attend a PCUSA church if they knew that they would be accepted. Instead, they go to a Unitarian Universalist church because they think it's the only place they will feel comfortable. Despite negative views of the Presbyterian General Assembly decisions from more conservative churches, SAPC does have an opportunity to minister to people who do not identify as fundamentalist. This was a conversation that the Task Force had at length, and it was reflected in some of the surveys completed by members of the congregation. In the words of one member, SAPC has more "theological flexibility" than more conservative churches.
4. The neighborhoods in our study tend to reflect the ethos of churches and vice versa. We learned that the Reformed Presbyterian tradition makes up only 7% of the larger Aiken community. The majority of Aiken is Baptist and conservative Baptist or PCA (for more info. see the previously referenced Percept *First View*). SAPC's next pastor will have to be comfortable being in a minority Christian denomination and hopefully will seek ways

to stress the positive aspects of the Reformed tradition and relay these to the larger community. Please note that SAPC is not interested in leaving the denomination. Nor is it interested in engaging in that conversation.

5. Our study revealed that there is growth in Aiken, and the area will continue to grow in population. Much of that growth is due to retirees moving in from other states and taking advantage of the many excellent retirement communities. As such, the church has an opportunity to be the PCUSA church for many retirees who already identify as mainline Presbyterian and even for those who simply want a loving church home.
6. In addition to retirees, Aiken may in the future experience some spillover growth from North Augusta, SC where many young families live as a result of the cyber security mission at Fort Gordon (located in Augusta, GA). However, this potential may be limited due to the distance between North Augusta and Aiken (about 20 miles). Having said that, SAPC is the closest PCUSA church for those who identify as mainline Presbyterian.

Other: Further discussion revealed that in the past SAPC opened its doors and expected the community to come to it. Many congregations still operate this way, but we realize that the church needs to be more proactive, especially with regard to its outreach. One participant in our round table discussions suggested that SAPC needs to reinterpret the “opening doors” part of its mission statement not to mean that it is open for business but to mean that the doors to mission are open when SAPC’s members leave worship and go out into the world. Our team agrees with that insight.

Emerging Insight

Leadership that will model hospitality and invitation will be helpful to SAPC going forward. SAPC needs to continue to find ways to intentionally reach out and connect with its neighbors and invite them to join us. As such, SAPC needs to foster in its members a call to extend invitations to their neighbors and others. SAPC’s next pastor should help empower its Elders, Deacons, and members to model invitation.

PART TWO

Self-Reflection – Part A:

How does our church reach out and interact with its neighbors?

Our Mission Statement

The nature of invitation brings us to SAPC’s mission statement. It is “Opening Doors to Serve Christ.” There is a story behind this mission statement. Years ago, a visiting pastor came to the church and began to pull doors to get in. All except one was locked. When he finally got in, he challenged the congregation about the nature of hospitality and invitation. Just how welcoming is SAPC if all doors are locked? That challenge caused discussion and action and gave birth to SAPC’s mission statement. As a team, we discussed the meaning of “Opening Doors to Serve Christ.” We asked ourselves to list the ways that SAPC is currently reaching out to the community.

That is, the ways that SAPC literally open its doors and invites its neighbors to come in. This defines who SAPC is and how it currently engages in ministry.

Ways that We Open Doors to Serve Christ

1. South Aiken Presbyterian Kindergarten (SAPK)

SAPC's kindergarten prides itself on teaching the whole child - mind, body, and spirit. In addition to a nursery for children ages 6 months to 2 years, the kindergarten includes classes for 2, 3, and 4 year-old prekindergarten as well as 5 year-old kindergarten. Children attend weekly chapel and learn through a play-based approach using research-based programs such as Handwriting without Tears and an exciting array of enrichment activities that include music and Spanish. Additionally, families can choose supplemental activities for their children such as karate and Science Club. Families also have the option to enroll their children in extended day programs. Lunch Bunch provides children with a social atmosphere to eat and play with their peers beyond their individual classrooms. Bible Friends provides additional enrichment opportunities such as music, drama, gross-motor play, and Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Music (STEAM) explorations. SAPK's director, assistant director, and staff are enthusiastic, resourceful, and loving. They bring their various talents to the forefront and continually build meaningful experiences for the children attending the school. They also foster relationships based on respect and love with both the children and their families. Families who visit the kindergarten, as well as those whose children attend, routinely remark on its warm and engaging school culture.

SAPC's kindergarten also extends its reach beyond the classroom. For example, many of its students attend SAPK's summer camp during the month of June. Summer camp includes three weeklong, theme-based camps and is open to children ages 6 months - 8 years, which offers a summer enrichment opportunity for children who are typically considered too young to participate in many of the available camps around Aiken. In the eyes of the community, SAPC is best known for its kindergarten program.

2. Scouting

Members of the community also know about SAPC because of Boy Scout Troop 146. Troop 146 is an active Scout troop that uses church facilities and, in the spirit of scouting, is inclusive in its membership and participation. In the past, SAPC's pastors have often assisted Scouts with their God and Country merit badges and other projects.

3. Secret Santa

Secret Santa is a combined church and community mission led by SAPC. Secret Santa sponsors, shops for, wraps, and distributes over 1200 toys and other items to over 400 children from low-income families in Aiken County. This mission has grown exponentially since it began over 30 years ago. Each year, the program is evaluated to see how it is meeting the physical and spiritual needs of those involved. In the past few years, multi-language Bibles have been included in the offering to families on distribution day. "Needs bags" with personal hygiene items have recently been included in the distribution. Most importantly, the spiritual movement in some of those sponsored is an outward sign of an inward grace. For example, during registration, a 7-year-old boy stood in wonder of the church cross, and it gave a church member an opportunity to witness

the love of God through Jesus Christ to this child. Another time, a grandfather at distribution, clutching a Bible with tears in his eyes, was grateful for the pictures in the Bible because he was illiterate. He could now see the stories of the Bible every day. There are even parents who have come back to sponsor a child because the mission helped them through their own time of need. This mission is much more than a child receiving material gifts at Christmas.

4. First Fridays/Parents' Night Out

Many families also participate in SAPC's First Fridays/Parents' Night Out (First Fridays) program throughout the school year. First Fridays is open to children of various ages on a quarterly basis. Children are provided a meal and are entertained through faith-based activities, play, and movies while their adult family members enjoy some personal time. First Fridays is very popular with kindergarten families and others throughout the community. They are a safe, fun, educational, and affordable child care option. SAPC has capitalized on the popularity of First Fridays by occasionally substituting food donations that benefit a local elementary school's anti-hunger program in place of the nominal admission fee normally charged.

5. Mighty Warriors of God (MWG) Basketball Program

Mighty Warriors of God (MWG) is an Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball program currently comprised of three teams for middle school boys, JV boys, and varsity boys. Unlike most AAU teams that are for-profit organizations run by coaches who charge their players to be on the team and whose sole purpose is to teach basketball, MWG is much different. MWG is a non-profit organization run by Justina Tyler and Michael Walcott. These coaches volunteer their time, and their mission is one of ministry as well as basketball. The only costs the players incur are the costs of uniforms and tournaments. However, the coaches lead the boys in numerous fundraisers to offset these costs because many of the players cannot afford to pay them.

In addition to teaching basketball skills, the MWG ministry also teaches life skills and discipline and focuses on academics with regular study tables during the school year. The players also engage in prayer time before practice. The coaches offer disciplined team activity and a mentoring role to the players, and SAPC offers them a safe environment to practice 3-4 nights per week. Both SAPC and MWG benefit from this relationship. MWG players have regularly participated in church clean-up events when invited, and they have also participated in worship services, picnics, and other church activities. Coach and player support of church clean-up days has been a big help to the church. In addition to offering a safe facility at no cost, SAPC members have provided support of the MWG program in the form of coaching and mentoring (Kevin Pethick and Janet Green) and tutoring (many volunteers) during the 2017 season.

Church member Kevin Pethick helped to establish the MWG program at SAPC and has served as a coach and the program liaison. In 2018, he once again is serving as the program liaison, and he ensured that the program was reapproved. He continues to act as an intermediary between MWG and the church. Church support will be limited this year due to Kevin's job demands (he is an attorney) and the church's transitional status. The coaches are grateful for the use of the facilities and have filled the gaps. However, they would welcome any support (financial, coaching, mentoring, tutoring, or otherwise) that SAPC can provide. There were approximately fifty players on four teams that benefited from the ministry in 2017, and approximately thirty-five are still involved and are benefiting in 2018.

6. Vacation Bible School

SAPC hosts a Vacation Bible School (VBS) in July that is widely attended by the kindergarten children and other children throughout the community. Children return year after year for a week of enormous fun. This includes drama, art, music, dancing, cooking, and play focused on an exciting theme. At the conclusion of each VBS, children and their families join VBS volunteers for a dinner and performance and share a bit of what the children learned during their week.

SAPC's membership invests heavily in VBS. A large number of members volunteer to ensure a safe and exciting experience for the children. Additionally, its rising 6th graders participate in a mission project (local or global, alternating each year) that they design and share with all of the VBS children, their families, volunteers, and church members, thereby fostering a continued commitment to service, faith, and love. VBS annual photographs, which include every adult and child participant, speak to the popularity and constancy of SAPC's VBS program.

7. Youth Group

SAPC's high school youth group includes both teens who are members of our church and teens who are not. They participate in Sunday school, worship, and youth events. SAPC offers them a fun and safe place to congregate and engage in activities, and it provides them a church home. SAPC encourages and challenges the youth to think about Christian discipleship and membership. It invites them to participate in local mission opportunities with church members. The youth group attends the Montreat Youth Conference each year, and visiting teens, who are active with the group, are also welcome to attend. Non-member youth who have been a part of this ministry say they feel blessed.

8. The Arts

Musical and vocal groups use SAPC's facilities both for practice and for recitals and concerts. SAPC does not charge for the use of its facilities. It consider this a community service. By offering its facilities for these activities, SAPC extends its name recognition and its witness.

9. Other

SAPC also offers several small groups such as a knitting circle, book club, and women's Bible stud, etc., which include both members and nonmembers. Even in these small group settings, SAPC needs to extend invitation, and it struggles with the best way to do that. For example, SAPC has Presbyterian Women circles. Those circles, however, do not always meet at a time that is conducive for working women. SAPC's failure to accommodate has predictably caused participation to decline and bewilderment as to why this has happened. In brief, SAPC doesn't always extend invitation that accommodates or know how to invite in a way that feels natural and comfortable.

Summary

SAPC does reach out to the larger community, and it does have visitors. However, there is a disconnect between both outreach and attendance/participation and attendance/participation and membership. SAPC needs to build relationships and nurture a willingness in its members to invite others to join it for worship and other activities. SAPC needs to create an environment that encourages those who visit to become active with the church and make it their church home.

Part of the leadership traits that SAPC will seek in its next pastor will be leadership that is intentional about invitation, making connections, and helping it be a more welcoming and accommodating congregation.

Example: Our demographic study confirmed that Aiken will continue to be home to an influx of retirees. In most congregations, seniors do not extend invitation to their peers because their peers already worship in established churches. So, in many congregations, evangelism falls to the “younger crowd”, who can invite other younger people. What is unique about SAPC’s “neighborhood” is that many of the retirees who are moving to Aiken are church-goers and will seek out a congregation. Moreover, these people will be SAPC’s neighbors. This creates an opportunity for SAPC’s members to invite others to our church regardless of age/peer group etc.

PART THREE

Self-Reflection – Part B:

What could we do better with our current resources to reach out to our neighbors and build a better church community?

Elder & Deacon Insights

At this point in our study, the Task Force turned to the Deacons and Elders to help us discern answers to this question. The following comments represent the views of the Deacons and Elders:

*SAPC needs to update its web page and technology, not just for better in- house communication, but as a way to engage others, especially the younger generation. An updated web page, Facebook page, and system that uses texting to communicate to the congregation are crucial. SAPC has a weekly email newsletter, but it is not being opened by many members. A phone system that would call homes automatically with important updates is also an option because SAPC has older members who do not use modern technology.

* SAPC needs to nurture its spirit of invitation. There is a disconnect between the church’s ability to attract and the fact that so few choose to worship with us.

*Should SAPC host a church festival/block party that would bring people in?

*SAPC needs to be more intentional in spreading its name to the community. For example, SAPC has no presence in the Aiken Christmas Parade, nor does it take much advantage of local media that offers free advertising, including the local paper in Aiken.

PART 4

A Current Description of Our Church:

Who are we in the present?

Worship

SAPC is traditional in worship with two Sunday services. Its 8:45 a.m. service enjoys attendance ranging from 69 to 83 people per Sunday. This service is popular with many of SAPC’s seniors for its convenient time and its length. On average, this is a 45-minute service. It is different from the 11:00 a.m. service in that it does not incorporate all the liturgy of the second service. There is opportunity for future growth with the 8:45 a.m. service. Visitors indicate that they like the time and flow of the service, and they are returning. Considering the fact that Aiken will continue to

receive seniors into the community, the 8:45 a.m. service should benefit if SAPC is intentional about invitation and is effective with its communication.

SAPC's 11:00 a.m. service is more formal and has more liturgy. It has a children's moment built into the service, and it features a full choir. Additionally, there is a moment for congregants to share the peace of Christ and greet one another. The 11:00 a.m. service is more popular with young families.

Each service has a printed bulletin. We celebrate communion on the first Sunday of alternating months (6 times per year) and at Christmas and Easter. Communion is given by passing trays at the 8:45 am service and by intinction at the 11:00 a.m. service.

Throughout the year, SAPC has special services. These include: Celebrating the Gifts of Women Sunday, Youth Sunday, Kirkin' of the Tartans, a Christmas Cantata, two Christmas Eve services, and Holy Week services. The Maundy Thursday service is held at First Presbyterian Church in partnership with SAPC, and the Good Friday service is held at SAPC in partnership with First Presbyterian every other year. On Easter Sunday, there is a sunrise service in addition to the 8:45 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship services. Twice each year, SAPC joins in worship with its partner in Christ, Friendship Baptist Church. SAPC has Sunday school for all ages is between services.

Choir/Music

SAPC has an active choir with a part-time music minister and paid accompanist. For special occasions (Christmas cantata, Easter, Kirkin' of the Tartans), additional paid and volunteer instrumentalists participate. The choir at the 8:45 a.m. service normally has six to eight singers. The choir at the 11:00 a.m. service has up to sixteen singers. With these limited numbers, the choir has done a commendable job providing anthems and special music. But with limited membership and limited resources, it has been a challenge not to re-use anthems and take on more challenging works.

In recent years, the number of singers in the choir has decreased because members have left the congregation. Some have left to move nearer to family, but others have left for other Aiken-area churches and denominations with more robust music ministries. Development of talent from within the choir and congregation has been limited, in part, by the number of active church members.

SAPC uses a variety of hymns to complement worship. These are accompanied by organ/piano, and the congregation sings from the *Glory to God* Presbyterian hymnal (published in 2013). As part of our mission/vision process, SAPC held a hymn sing to better gauge the types of music the congregation enjoys.

Some members of the congregation feel that hymn selection could be improved (more variety, use of more familiar hymns). They feel that many of the hymns in the new hymnal are difficult to sing. Others feel that there is a tendency for the hymns to drag and that a somewhat quicker tempo would be appreciated.

Christian Education (2017 Participation: 243 children & adults (total))

SAPC's adult Sunday school is well attended. The average attendance per Sunday is 40- 60 people in total. Naturally, SAPC would like more people to participate, but it feels blessed by the ones who attend. Between the first worship service and Sunday school, SAPC offers a time of

fellowship, coffee, and finger food for our members. This is a popular time as it provides opportunity for one-on-one conversation.

SAPC encourages children in worship. Some parents choose to send their infants and toddlers to the nursery and their older children to Children's Church. Other parents keep their children with them in the services. Either option is perfectly acceptable. Those children who stay in the services have access to worship activity bags and pages if needed. On Communion Sundays, parents are encouraged to keep all children in the worship services so that the children can participate in communion and more fully experience worship with their families. Parents who attend the 11:00 a.m. service often choose to send their young children to Children's Church, which begins right after the children's moment in the service. Children's Church is designed to help younger children better understand the elements of worship and the lesson of the day. In this same vein, SAPC offered a children's worship class in 2018 (and in also in past years) for first, second, and third graders, and it has children usher on select Sundays under the supervision of an adult. Between services, SAPC has a Sunday school program for children 3K – 5th grade. Currently, SAPC children's Sunday school attendance numbers are low due to the small number of young families in the congregation. Youth are also encouraged in worship. Each spring, SAPC youth lead worship during Youth Sunday. This service is usually well-attended.

In the fall and spring, SAPC offers a Wednesday evening program over the course of 5-6 weeks called *Food for Thought*. The topics vary each time, but SAPC tries to pick topics and studies of interest to the congregation from a Christian perspective. *Food for Thought* consistently brings out 60 plus people each evening. These individuals come to share a meal and a time of study and worship.

Membership

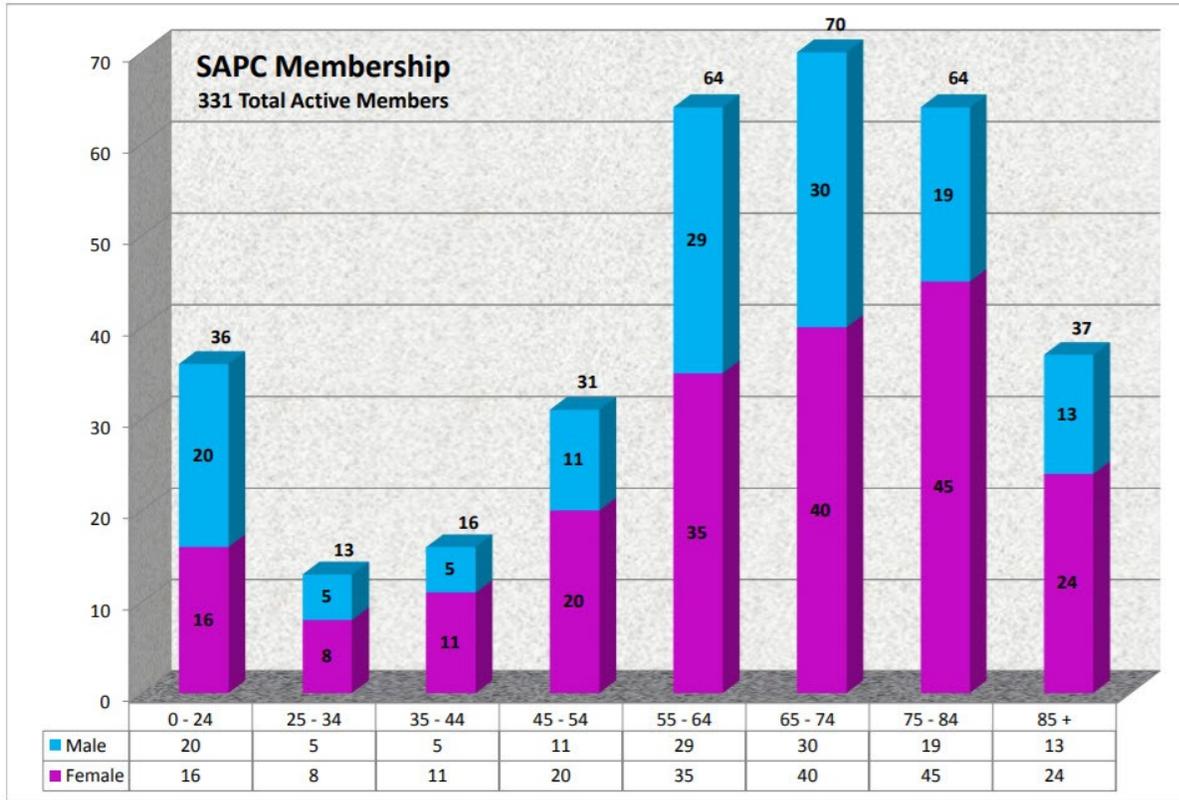
One task that needed to be accomplished before calling a new pastor was to insure that the church has an accurate active member roll. As such, SAPC reviewed its active member roll during this interim period, and, following the Book of Order protocol, removed those individuals who had either requested removal, moved away from the area, joined another church, or were no longer active. As a consequence, SAPC's active member roll now stands at 331. Here is a breakdown of active members by age:

SAPC MEMBERSHIP DISTRIBUTION BY AGE

Active members: 331

85+	37
75-84	64
65-74	70
55-64	64
45-54	31
35-44	16
25-34	13
24 & younger	36

This breakout shows that SAPC is an aging congregation, but still has youth and young families. A graphic representation of these age groups as well as the number of males and females in each group can be found below:



Partnership/Outreach

Currently, SAPC has been blessed with opportunities to reach out and engage with others beyond the church. It has a valued relationship with Friendship Baptist Church, a historically African-American Baptist church here in Aiken. Friendship Baptist joins with SAPC twice each year for worship and a period of fellowship. SAPC is working to build upon this relationship. It was fortunate to begin this relationship under the leadership of the previous pastor and now is graced with a bond of lasting friendship.

SAPC also works alongside other organizations such as the Salvation Army, Greendale Elementary School, MWG Basketball, Honduras Agape Foundation, the Community Medical Clinic of Aiken County, Golden Harvest Food Bank, and ACTS (Area Churches Working Together). ACTS is a charitable organization that supplies food to the needy and operates a resale store to raise funds to help those in crisis.

Facilities

SAPC facilities include the sanctuary, preschool/kindergarten, fellowship hall, and family life center (FLC). The first building in the SAPC complex was constructed in 1955. This building now serves as the fellowship hall and includes a medium-sized meeting space and an attached kitchen area. This building also currently houses the nursery and some of South Aiken Presbyterian Kindergarten's (SAPK) classrooms. The sanctuary was constructed in 1967 and the first service was held there in January 1968. Additional facilities that initially served as a sports center and now house classrooms, offices for SAPK and the library, were constructed in the 1970's. The final building constructed at SAPC was the family life center, which was built in 1994. The family life center

currently houses staff offices, the choir room, classrooms, a gym with stage and a professional style kitchen. There have been no major renovations or new construction at SAPC since 1994.

Insights from Survey Data

Several questions on the survey help to describe SAPC as it currently exists in that the responses tell how the church resonates with the membership, how members came to join the church, and what the responders believe the church does well.

Question 1: When was this church the biggest blessing in your life?

Pastoral Care was a heavy consideration in responses to question number one. The majority noted how SAPC reached out and ministered to people in times of grief, personal crisis, surgery, and the like.

A sizeable number of people responding noted how SAPC provided healthy childhood formation for their kids through the kindergarten and children/youth group programs. Others noted small group dinners (Salt Shakers) as a source of greatest blessing. _

Question 2: How did you become part of this church?

A significant insight from the survey was the manner in which people joined SAPC. The majority of people who completed the questionnaire indicated that they joined the church after “church shopping” and chose to join on their own without invitation. These same people point to the warmth of our congregation, its worship, and activities as a reason that they stay.

Some survey responders have family connections at SAPC and they have cited family connections as a reason why they joined and remain. The kindergarten program has also attracted people and this was reflected in the survey responses.

There are some instances of members having joined SAPC because of invitation. This too was reflected in the survey responses, but survey responses also confirmed that SAPC needs to be more proactive about invitation to visitors and neighbors.

Question 3: What do we do well?

Responses to this question revealed some interesting insights. Clearly SAPC’s Vacation Bible School, kindergarten, and Secret Santa program, all of which are noted in Section 1, are considered by the congregation to be ministries that SAPC does well. Small groups, Sunday school, and mission projects were also noted.

PART 5

Our Future: What do we believe God is calling us to do?

The Task Force, after much prayer, discussion, and deliberation, was able to identify some recurring themes in its efforts to clarify what God is calling SAPC to do. We reached several conclusions based on discussion and congregational survey responses. Above all, it became clear to us that SAPC needs to become a 21st century church. This is not to say that SAPC should, for the sake of mere change, jettison its traditions or nature of worship as described throughout this document. Yet, it does need to evolve and build upon its strengths. Change can be difficult, but the

Task Force believes that God, with the help of the newly called pastor, will lead us in the right direction. That right direction will include invitation and connection. SAPC has good ministries in place to reach its neighbor. Perhaps it is ignoring some ministries (a men's group, etc). SAPC will need to be intentional about establishing ministries that are needed as opposed to "me too" ministries, which may not be in response to a real need.

Invitation and Connection

First, SAPC needs to become more intentional about being invitational. To that end, SAPC needs to improve its efforts to greet everyone who enters its doors, especially new and returning visitors. It also needs to reach out to the community to let people know of its presence and that it welcomes them to be part of this church family. It is our hope that people of all backgrounds, perspectives, and ethnicities would feel welcome and comfortable. SAPC needs to recognize that being invitational is up to each member-- not just the Membership Committee or the pastors, for example. Therefore, the congregation would benefit from and welcome guidance on the best ways of becoming invitational. Many members are not accustomed to reaching out to those they do not know. This is not because they are unwilling to be welcoming but is often because they are unsure of the first steps to take. In addition to invitation, SAPC needs to learn how to better connect and build relationships with others and show the people it reaches how the church can be a blessing in their lives. This includes small groups. SAPC has many cells (groups) doing ministry here and there. Folks can plug into these opportunities.

Collaboration

We also realize that it is important to work more collaboratively across organizations, committees, and groups within the community at large and also within the church itself. Yet, in our Task Force conversations, concern has been expressed that SAPC does not collaborate within the church as well as it should. Various groups and committees often do not work together for maximum effectiveness. This does not stem from an unwillingness to work cooperatively; it has simply never been a part of the church culture for committees and groups to keep in frequent contact with each other. If SAPC could begin to do this, we believe it could accomplish even more than it does now. More collaboration would also equip SAPC to work together to avoid misunderstandings and to know what is happening in the church. For example, the choir, pastor, Worship Committee, and kindergarten could work together on music in order to reinforce hymns that the congregation would like to sing, or new ones they would like to learn. In the end, with more collaboration (which overlaps with communication, addressed in the next section), SAPC would be a more unified church. A pastor with the skills of collaboration and communication will go far in helping SAPC fulfill its mission of opening our doors to serve Christ.

Communication

SAPC also needs to communicate more effectively. It should do this not only within the church itself but also to the community at large. To create a higher profile in the community, SAPC should consider placing ads for special services (Holy Week, Christmas, Kirkin' of the Tartans, and our joint worship service with Friendship Baptist, etc.) in the local paper (Aiken Standard) and neighborhood newsletters and magazines. It should also make a consistent effort to contact the local paper and community publications when it is undertaking mission projects (Secret Santa, Greendale Elementary Summer Book Drive, food drive for ACTS, etc.). In doing so, it would make the community aware of what is going on at our church and could even invite them to participate

(this would overlap with being more invitational). The church might also consider participating in the annual Christmas parade or having a festival to which the community was invited.

Within the church itself, there are several steps it should consider taking to improve overall communication. First, it should clear out old, outdated technology (televisions, VHS players, outdated computers, etc.). This is not only practical, but symbolic of becoming a 21st century church. Additionally, it could enlist the help of an expert (perhaps hired from outside) to improve and keep our website current. Good things are happening at our church--opportunities to participate in activities beyond Sunday morning worship abound. Yet, in our Task Force meetings and from survey responses, members have indicated that they are often unaware of these events or exactly where and when they are taking place. Committees do a good job publishing their activities in the weekly worship bulletin and in Spirit Express, the email newsletter, but if the information is not also on the website, members can miss important information. Also, an attractive, current website is a means to reach the larger community. In addition to a frequently updated website, the church could consider sending out text messages or using social media to advertise events and activities.

While many members indicated that they would prefer to be notified by traditional email, younger members tend not to use this as a means of communication. It would, of course, be important for the church not to forget the homebound or those in assisted living facilities. These individuals could be reached by traditional communications. Our revamped efforts at communication would also overlap with better collaboration.

Insights from Survey Data

The following questions from the survey provide a glimpse of what those responding think needs to be instituted or improved.

Question 4: What can we do better?

The desire to attract more young people and families and relocated retirees was indicated by church members completing the questionnaire. As to younger families, in August 2018, the SAPC Session hired a part-time employee who can assist us with ministering to youth and young families. This person is the new Director of Children's Ministry. She is assuming much of the DCE role held in a position that was vacated in May 2018 (noted on page 1). This new person is well-qualified as she is also the SAPC kindergarten director. The hire has been seen as a very positive action by young families.

PART 6

Question 5: What skills does our new pastor need to have?

After processing who we currently are as a congregation and what we believe God is calling us to do, we then turned our attention to the skill sets needed in our next pastor.

Over the summer, the Task Force had extensive discussions concerning the types of training, skills and characteristics the next pastor should have in order to be the best fit for SAPC. The Task Force also carefully studied the responses to the survey submitted by the congregation. Based on these discussions, dialogue with Deacons and Elders, comments from members attending open meetings, and survey responses, the Task Force identified ten leadership competencies from the *PCUSA Ministry Information Form* that a pastor called to SAPC should exhibit. These leadership competencies are:

1. Strategy and vision
2. Compassionate
3. Hopeful
4. Motivator
5. Collaboration
6. Communicator
7. Change agent
8. Flexibility
9. Risk taker
10. Preaching and worship leadership

SAPC's Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) will have the right to place these in order of prominence, but as a committee, we can confirm their accuracy.

PART 7

Summary and Conclusion

God has blessed SAPC with 63 years of ministry. It remains a vital congregation with committed members who are anxious to call its next pastor. As such, it is not content to be a "maintenance church" but desires to capitalize on the potential for growth in the area and be a church of growth and dimension. In the future, we envision SAPC to be a congregation that is more attuned to the needs of its neighbors and one that is able and ready to respond to these needs. SAPC is currently doing some needed repairs and improvements in an initial effort to make its facilities more welcoming to visitors and members alike, but in the future improvement will also need to include personal invitation, hospitality, and connection, not just facility upgrades.

SAPC is a congregation that values traditional worship. It does not envision establishing a contemporary service just to attract people. It has had that conversation. SAPC's sanctuary with its pews and stained glass windows is not conducive to contemporary worship, and visitors tell us they are not looking for that kind of service. In brief, SAPC still envisions itself as a body that is happy to worship traditionally. It's who we are.

With this said, our conversations and work has revealed that SAPC's current services could use a face lift. As noted in this document, the hymns could have a more up-beat tempo. We are currently working on this. Some have pointed out that SAPC's worship services can be stiff. (Is it ever appropriate to clap in a Presbyterian church?). Can we loosen up and thereby be more invitational and welcoming without compromising worship? Can SAPC implement with integrity some more informal, lighter elements in worship in order to create a more welcoming environment? We've noticed that when SAPC worships jointly with Friendship Baptist, there is a lot of clapping! We think the answer is "yes."

We envision a church that ministers to the needs of both members and neighbors in an invitational and connectional fashion. Here, we envision flexibility with our next pastor. He/she is not expected to adhere to the lectionary. He or she will have the freedom to address issues that are important to the membership and the church's neighbors - matters that the weekly lectionary might not address. What will be important is that the scripture and theme used is communicated to all ministry teams, such as the music ministry, children's ministry, and the like.

“Are we any closer yet?” is a buzz phrase that we have often heard from members these past weeks. This Mission/Vision Task Force was chosen by the Session in response to Trinity Presbytery’s request that SAPC complete a mission/vision study prior to the election of the PNC. This has been a worthwhile effort and a time of discovery. We feel that the demographic study in particular will be very helpful to SAPC’s leadership going forward. It is our prayer that this study and period of discernment will assist the PNC in its work in calling SAPC’s next pastor. We thank the congregation for its patience and participation.

Lastly, it should be noted that this is the first time that SAPC has conducted a mission/vision study prior to the election of a PNC. This is also the first time SAPC hired a trained intentional interim pastor to lead it through the discernment process. We are grateful to God for the gift of clarity and discernment, and we present this report to the Session and congregation for their comments

To God be the glory