

FSA Volunteer Survey Findings – March 2025

Introduction

In late 2024 steps were taken to assess FSA vulnerabilities using a tool developed by regional councils of the United Church.

There are three main sections to the Vulnerable Congregations Assessment Tool: financial vulnerability; membership vulnerability; and participation and leadership vulnerability.

This survey was created to learn more about the current state of volunteer participation and leadership at FSA.

More specifically the following are indicators identified in the tool:

Warning Signs (participation and leadership)

- People wearing too many hats due to lack of volunteers
- Volunteers are being asked to fill more than one position
- Volunteers have held the same position for more than five years because there was no one else available
- The Board of Trustees or M&P Committee do not have the required three members
- Volunteers are feeling exhausted, overwhelmed or resentful
- Very few people are gathering for worship in person or virtually
- OR No opportunity for others to get involved

In a separate undertaking a list of current volunteers at FSA was developed and based on that list a total of 163 individuals were identified.

- One volunteer commitment = 92 or 65%
- Two volunteer commitments = 71 or 44%
- Three volunteer commitments = 54 or 28%
- Four volunteer commitments = 28 or 17%
- Five volunteer commitments = 15 or 9%
- Six volunteer commitments = 7 or 4%

It is noteworthy that 28% had three or more volunteer commitments.

Executive Summary of Survey Findings

This report is based on an on-line survey undertaken in mid January to mid February 2025 and while it may not be fully representative, a significant number of people (52 in total) did respond.

- Most people who answered the survey are currently volunteers at FSA
- Of those who are not currently volunteers most (7 of 9) indicated an interest in getting involved.
- Of those who currently volunteer their time (N=42) most (30) described their involvement as very satisfying and rewarding. It is noted that a few are overwhelmed and/or would like someone else to take over. This is an identified vulnerability in the assessment tool. However, it is a very positive note that so many see their time as satisfying and rewarding.
- Of those who answered the survey and volunteer at the present time 1/3 have a leadership role and 2/3 do not.
- Of those who do have a leadership role almost half expressed feeling overwhelmed and/or would like someone else to take over.
- In a more general question, everyone who completed the survey was given the opportunity to comment on their perception of the overall state of volunteer participation and leadership at FSA. About half of those who answered this question see volunteer participation and leadership at FSA as a matter of concern. This also is a vulnerability for FSA.

In addition to answering the multiple choice questions a significant number of people took the time to provide comments. These are a very meaningful part of the survey responses and are worth reviewing as they contain some very important insights.

Summary remarks

One important message coming out of this survey is that more purposeful attention needs to be paid to those who currently volunteer at FSA and those wishing to do so. Historically volunteering may have been taken for granted. This is no longer the case. Times have changed and so have peoples' lives. FSA needs to recognize that the "old ways" recruiting, supporting volunteers and the nature of their involvement may not work and that a new approach is needed to attract, support and sustain volunteer involvement in FSA. Volunteering can be rewarding and gratifying – it's being part of something bigger than oneself. It's a great way to make friends and get to know people and share experiences. To bring this positive energy forward can be life-affirming and soul-enriching.

Another important message is that some people who currently occupy leadership roles are finding it increasingly difficult to find others to take over – leading to stress, burnout and frustration. New approaches to leadership need to be found that allows leadership to be a shared responsibility, thereby lightening the load and making it more attractive to provide leadership. Leadership as a team responsibility builds relationships and comradery.

Comments and suggestions welcome: Please direct to Steve Elson at stephenelson825@gmail.com

2025 FSA Volunteer Survey Findings

Q1 Most people who answered the survey are currently volunteers at FSA.

Are you currently a volunteer member of a committee, task force, group or activity at FSA?

YES (43)

NO (9)

Q2 Of those who are not currently volunteers most (7 of 10) indicated an interest in getting involved.

If you answered NO to question #1 - would you be interested in getting involved in a time limited task or on-going group at FSA

YES – time limited only (3)

YES – on-going

YES – either time limited or on-going (4)

Not at this time but thanks for asking (3)

Q3 Of those who currently volunteer their time (N=43) most described their involvement as very satisfying and rewarding. It is noted that a few are overwhelmed and/or would like someone else to take over. This is an identified vulnerability in the assessment tool.

If you answered YES to Q1 how would you describe your volunteer committee, activity involvement

Very satisfying, rewarding (31)

Satisfying but very time demanding (8)

I'm feeling exhausted, overwhelmed (1)

I'd like to slow down/stop but no one is prepared to replace me (2)

Comments (N=10)

#5 - I'm on the Planning Committee. I'm overwhelmed with family matters so not as active a contributor as I'd like to be in recent months.

#9 I am in the choir and handbells. That means that I am at the church three times a week: rehearsals for each music group, and I am always there on Sundays for services and at the concerts for each group. I am also librarian for Handbells which actually is time consuming.

#24 - My volunteer activity is very satisfying. The workload fluctuates sometimes greater than at other times, depending on the church season. The fall and advent period is very busy due to increased activities in the Music program and at times it is overwhelming.

#25 - I am becoming more active as a volunteer and as a participant in church services and activities after a long period of superficial engagement. I am enjoying my activity as a member of the Finance Committee. At age 80 I am being careful to undertake "doing" commitments (tasks that can be done) instead of "leading" commitments such as committee chair.

#32 - I have come to value and appreciate my involvement in the Archives Committee. I enjoy the comradery of my fellow participants. I appreciate that I can choose a project and work within my own timeline. I have learned a lot about my church, its history and also about others on the committee.

#35 - just added to the committee

#37 - I enjoy being on the Outreach Committee and I thoroughly enjoy helping out the Treblemakers by preparing Monday evening meals. I am actually considering joining another committee but will carefully think about time commitment. Volunteering is a rewarding way of reaching out, getting to know the Church community, and supporting very necessary and enriching programs. I take Minutes for the Outreach Committee when we meet for Zoom meetings.

#40 - We have a great chair person who takes most of the burden making it easy for us to contribute our ideas at meetings.

#50 - Scheduling the Sunday door greeter duties for the month of April.

#52 - I would like to consider volunteering in a few years when I am wanting to be home more. I have been volunteering since I was a brownie in grade school. I want to have time to go places and do things. I don't want to book anything that will keep me tied down. It sounds selfish but time is passing quickly and I want to do things while we can.

Q4 Of those who volunteer at the present time 1/3 have a leadership role and 2/3 do not.

Do you occupy a leadership role at FSA? For example, chair or co-chair a committee, task force, working group, coordinate volunteers, take meeting minutes, call meetings etc.

Yes (17)

No (35)

Q5 Of those who do have a leadership role almost half expressed feeling overwhelmed and/or would like someone else to take over. This reinforces the responses to Q3 above. Again, this is a vulnerability for FSA.

If you answered YES to the last question, how would you describe your current experience?

Very satisfying, rewarding (5)

Satisfying but very time demanding (3)

I'm feeling exhausted, overwhelmed (1)

I'd like to slow down/stop but no one is prepared to replace me (3)

Comments (N=4)

#7 - Satisfying, frustrating and demanding all at same time. Close to burn out.

#12 - I would like someone to co-chair M & N or a volunteer to do Coffee and Conversation.

#24 - chair, Music Committee. Both satisfying and rewarding but at times overwhelming. See comment above. Other responsibilities add to the workload, apart from the chair position. These include advertising concerts, finding volunteers to assist at concerts, coordinating the live streaming team.

#49 - I have been Chair of Membership & Chair for the last 18 months but am happy to step down & let younger people take over. It is a worthwhile committee to look after the ongoing concerns & needs of the congregation The Directory took a great deal of time & organization but was a great way to meet people that we may have not met I plan on staying on the committee as we need more persons to do the work of attending mtgs, doing outreach & visiting & keeping in touch either by phone or letter

Q6 In a more general question, everyone who completed the survey was given the opportunity to comment on their perception of the overall state of volunteer participation and leadership at FSA.

A majority of those who answered this question see volunteer participation and leadership at FSA as a matter of concern. This is a vulnerability for FSA.

Based on your personal experience, how would you describe the current state of volunteer participation and leadership at FSA?

Things are working well (4)

Room for improvement but generally OK (14)

Not sustainable – we need to change (6)

We have too few people doing too much (16)

Comments (N=19)

#5 - I'm not sure how to answer this. Steve Elson is a fabulous leader and I suspect too much rests on his shoulders. We need new recruits and younger adults but hard to find replacement volunteers to sustain future planning. Steve and the others who carry this group are a gift to FSA.

#9 - The choir is actually growing with new members from outside of the congregation. So, we are doing well in the music program.

#10 - I think this will be true everywhere and is the nature of working with / being a volunteer. Not everyone is able to help (due to life circumstances, their own ability levels, etc.) or wants to as they may be active with other things.

#12 - We are an aging congregation, and this has many concerns as some can no longer volunteer for the many committees and needs at FSA.

#15 - I can see problems coming down the road...many soon will not be able to sustain their level of participation...me included

#24 - All these points are relevant. Things work well mostly because of the dedication of a few people but this is not sustainable as many of our volunteers age out of being able to assist.

#25 - This is not surprising. We need more people taking on the volunteer roles that are important to the church. I hope this questionnaire will help move forward.

#26 - Not able to comment

#30 - I am only guessing at this answer but given the decreasing number of members I assume this is the case.

#32 - I am always concerned about the fact that we have too few people doing too much, but I am encouraged by the apparent growth in membership, or at least by the number of

new people who are attending and participating in church activities. There will always be a struggle between 'doing things as they have always been done' and being open to newer, innovative solutions. We need to be diligent about the balance of appreciating 'the old guard' and still being receptive to new ideas.

#33 - I am a new member to FSA - I enjoy my committee and am currently learning the responsibilities that involve the Membership & Nurture committee. I do feel that our co-chairs take on a lot of responsibility and am truly grateful for their considerable contribution. Unfortunately, I am not able to comment about any other committees i.e. room for improvement etc.

#34 - This is where I would like to help out more, but currently have also "too" many commitments at home myself. I've got to change things up!

#38 - I sing in the choir and play handbells. That means I am at the church 3 times a week for rehearsals and performances for a minimum of 6 hours each week from the beginning of Sept. to the end of June. I am also the librarian for the bells which is a lot more of volunteer time. I am the coordinator of the baking table at the Bazaar and deliver knitting from the Knit Wits to My Sister's Place and Merrymount every year.

#42 - Leaders seem to be in the position for long periods and others (particularly younger members) seem not interested in stepping up to the leadership roles.

#46- I can't tell people's burnout or not but I am very impressed with the love and commitment I can see goes into volunteering at FSA!

#48 - My work at SSA includes leadership of the quilting group. We meet every second Wednesday and make donation quilts for project lioness and Ronald McDonald House. Our group produces oodles of quilts for needy families in our community. We have also displayed some quilts that are gorgeous for auctions at the white squirrel golf tournament or in the church itself at certain times of the year. The group that works at FSA in this area is a hard-working dedicated and energetic group.

#50 - I personally have no complaints however with all my singing engagements throughout the community, coaching, and travel for competitions, I am not abused right now to commit more time. I am sure however that there is room for improvement.

#52 - Not sustainable because we have too few people doing too much.

#53 - I'm new to FSA so not sure how to respond. It appears that many of the people I see in leadership and participatory roles are quite active and I've wondered if there are enough volunteers.

Q7 Thanks for taking the time to answer this survey. Your views are important to the life and work of FSA. Do you have any suggestions or anything else you would like to say about this topic?

No (22)

Comments (N=16)

#3 - It is very important not to over work the volunteers you have or they will leave.

#4 - Grateful for volunteers who provide online services and broadcast of concerts, funerals etc. 👍🙏 Deanne and Dave Pederson

#5 - Good luck... hope the survey is helpful.

#7 - People who are not volunteering need to step up. Too many silos and individuals operating independently of others.

#12 - I think we have a wonderful congregation. There are so many volunteers. Some work quietly but so important. Others do so much and I'm so thankful to work with these amazing people like Jim Silcox, Steve Elson and many more. We are so fortunate to have Dr. Rev. Joshua Lawrence and Rev. Annie Jannaway and are thankful for their continuing support who guide us spiritually.

#15 - Try to recruit more of our members in the 50 - 70-year-old age category to serve on ongoing committees and/or time limited tasks. We are very fortunate to have many actively and very competently serving members over age 70 but succession planning is needed.

#18 - The lack of volunteers is a widespread problem. Society has changed. There are very few stay at home Moms. The older retired people in a post COVID world want to do the travel they missed during COVID and they often have responsibility for grandchildren.

#20 - I would like to be more involved with the church and volunteer for more, but I feel that the activities/events do not fit or have a place in my life at the moment. Also, I feel that there is a certain group of church members who run everything and keep going back to the same group, which I am sure is tiring for the same group to be doing the work. I don't see that I have value at the church, at this point. I was part of the Bazaar committee for years, and I didn't even receive a phone call to help in any capacity this year.

#21 - I would like to see a list published of all the volunteer opportunities with descriptions and approximate time commitment and contact person. Perhaps this exists, but make it more conspicuous.

#24 - As we have new members join FSA, having them take on some of the less arduous tasks would be a big help. When I look back over 40 years ago, and we were all that much younger, we were assisting where we could. Many people are working fulltime, as we were, and it is challenging to be a volunteer as well. On the positive side, excellent programs are being offered to all age groups and it is wonderful to see both the strong leadership and response to the children's programs.

#25 - Thanks for this initiative

#29 - Unfortunately, I don't have solutions for the problem. We need the participation of younger people but the young folk are very busy. I think short-term commitments are perhaps the way to go.

#31 - Volunteer fatigue and shortage of volunteers are FSA's greatest vulnerability. Part of the solution is changing our governance and volunteer operational structures to require fewer volunteers and to reduce the loading on the volunteer leadership cohort. Another part is broadening the volunteer base and ongoing efforts to instill the importance of volunteering throughout our varied demographic.

#37 - Thank you for opportunities to participate in the Church community. When you get involved, it feels like a second home.

#46 - Perhaps there is room for a survey that would list the types of committees/volunteer opportunities? This survey seems geared towards people with knowledge of current practices. I wonder if a more informative survey might help new people get involved?

#53 - Nothing to say on that topic, but want to say that I'm THRILLED to be at FSA!