



MISSION STUDY
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AT WOODBURY
adopted by the Session May 17, 2008

The Mission Study for The Presbyterian Church at Woodbury is the result of materials provided by Percept's ReVision process. The congregation participated in a survey which was then compared to local demographic information to tell us who we are and how that does or does not match with our community. Eight small groups spent eight weeks studying the information and looking ahead to how The Presbyterian Church at Woodbury might close the gap between life as it now is and life as it could be. In addition to the basic report, the process gave us a wealth of mission and program initiatives as well as an understanding of our strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. All are included in this report.

The Session is grateful to Chick Dougherty who chaired the study and to his committee: Janice Brown, Melanie Chase, Dot Harris, Lee Hourani, Wally Minnich.

WHO ARE WE

For 287 years The Presbyterian Church at Woodbury has shared in the life of this community, bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ through worship, educational programs, and service. The cross at the front of our sanctuary speaks of our commitment to our Lord and our desire to live faithful lives.

Our life together centers in Sunday worship which is traditional in its style and music, in harmony with the church's architecture. We rely upon Christ's presence in the sacraments and we value Biblical preaching, applying the Word to our daily lives. Sunday morning also brings the opportunity for personal growth through a strong education program for children, teens, and adults— a growth that continues in our small group ministries. Gathering in Theo's Café for coffee after church strengthens our ties with one another.

Located just two blocks from the County Court House, we draw members from many sections of northern Gloucester County. Some have joined this church after their search for a caring Christian community, others have grown up in this church and their families are still here. In a community with high racial and lifestyle diversity, we are somewhat more mature, more affluent, and better educated, than the general population. In the midst of a diverse community, we are a white congregation. One way we try to bridge that gap is by sharing our buildings. We host various recovery programs (i.e., AA, NA, AlAnon, etc.) and the local chess club. We own the house next door to the church and lease it to Mother / Child Residential Services, a program for pregnant single women who might otherwise be homeless. As one of the founding members of the Greater Woodbury Cooperative Ministries, we share in their various ministries, including the Food Bank and Handy Helpers, a monthly home service project. And we provide support to a ministry at the county jail by supplying Bibles and other materials. Within the congregation the Deacons help to care for those whose health might otherwise leave them feeling isolated. Each year brings missions trips to such places as Maine, Honduras, Haiti, Louisiana, and Cuba.

In 2002 the congregation decided to place special emphasis on ministry to youth by hiring a youth worker to reverse the trend of older youth disappearing from the life of the congregation. That ministry is in a building process with our present Director of Youth Ministry. We are now much more able to reach out to our own teens and those in the community.

Perhaps our greatest asset is our lay leadership. We are blessed to have many, many capable, creative, and committed men and women of all ages who readily volunteer for leadership roles. Because we have a larger than average boomer population, we know that the pool of volunteers will continue to grow in the years ahead. Our desire is not just to use their talents, but to provide them with opportunities to grow in discipleship and faith.

Our members have expressed a desire to deepen their personal faith, asking for more opportunities to grow through prayer, worship, study, and outreach. We are willing to change our life patterns when such change will deepen our faith and strengthen our witness. In our work we try to model Christ's self-giving nature, so that others might see his love in and through us and be drawn to Him.

THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE BEFORE US

Growth in Sharing the Good News

While the greater northern Gloucester County community grows, membership in The Presbyterian Church at Woodbury slides. We still have a viable base from which to work and build, but it is dominated by those over 50. Those aged 27-47 form 30% of the community but only 6% of the congregation. Reaching out to this segment of the community will require changes in the way we communicate our message and, perhaps, in the programs we offer and the style of our worship.

Growth in Commitment

We want to “raise the bar” for church membership, challenging members to a greater depth of commitment. We desire all members to see themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ, following where He leads, being His hands and feet and voice in the church and the world. The survey showed that our members have a greater spiritual hunger than the broader community. We see this as a commendable difference, one to build on, recognizing that all people need to know the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Growth in Diversity

While Woodbury itself has a high diversity of ages, races, and social economic groups, that of our church is low. We recognize that broadening our diversity would add strength to the mission of the church. We also recognize that our church draws members from an area much greater than Woodbury, and that certain aspects of diversity present in Woodbury (race and economics) are different from the larger area.

Growth in Social Consciousness

Our mission trips have opened our eyes to the needs in far off places, and our work with Greater Woodbury Cooperative Ministries, Mother/Child Residential Services, and Handy Helpers have helped us see the needs in our immediate community. However, we are not always aware of how we can address the needs in the broader area of northern Gloucester and Camden counties.

Growth in Service to the Families of the Community

Though we are situated in the middle of downtown Woodbury, three blocks from the high school and surrounded by working class residential neighborhoods, we tend to be isolated from the children and their families in our immediate community. With an education wing of the church that sits empty throughout the weekday, perhaps we have both the opportunity and the means to reach out to them.

Growth in Faith and Spiritual Maturity

We recognize that we are a community centered on our faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We believe that all people need Jesus in their lives and we encourage others to seek and know Him. We are challenged to reflect the irresistible love, grace, peace, comfort, mercy and joy of Christ in such a way that it will attract others to Him. We believe that we can know and understand this life in Christ through prayer and Bible study, through fellowship in small groups, through corporate worship, and through service to the church and beyond the church.

MISSION AND PROGRAM INITIATIVES

To fulfill our mission and strive toward our vision for the Presbyterian Church at Woodbury, the following actions are proposed. The Session is beginning to evaluate these plans and work toward making them a reality. Those items with an “*” are initiatives that we believe can be advanced the first year.

Growth in Sharing the Good News

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1. Learn how to tell the good news of Jesus Christ
 - a. Public Relations
 - i. Develop materials
 - ii. Recruit PR people
 - iii. Welcome wagon, Realtors lists, door hangers, mailings
 - iv. Creative advertising: explore use of materials developed by PC(USA)
 - b. “Evangelism Year”
 - i. Sermons on evangelism
 - ii. Evangelism training: telling your story
 - iii. “Invite a friend to church” Sunday
 - iv. “Business cards” with the name of the church for folk to give out
 - v. Reactivate the Ambassadors to call on perspective members
 - c. Reach out to groups using the church - i.e. AA
 - i. how can we welcome them: fliers, liaison, occasional “treats” of cakes or cookies
2. Explore ways to attract younger members
 - a. Worship style
 - i. Experiment with big screen and projector
 - ii. Explore the use of contemporary and ethnic music
 - iii. Print words to creeds, etc. so there is no need to hunt through the book
 - iv. Revisit age for children to be in worship
 - b. Offer family recreational programs to the community; i.e. hayrides, movies, Halloween party– FUN
 - c. Community event at Riverwind with band and games
 - d. Halloween event for teens
3. Church members:
 - a. Better integration of new members into the life of the church
 - i. “Surrogate family” to help become part of the church
 - ii. Care of those who drift away

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1. Identify and communicate the expectations
 - a. Teach expectations of membership to Inquirers’ Classes
 - b. Include stewardship as an expression of commitment
2. Develop gifts of the congregation
 - a. Spiritual gifts inventory retreat*
 - b. Small group study topic
3. Greater use of members in worship leadership
4. Shepherd to person or family going through crisis

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1. Broaden the diversity of ages active in the church
 - a. Explore ways to appeal to younger individuals and families
2. Racial diversity
 - a. How do we attract Hispanics? Blacks? Asians?
 - b. Offer space to an Hispanic congregation
 - c. Offer adult education classes to equip the congregation to understand both the challenges and rewards of diversity.
3. In cooperation with GWCM, add a singles ministry
4. Begin a dialogue on full inclusion of gays and lesbians

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1. Address issues of
 - a. homelessness
 - b. affordable housing
 - c. Hunger: Become more fully aware of the work of the food bank and the people served
 - d. Peacemaking

- i. conflict resolution
 - ii. Study the causes of conflict
 - e. Mental health
 - f. Ecology
2. Work with Presbytery on issues of poverty and hunger

Growth in Service to the Families of the Community

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1. Establish a task force to explore the possibilities for day care, preschool, after school programing, tutoring, summer day camp*
 - a. Include Greater Woodbury Cooperative Ministries in the conversation
 - b. Explore the possibilities of a program such as Logos or Awana (fun, food, and study)
 - c. Consider grants, licensing, staffing, volunteers, space requirements
2. Offer family enrichment classes to the community
 - a. Parenting workshops
 - b. Financial planning
 - c. Parish nurse program
 - d. Counseling for families, teens
 - e. Programs for retired adults
3. Develop mentoring program to work with a particular family on problems

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1. Enrich the prayer life of the congregation
 - a. 30 days of prayer or similar program
 - b. 24 hour prayer vigils
 - c. Prayer retreats
2. Expand involvement in small groups
 - a. Add 5 new small groups*
 - b. Provide training and materials for small groups*
 - c. Foster concept for small groups to grow and divide to multiply
3. Continue to enrich the current adult education program
 - a. Offer elementary Bible study for those who feel out of their depth in the current programs

- b. Theological discussions
- 4. Reach out to those in crisis through an enhanced pastoral care program, i.e. Stephen's Ministry

Odds and Ends

- 1. Facilities may need to be upgraded in order to enhance our outreach
 - a. New kitchen
 - b. Upgraded youth room
 - c. Concerns about the public address system - some can't hear
 - d. Elevator!
 - e. Parking: how to find it
- 2. Communications
 - a. Print the words to the anthems for those who are hard of hearing
 - b. Expand the use of the church library, add media center
 - c. Improve communication within the congregation
 - d. Greater use of technology
 - e. Find ways to get information back from members
 - f. Cooperative exchange of opportunities with all churches in the Greater Woodbury Community Ministries, i.e. special speakers, music opportunities, small group studies, Crop Walk, special services (Thanksgiving, Lent)