

## Strengths and Weaknesses

*These lists of Strengths and Weaknesses of First Christian Church and of Niles Congregational Church were generated by the Discernment Teams based on what we heard at various activities and through questionnaires. The congregations were invited to add to the lists during April and the first week of May.*

*Our hope is that comparing these lists will help us discern if merging churches would strengthen our abilities to do ministry.*

### Strengths – Niles Congregational Church

- ✚ We are open and affirming and act it out.
- ✚ We have strong lay leadership.
- ✚ We do our best to communicate openly.
- ✚ The congregation is friendly and supportive (family)
- ✚ We resolve our differences respectfully.
- ✚ We encourage dialogue and expect to have it, often in a Town Hall format.
- ✚ We work for social justice issues in the community and in the wider arena.
- ✚ We have a liberal theology but respect others who do not share it. It is a safe place to explore.
- ✚ We are multi-generational.
- ✚ Our worship services are creative.
- ✚ The Adult Sunday School functions well with lay leadership.
- ✚ Our minister is honest and friendly.
- ✚ Our minister is well-liked and respected for his leadership, teaching, and hard work.
- ✚ Our Council, Boards, and committees work well to carry out programs.
- ✚ We have traditions that make us comfortable.
- ✚ We own our building and have only a small loan on the parsonage.
- ✚ We have a good relationship with the Kidango day care operation on site.
- ✚ “Angels” provide special financial gifts.
- ✚ We have a strong choir.
- ✚ Our central location in Niles
- ✚ We believe that we will grow and be able to increase ministerial staff.
- ✚ We are a source of education and outreach to our community.
- ✚ We care about the Earth.
- ✚ We have movie nights.
- ✚ We share spiritual journeys.
- ✚ We are like a big family.
- ✚ Our spiritual leadership is good.
- ✚ We try to welcome others.
- ✚ Our minister has faith, and he articulates it. Most of us are willing to move out of our comfort zone.
- ✚ Our minister has a passion for ministry, he is organized and he is a good leader.
- ✚ People respect and support each other.
- ✚ We have a Congregational heritage and culture.

- ✧ Most of us are willing to try new things.
- ✧ Opinions are shared openly.
- ✧ People smile.
- ✧ The congregation is not dominated by one group.
- ✧ We do Winter Relief.
- ✧ We are concerned about each other.
- ✧ There is a good mix of ages.
- ✧ When we disagree, we find ways to pull together.
- ✧ Niles is open-minded.
- ✧ Friends!!!
- ✧ We have a balance of social justice, spirituality and fellowship.
- ✧ There is an opportunity to grow spiritually.
- ✧ It is a good place for kids.
- ✧ Sometimes we feel that we are doing God's work.
- ✧ There is an intellectual challenge.
- ✧ The sermons are relevant and make you think and feel.
- ✧ There is a sense of direction.
- ✧ There is a sense of peace and belonging.

#### Weaknesses – Niles Congregational Church

- ✧ We have been unable to attract a large group of young families with children so our Sunday School and Youth Groups are small.
- ✧ We have many programs and could use more members to help us so some people don't get burned out.
- ✧ We have difficulty recruiting Sunday School teachers.
- ✧ Our congregation lacks racial diversity.
- ✧ We do not have adequate Sunday School rooms.
- ✧ We have not articulated our long term goals and solidified them into a mission statement.
- ✧ We are not financially capable of hiring a half-time minister to assist our pastor.
- ✧ We are not good at marketing our wonderful church to others in the community.
- ✧ Our music tends to be of only one style/era.
- ✧ We have not come to any conclusions about the possible merger with First Christian.
- ✧ Some of us find it difficult to face change.
- ✧ We say we are welcoming, but do not always know how to include guests when they come to us. Sometimes people come searching, but do not return.
- ✧ We have property constraints that make expanding on our site difficult. We also do not have capital funds to achieve building changes at this time.
- ✧ There is some “groupiness” that makes it difficult when you are a new person.
- ✧ We could expand our service to the community if we could grow.
- ✧ Our building configuration makes it difficult to worship as one group.
- ✧ We need to accept the “growing pains” and grow our congregation.
- ✧ We need to adapt to a younger group and have a more modern format.
- ✧ Could we reach out and find another UCC church to join with?
- ✧ We need more interfaith connections.

- ✂ We need to consider our numbers and grow.
- ✂ We need a more attractive building. Our building is aging and hard to maintain.
- ✂ Some people feel overwhelmed by the topic of merger.
- ✂ We need to support Jeff in his work to help us grow and to be more welcoming.
- ✂ Our pastor needs ministerial help our budget doesn't allow that.
- ✂ Our youth programs need more staff direction, and we need more staff to do that.
- ✂ Our music is beautiful but of one era.
- ✂ We need to think about the future and how to keep our church relevant.
- ✂ Marketing and media are necessary to let people know we are here.
- ✂ There are not enough younger families and people.
- ✂ We lose young members after their teen years.
- ✂ We lack long-term goals.

#### Strengths – First Christian Church

- ✂ Openness
- ✂ Open and affirming
- ✂ Can say what you feel
- ✂ Willingness to listen to others
- ✂ Non-judgmental, don't condemn
- ✂ Not told what to believe or what to do
- ✂ Not outrageous or over the top
- ✂ “New” facility, exciting changes going on with appearance.
- ✂ New building offers room for growth
- ✂ Congregation is like family (because of size)
- ✂ Friendly, joyful congregation
- ✂ Financially sound

#### Weaknesses – First Christian Church

- ✂ Ultra small congregation
- ✂ Aging, lack of new families
- ✂ Stagnant or negative growth
- ✂ Need more witness/local missions
- ✂ Finances out of balance with health of congregation