Answers to the MIF 5 Narrative questions

1) What is the congregation’s or organization’s vision for ministry? Additionally, describe how this vision is lived out.

Since its founding nearly 150 years ago, First Presbyterian Church of Santa Monica (First Pres) has grown into a cornerstone of Christian faith in the city’s downtown area. The main building has undergone several transformations in recent years, turning it into a striking place of worship and amplifying the church’s mission: to communally find each member’s calling in the name of Jesus Christ.

Currently, Sunday’s service is organized to embrace the full breadth of our Christian faith. The instrumental prelude sets a tone of tranquility like the hearth in a home giving off comforting heat while manifesting the glow of sacred peace. A lively praise band brings worshippers to their feet, followed by prayer, the passing of the peace, a fun and thoughtful story time for children, traditional hymns, and sacred music from the choir. The pastor’s message illuminates the connection between the ancient teachings of scripture and modern-day life.

The congregation is multigenerational with congenial members and regular attendees open to new arrivals and blessed with long-term friendships. Through the helpful guidance of elders, deacons and volunteers, the church remains involved in assisting financially-challenged families while opening its doors to community festivals, children’s performances, faith classes and social gatherings.
2) How do you feel called to reach out to address the emerging needs of your community or constituency?

First Pres has been responsive to our community and its needs since 1875, the same year both our church and city were officially founded. Santa Monica has a beautiful beach, temperate weather and costly housing — all contributing to the homelessness that our church has responded to for several decades. The church supports transitional housing for families and shoes for schoolchildren in need. It also has provided brown-bag lunches for shelters, as well as holiday cookies with a message of support.

Year round, the church opens its doors to numerous outside events – from classical music concerts and AA meetings to mindfulness and yoga classes. A Taiwanese congregation meets weekly in our chapel.

First Pres welcomes all who come into our sanctuary to worship and offers fellowship afterward with a catered coffee-hour buffet. Members and regular attendees old and young, their children and guests munch and mingle with individuals just passing by, whether they’re staying at a beachside hotel or living on the street.

In 2015, First Pres allied with the Covenant Network of Presbyterians to reflect our commitment to the inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the church.

Two years later, First Pres became a Matthew 25 pledge church that embraces diversity and seeks to protect the vulnerable. Interfaith families are welcome here.
3) **How will this position help you to reach your vision and mission goals?**

The pastor is considered the leader of our congregation. He or she sets the tone for our worship experience both for members and those we interact with in and around the Santa Monica community.

The pastor will be expected to be a continuous learner and visionary, honoring the First Pres traditions and history, while bringing alternative ways to connect with those inside and outside the church walls. In partnership with Session, teams and the entire membership, the pastor will be a “player-coach,” leading by doing, guiding and teaching.

It is also expected that the pastor will, over time, help refine and shape both the vision and the mission of the church. Much of the worship service and ministries bear the mark of The Rev. Dr. Bill Wood, who retired in 2017 after 19 years at First Pres. His legacy is one of love and wise discernment, and his theological teachings continue to resonate with members. At the same time, the congregation is open to new ideas, fresh insights and expanded perspectives that can augment the faith of its members — building on Dr. Wood’s leadership over the past two decades.
4) Provide a description of the characteristics needed by the person who is open to being called to this congregation and/or organization.

First Pres seeks a communicator with strong preaching skills – a Christian leader who can cultivate spiritual energy for both congregants and staff through inspiring sermons and operational management skills, with an emphasis on team-building.

The congregation feels strongly that the next pastor should also be a teacher with a passion for the history, meaning and relevance of the Christian faith, someone who can interpret the teachings of Jesus Christ through engaging faith classes and weekly Bible study. The pastor should be a compassionate listener and faithful advisor.

Several unique circumstances of First Pres dictate complementary requirements for our future leader. While we are blessed with substantial physical resources in the church campus itself and a very unique pipe organ, the maintenance of these gifts does come with significant monetary requirements. The new pastor will need to be prepared to spearhead capital campaigns as necessary. The church also has a number of endowments that support the annual budget, which will necessitate the understanding of financial planning and accounting, along with being technologically able.

Our on-site preschool is a wonderful resource to the community which also requires oversight and relationship management.

These items are just some of the legacies of our past that continue to shape how First Pres builds its future.
5) **For what specific tasks, assignments, and programs areas will this person have responsibility?**

1. Leading the Sunday service.

2. Preaching the Word with clarity and sensitivity to relevant issues in the lives of the congregants.

3. Administering the Lord’s Supper the first Sunday of the month.

4. Baptizing adults and children; counseling parents.

5. Performing marriage ceremonies and counseling couples.

6. Presiding over new-member education and their service of reception.

7. Educating newly elected elders and deacons and performing their ordinations/installations.

8. Presiding over memorial and committal services.

9. Leading a Bible study at least once weekly.

10. Moderating monthly session meetings and attending team meetings.

11. Participating as an active member of the Presbytery of the Pacific.

12. Offering administrative oversight of church operations, programs, preschool (First Pres Nursery School) and an electronic/internet presence.

13. Providing administrative oversight of the congregation’s $1 million-plus budget with finance team and Session. Must understand spreadsheets and have basic knowledge of accounting.

14. Providing energetic, consistent and wise counsel to the leaders of the First Pres giving and capital campaigns.

15. Supervising a staff of 10, their work, performance evaluations and recommendations to Session regarding staffing, compensation, disciplinary issues and office policies. Presiding over weekly staff meetings.
16. Providing pastoral care, including communion when requested, for those confined to home, hospital or a residential facility.