

## Taking the Pulse of First Parish – report for Parish Board

Lee Vorderer, Brown Pulliam, and Merc Kane agreed to develop and implement a survey protocol to gather feedback on the two service model that was followed during the 2009-2010 church years at First Parish. We saw our charge as gathering information, pointing out any outstanding findings, and giving the Parish Board information they would need to think about decisions that they will make about the next service year. The protocol had two parts: personal or telephone interviews, of all paid staff and of key volunteers; an online or on paper anonymous survey, released on March 18 and closed on April 19. The questions for both components were developed by Merc, Brown and Lee, and were reviewed by John Gibbons before anything was begun, and the mechanics of the online survey were field tested as well. Notices about the survey were in the Parishioner and in orders of service during the month that it was available, and John and Megan gave reminders during services.

**Demographics:** 142 people completed the survey, 36 using the paper version and 106 online, through the link provided on the FP website. 131 members of FP completed the survey; 19 were committee chairs or leaders; 44 had children in RE, and 29 were involved in some way in providing RE services. (5 people reported that they are actively involved in projects at FP, like Habitat, the auction, the plant, fair, etc.) In terms of attendance, 50 people reported coming to FP once or twice a month, and 92 people come to services three or more times per month.

**General findings:** Slightly more people like the two service model than do not like it (55 versus 50), while 32 people are neutral about it. 74 people like the smaller size of the coffee hour group, and 28 do not, with 36 people feeling neutral about it. Many people miss seeing particular people that they used to see at services – 97 miss seeing these people, 13 do not miss them, and 28 are neutral about it. 51 people cannot get to the Lyceum easily, 41 can get there, and 35 are neutral about it. 36 people do not miss choir at both services, 69 do miss it, and 26 feel neutral about it. 90 people do not miss having both services projected upstairs.

**Text responses:** Many people offered their thoughts in response to questions about what they like/don't like/ suggest as changes to the two service model. 120 people took the time to say what they liked, with comments generally following these pattern: improved flexibility makes Sunday morning easier; the smaller group is cozier and easier to manage, both at service and coffee hour; it all feels less hectic. There were also 120 responses describing why people do not like this model, again, following these general patterns: missing people, either at service, joys and concerns or RE, and it feels lonely; lower attendance at each service feels like the energy is depleted, too, and the whole experience is less robust; awkwardness of attending lyceum and leaving to be in second service, or the impossibility of attending a service the lyceum and talk back; keeping track of what's when, when special services are happening, when it's a one-service week – all too stressful.

The request for suggestions for one thing to change generated 104 suggestions. Here's a sample: have something fun for the kids to do during coffee hour, then I can come to the lyceum, service and coffee hour after that service; time the services at 9 and 11:30 – that way

there can be a real lyceum; have one Sunday per month be a one service Sunday, at 10; begin and end both services on time, really; go back to one service, with coffee hour before and after, the lyceum before and talk back after, so many more people could have a complete morning experience; have the choir sing at the earlier service sometimes. And a number of people took the suggestion question to repeat their dislike for the two service model.

**Interviews:** Personal interviews revealed a generally positive experience with the two services model. Most staff said that the two service models didn't really affect the amount or quality of their work; ministerial staff report that the amount of work and the energy needed to do the work has increased. RE staff have had an increased workload as well, but feel equally effective. Some staff reported slightly longer hours, especially when thinking about the planning required, but most, especially music staff, report they enjoy having more time to do what they love. Access to the sanctuary for set-up and rehearsal was one area that was widely mentioned: when the 9 am service runs over, it creates a hustle to get all ready for the 11 am service, especially if people don't leave the sanctuary after the 9 am service is over. The volunteer coordinator has twice as much work, having to coordinate and find volunteers for both services, get to know new people at both services, and being here for both services takes up a big chunk of Sunday.

Regular volunteers made up the other sector of interviewees. Videotaping, making the Lyceum happen, making sure the sound system works, and generally overseeing the physical plant is all work handled by volunteers. Each group suggested that more people being involved would help them feel less burdened by the responsibility of the tasks. And several mentioned new equipment as way to reduce the time commitment. This included the videotape copying, which could take much less time with a different kind of machine (DVD copier?); and the lyceum, where setting up the computer and the projector takes a lot of time. Both the copying and setting up functions could be eased with more available, more functional equipment, with better security for the equipment a must.

From the Taking the Pulse Committee's point view, there are some suggestions worth the Board's consideration, ones that may make the structure easier around the two services model, and several that will make the work of volunteers easier to do. We suggest that FP:

- Confront directly the burden that sound managing and videotaping places on a very few people at FP, for very many events, and find a way to bolster those ranks
- Consider some new equipment purchases to make the Lyceum easier to manage and the DVD copying simpler
- Make some changes so that lyceum is more available – perhaps a 10:15-11 am schedule for lyceum or an 11:30 start to the second service.
- Become serious about start and end times for services

We think it is important for the board to consider implementing a similar process again in about a year's time, *but earlier in the year to allow for any RE changes*, in order to have a chance to

compare findings across two years and to examine whether small changes make a significant difference in the experience of the model.

Lee Vorderer, Merc Kane, and Brown Pulliam.