



THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF OKEMOS

A Reflection and Summary by the Congregation of The Presbyterian Church of Okemos:

What do we Cherish? What are our Concerns and Priorities?

January 2017

INTRODUCTION:

In 2014, guided by our Mission Statement, a small group of members of the Presbyterian Church of Okemos was assembled to study, review, and make strategic recommendations to the Session. The charge from the Session to this newly-formed Strategic Planning Committee was to assess the current state of church life and to begin envisioning areas where we should focus our attention and resources to benefit our congregation.

The expectation was to provide a vision, backed up by defined actions, that could be implemented and measured by the Session over the next five to ten years. In the spring of 2016, the Strategic Planning Committee submitted their report to the Session and congregation.

Based on this report, the Stewardship Committee, a newly formed standing committee of the Session, produced seven specific, measurable objectives to prioritize the efforts of the church. Those objectives were as follows:

- 1) Increase the number of persons who regularly attend worship
- 2) Increase participation and involvement in congregational programs and activities
- 3) Increase both the percent of annual budget dedicated to mission and the number of members who participate in mission activities
- 4) Improve connection/communication between families and individuals of the congregation
- 5) Improve our efforts to welcome visitors and to encourage those visitors to join in the work of our congregation to worship, study, and serve our Lord, Jesus Christ
- 6) Develop lay leadership among church members
- 7) Increase the financial support of the congregation by creating a culture of generosity and responsible stewardship

Following the development of these congregational goals, the Stewardship Committee felt strongly that a broader conversation was needed with the congregation at-large to determine if these objectives were the most important ones and to seek input on how best to achieve them.

Towards that end, the Stewardship Committee began the development of an Every Member Visitation Campaign to identify and record comments regarding church life; to discern where church members felt their spiritual needs were being met; and to learn where the church might consider improving our mission and ministry.

The Stewardship Committee consulted people across the denomination about creating a conversation-based guide for conducting Every Member Visits. In September of 2016, the Session approved the document and gave permission to the committee to ask elders and deacons and other volunteers to receive appropriate training and conduct these visits. The Stewardship Committee prepared the questions, conducted training events, and organized volunteers to visit church members, two by two. These volunteers conducted 120 interviews in October, November, and December of 2016.

A general summary of the comments and suggestions heard by those volunteers follows:

What We Value

- Traditional Sunday Church services, the quality of the sermons, our music programs, and our focus on the biblical and theological precepts underlying the Presbyterian faith.
- Friendliness, hospitality, and interpersonal relationships. Many people expressed a strong sense of connection to the church community and recognized that this church is a place where they have developed abiding friendships.
- We feel welcomed and we desire to welcome others into this fellowship. Church members care for each other and value the care they have received. In spite of differences, we get along well with one another.
- The music programs, including the Chancel Choir, Bell Choirs and Children's Choir. Music is an important part of our worship and the life of this community.
- The Mission and Outreach Committee is an important vehicle for doing God's work in the community. We value our outreach to refugees, immigrants, and are appreciative of the work done with the Global Institute of Learning.

Areas of Concern

- There is need for our congregation to focus more time and resources on personal faith development. Even though this is difficult to measure, this sort of development should be among our objectives as a congregation.
- The congregation is aging. We need to attract more young families and youth into the life of the congregation. We should be seeking ways to expand the diversity within our church.
- We need to improve how we attract and follow-up with visitors, and be more intentional about inviting visitors to join the church.
- We need to maintain contact with church members who attend church less frequently, stop coming, or leave the church altogether.
- There is much work for the church to do, and not enough volunteers to do that work.
- There were complaints that the church does many time and talent surveys, but is inconsistent in following through with those who volunteer. We need to rely less on "sign-up lists" and do more face-to-face invitations to service.
- There were concerns raised about the length of some worship services and sermons. Some members wondered if children were paying attention to Children's Sermons. Some members asked

for a little more diversity in worship services. Some members wanted more “worship themes” such as Jazz Sunday. Some members expressed a desire to see more lay leadership in the worship service.

- We need to improve congregational communication, especially through our Website and Internet. Our website needs more regular attention. A number of church members expressed appreciation that The Grapevine is again being mailed to members at home.
- It is important to develop some programming that would make it possible for working people to attend. Offering child care as often as possible for all church events and programs is imperative. There were also many who expressed their appreciation for all the child care that we are currently able to offer as a congregation.

Feedback on the Seven Proposed Objectives:

Most persons interviewed felt that the seven objectives proposed in 2016 are relevant and appropriate for our church to focus on for the next term. While there were many suggestions related to the objectives, the following are the most often mentioned ones regarding how we can best accomplish each objective.

Increasing the Numbers of Persons Who Attend Worship:

- Pay attention to the proclamation of the Word to adults and children
- Offer alternatives to children (older than age 6) during worship
- Ask members to make an intentional effort to invite friends and neighbors to worship
- Offer more diverse worship experiences like Jazz Sunday
- Include more people/families in leadership of worship

Increasing/Improving Involvement in other Programs/Events:

- More offerings on faith development
- Depend less on sign ups and more on personal invitations
- Offer child care
- Offer events during non-working hours
- Offer transportation
- Publicize widely

Increasing Participation/Funding for Mission:

- Offer more direct service opportunities
- Focus more on local mission
- Offer fundraising events
- Make it possible to donate online or via credit cards

Improving Communication:

- Keep mail and online versions of Grapevine and use it more effectively
- Commit resources to website to make it attractive, current and informative
- Use social media
- Put more information in the bulletin
- Identify a Communications Coordinator
- Use LINK groups to communicate regularly

Attracting More Visitors/New Members:

- Improve protocols for following up with visitors
- Publicize/advertise
- Train congregation in “Radical Welcoming”
- Offer our church for use by community groups/organizations
- Re-establish MOPS and promote to community

Developing/Strengthening Lay Leadership:

- Develop job descriptions for volunteers that specify length of term and time requirements
- Provide leadership training for current and future leaders
- Recruit new leaders. Match individual gifts with the needs of the church

Increasing Financial Support and Creating a Culture of Stewardship:

- Provide financial information more often; use a variety of media to communicate; explain our budget more clearly
- Offer automated giving
- Develop better guidance on average stewardship giving and budget expectations
- Continue to emphasize the “Impact Budget”
- Preach more stewardship sermons

CALL TO ACTION:

It is hoped that this summary will be used by Session and its committees in setting goals for the coming years.

We will establish a method to track each measurable goal for the next five years. We intend to communicate to the congregation about our performance on a monthly and annual basis.

We intend Session to be held accountable for meeting these objectives. It is impossible to implement every suggestion. But as a Stewardship Committee, we will urge Session to dedicate the necessary time and resources to use these suggestions as tools for discernment, and then to work toward meeting the larger objectives identified in this document.

The Stewardship Committee (2015-2016): Bill Given, chair; Chris Doemel, Mike Morgan, Doug Paterson, Barbara Hoevel, Jane Bobay, and Frank Webster.

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