



GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Mission Study Team

Report to the Session

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Introduction

MISSION STUDY LEADERSHIP TEAM REPORT

The Task

In early 2008, Art Gatewood, the founding pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church, retired. When a founding pastor retires, it is in the best interests of the congregation to move slowly into a mission study process, giving time for grief, transitions, and new stability.

When the Interim Pastor Nominating Committee was established in 2008, a decision was made that Grace Presbyterian Church would need strong leadership from our interim pastor. After reviewing the candidates available for the interim position, it was evident that there were candidates who had the gifts and training for a church like ours, putting a focus on the things that make churches successful. The Session decided, at the recommendation of the Interim Pastor Nominating Committee, in consultation with Providence Presbytery to create, rather than an Interim position, a Temporary Supply Pastor position, which would enable the congregation to consider that person for an installed position.

Regardless of the institution in these dynamic and uncertain times, the issue of leadership ranks first both in the needs and success of the organization. Historically, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. has carefully guided and guarded matters related to pastoral selection and succession. All across the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. presbyteries and congregations have become more invested in leadership that "works" rather than procedures and pathways to that position. Grace has a history of creative answers and practices in staffing patterns, and chose a pathway between installed pastors that would retain all appropriate options.

After asking the Rev. Dr. Joanne C. Sizoo to serve our church, the Session decided to postpone any activity towards a mission study for six months, which is common practice after the retirement of a long term pastor, and particularly a founding pastor. In January of 2009, they established the Mission Study Leadership Team.

The Mission Study Leadership Team was charged with accomplishing the following items:

- To enable the congregation and its leadership to discover who it is now and wishes to become in the future.
- To involve all who are vitally interested in the future of Grace to participate in conversations about the hopes and desires for the future.
- To write a Mission Study which would provide the basis for the Church Information Form for the Pastor Nominating Committee.
- To provide potential pastoral candidates with a thorough and in-depth understanding of the congregation and our needs.

In the pages that follow, the Mission Study Team (MST) shares information from their studies that will lead the reader through the process, the discoveries, the suggestions, and ultimately, to a sense of the future for Grace. The Session, which has approved this study, will take this information, act upon it, and ultimately determine the way to move this vision to action.

Dave Harkins, Roy Hunt, Peter Kalshoven, Lipi Pratt, Chris Reynolds, Bill Singleton and Joanne Sizoo (staff to the Mission Study Team)

The Process of the Study

In order to complete the study, the MST (Mission Study Team) needed to get data from many different sources. The Team worked diligently to do the following:

- Identify the demographics of the congregation to include where we live, our ages, and the makeup of our households.
- Identify our surrounding community to include current demographics, current and projected population patterns, and what individuals are looking for in a church.
- Review the church's history and trends.
- Review comparative data on other Presbyterian churches in the area.
- Investigate the opinions of some community leaders about the needs of our community and perspectives of our congregation
- Investigate how the congregation feels about the church today.
- Investigate what the church hopes to accomplish in the future.

To obtain this information, there was a need to put together opportunities for the congregation to provide input to the process. Two congregational gatherings were held to obtain individual and group information around the history of the church and what we want for the future.

The Mission Study Team wanted to know how members felt about our church today. In order to obtain as much data as possible about many different subject matters, a Church Planning Inventory was used. The survey was offered by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research from Hartford Seminary. There are a number of questions that are related to people's satisfaction with the congregation as it is. This section of the Mission Study addresses these questions. The 25-page survey was offered to all members of the congregation, and a Sunday school hour was set aside for the completion of the survey. There were 138 completed surveys turned in and summarized by the Hartford Institute. This number reflects 33% of our membership and 63% of our average attendance.

After all of the results were gathered, the Mission Study Team reviewed the findings and discussed what this meant for the future of this church.

The specific process followed for some areas will be reviewed later in this document.

History of the Church

GRACE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Brief Church History (Appendix C)

In 1992, Providence Presbytery leaders believed that the continued growth in this area called for a faithful response. In 1993 and 1994: mission grant funding was secured from denominational sources; land in the mission area was purchased for the new church; and the search for an Organizing Pastor was undertaken.

Organizing Pastor Arthur S. Gatewood began service December 1994, and the newly named **Grace Presbyterian Church** held our first worship celebration Sunday, April 30, 1995 in the Fort Mill National Guard Armory. Of the 190 persons present, 90 were potential mission participants

Sunday, November 12, 1995, saw the Service of Organization and Installation of the Pastor. A commission of Providence Presbytery enrolled an initial membership of 82 adults (and youth); 16 children, 14 of whom were already baptized; from 41 households.

The congregation elected a session (local governing body) of 16 men and women elders, who were ordained and installed January 1996, and met monthly to provide overall leadership. An interesting piece of Grace's history thus far has been to cultivate new leaders; only one person has served two terms on Session. Elders move off the Session, but stay involved in the congregation in various activities.

By May 1, 1996, membership stood at 106 adult/youth members; plus 21 children; from 52 households, and a building campaign was conducted. Membership as of January 1, 2010, is 420 active adult/youth members, 91 inactive members, plus 65 baptized children.

The first building was dedicated on March 14, 1999, and an expansion to the building was added in 2005.

A part-time administrative assistant was hired in January 1996, and a part-time music director was added in 2000. Also in 2000, the first part-time program director and another part-time administrative assistant was added to the staff. 2001 brought us our first part-time youth director, and a change to a full-time administrator. The nursery director was added in 2002, and a part-time custodian in 2005.

Art Gatewood announced in 2007 his plans to retire in April, 2008. His retirement was an occasion of affection and gratitude for the faithful leadership he provided in the birthing of Grace and bringing us to this place of transition as a healthy, vibrant congregation.

Who are we?

Process:

Information was gathered in the first quarter of 2009 from the Inventory (Appendix D), congregational statistics and congregational gatherings to get information about the makeup of this congregation.

Findings:

We are an Anglo congregation, at 96% of respondents. 22% of respondents were age 65 or older, and 23% were under age 44. 45% are couples without children at home, and 47% are couples with children at home. 82% of respondents are married. 14% have some college, while another 41% have a college degree, and 33% of us have graduate degrees.

55% work full time, 26% are retired. 59% are employed as professional persons or managers, 16% are salespeople, and 9% report clerical work. 15% of us are self-employed. 70% of our married respondents report that their spouse is also employed, at least part-time (57% full time and 13% part time employed spouses).

84% of our members report household income over \$50,000 per year. 13% of us give less than \$1,000 per year to Grace, 61% gave between \$1,000 and \$5,000, and 27% of us gave over \$5,000 to Grace last year. When comparing household income to household giving, it is clear that the Biblical notion of the tithe (giving 10% of income) is not the norm at Grace.

Most of us (71%) spend time in private devotional activity at least a few times a week. 90% of us use the web and email regularly, and only 1% of us seldom or never use the internet (6% seldom or never do email). 80% of us seldom or never look at religious Internet sites. 33% of us never volunteer time in social service, and 19% of us volunteer time at least a few times a week.

31% have been members for over 10 years. 27% have joined in the past 4 years (these figures obviously do not include the people who have joined Grace since the study began in January 2009. Most of us did not join Grace quickly upon moving to the area, in that the figures of how long people have lived here are different from when folks came to Grace (i.e., they have lived in the area longer than they have been members.) This dispels the notion that the only folks looking for a church are new residents. Few (4%) are planning to move away in the next few years.

37% of us grew up as Presbyterians, while 18% were raised Baptist, and 34% were raised in other mainline Protestant denominations. 7% of us are former Roman Catholics. For the most part, we don't assume a Presbyterian heritage and understanding by members of the congregation. Classes were held last year about "being Presbyterian" and elder training is intentionally targeted with little or no expectations about people's Presbyterian history. There is occasional tension resulting from our conforming to Presbyterian polity and practices.

93% of us live within 15 minutes of the church, which corresponds to the map of members' homes.

98% of respondents attend church at least twice a month. 77% of us have invited at least one person to visit or come to church within the past year, and 59% of us have invited two or more people to church. Almost one in five of us have invited four or more people to church. 40% of us have four or more of our closest friends in the church, while 29% of us have no close friends in this church. These numbers correlate to the number of years people have lived in the area, but also point to the need for new members to have opportunities to form solid relationships in the church.

While 19% indicate that they do not belong to any committee or group in the church, 60% belong to two or more. 38% of respondents indicated that their involvement in the congregation has increased over the last few years, and 53% indicated that their involvement in the church has stayed the same over the past five years. Of those whose involvement has increased, most indicated that it was because they had accepted an office or more responsibility, and half because their faith was now stronger.

Theologically, we are a moderate congregation. 64% of us believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and its basic moral and religious teachings are clear and true, even if it reflects some human error. 26% of us believe that the Bible is the record of many different people's response to God and because of this, people and churches today must interpret for themselves the Bible's basic moral and religious teachings. 6% of us believe that the Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally. 4% of us do not believe the Bible is really God's Word. However, it is a valuable book because it was written by wise and good people and can teach us many moral precepts. None of us agreed with the statement that "the Bible is an ancient book of history, legends and cultural stories recorded by man. It has little value today except as classic literature."

79% of us agree or strongly agree that there is no other way to salvation but your belief in Jesus Christ. 11% of us disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. 90% of us believe that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was an actual event and 10% of us are unsure.

Regarding evolution, Grace members form an almost perfect balance, where 41% of us agree or strongly agree that human beings have developed over millions of years from less advanced forms of life, 45% of us disagree or strongly disagree with this statement and 14% are neutral or unsure.

35% of us believe that all religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth, 41% of us disagree with that statement, and 25% are neutral or unsure. 81% of us believe that the Bible has answers for all the basic questions of life. 60% of us believe that social justice is at the heart of the gospel, 29% of us are unsure of this and 12% of us disagree with that statement. There is a poor correlation between the 60% figure, and priorities for pastoral work, preaching, and classes taught related to social justice ministries.

50% of us agree that it is often difficult to live out our faith in daily work, leisure and community life; while 47% of us disagree with that statement.

Where Do Our Members Live?

The Mission Study Team determined that it was important to know where our members live within the community.

Process: In order to identify where our members live, our congregation members were invited to place a pin on the map, indicating their homes, and a mapping software was utilized in determining our target area (Appendix H).

Findings: A visual analysis identified that virtually all our members live within 10 miles of the church. A few live in the direction of Rock Hill, a few live in Fort Mill proper and beyond. The vast majority of the respondents live within 4 miles of the church.

Anecdotal evidence provided by new members this year indicates that among families with adolescents who are choosing a new Presbyterian church home, families with students at Nation Ford High School seem to be drifting towards Unity Presbyterian Church, and students at Fort Mill High School seem to be drifting towards Grace.

What is our Neighborhood Like?

Process:

The MST was able to identify detailed demographic information for our neighborhood (a 3 mile radius around the church) using information obtained from Providence Presbytery, which subscribes to a service called Percept (Appendix F). Percept gets its data from four different sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, Claritas, the WEFA Group, and Percept's own proprietary Ethos Survey System.

We also obtained information about our neighborhood (in a 6 mile radius from the church) from information on the PC(USA) website (Appendix G).

Findings:

There are 20,466 people living in a 3 mile radius from the church. Our neighborhood is primarily white (81%), with African Americans making up the largest percentage (10%) of people of color in the community, and the Hispanic population the fastest growing community of color.

62% of the households in our neighborhood can be described as "affluent", whereas only 15% of the United States can be described that way.

The generational makeup of our neighborhood is reflective of the national averages, with 12% of the people ages 0 to 7, 26% of the people ages 8 to 27, 31% ages 28 to 48, 24% ages 49 to 66, 7% ages 67 to 84, and 1% over age 85. Our community has a higher ratio of married people in it, with 72%, as opposed to 57% as the US average. 16% of our community is single (never married,) and 12% are divorced or widowed.

The overall education level in our neighborhood is very high. 92% of the population age 25 or over in our neighborhood have graduated from high school, as opposed to the national average of 80%; and college graduates account for 38% of those over 25 in the area versus 24.4% in the United States.

The average household annual income in our community is \$83,620 and 32% of those households contribute more than \$500 per year to churches. While the national average household income of \$67,918 is significantly lower, the national percentage of households contributing more than \$500 per year to churches is 31%. So while we may live in the "Bible Belt," our neighborhood contributions to churches don't reflect a very serious commitment to neighborhood churches.

The likely faith receptivity in our community is expected to be somewhat high when compared to national averages. Our community reflects a fairly balanced preference between traditional and contemporary worship, music, and church architecture.

Our neighborhood shows a strong preference (82%) for "historic Christian" groups, and about 7.3% of the households are likely to express a Presbyterian/Reformed preference. This is very much above the national average of 4.6%.

How do We Compare to our Neighbors?

The congregation of Grace is generally reflective of the neighborhood (Appendix F). We are a bit older than the distribution of ages in the neighborhood, but as a young congregation, our age distribution is younger than many congregations.

Our ethnicity and household income seemed to be right in line with those of the neighborhood. Not surprisingly, a higher percentage of Grace members than neighborhood residents give more than \$500 per year to the church, since neighborhood averages include people with no church affiliation.

We are typical of our neighborhood in percentages of high school graduates, and have a higher percentage of college graduates than is typical of the community, even though we live in a well educated community. Our congregation's proportion of college graduates is more than twice the national average.

Our congregation's religious background of growing up in "historic Christian" groups reflects what is typical for our community.

How is our Neighborhood Changing?

Process:

Information on how our neighborhood is changing was obtained from the Percept demographic information (Appendix F).

Findings:

In the decade from 1990 to 2000, the population in our neighborhood nearly doubled. In the nine years from 2000 to 2009, there was a 62% increase in the population of our neighborhood. In the next five years, it's expected that our neighborhood population will increase yet another 23%. These figures vastly exceed the national averages.

Locally, the Hispanic/Latino population is growing at the fastest rate. While still the smallest group by proportion of the population (4.9%), there is expected to be a 59% increase in the population of Hispanic/Latino people by 2014. Whereas in many older congregations, a rapidly growing community can be destabilizing for long time members, this pattern is the only one Grace has ever known. As a New Church Development and young congregation, Grace has benefitted greatly from the growth of the community.

How Does Grace Compare to Neighboring Churches?

Process

The MST determined that a comparison between other Presbyterian churches in the area would be of some interest, specifically in the areas of membership and financial giving. The churches included in this comparison are Community, Doby's Bridge, Riverview, Unity and Pleasant Hill. To obtain this information, the MST utilized the data on the PCUSA website that contains church-reported statistics. (Appendices I, J & K) These statistics are for year ending 2008 and will be as accurate as the church reported. They do not reflect the increased membership or attendance experienced in 2009.

Findings

Church	Membership	Attendance	% of Membership at Worship	Giving per Attendee
Grace	399	234	59%	\$1,572
Community	23	18	78%	\$1,445
Riverview	137	75	55%	\$1,759
Doby's Bridge	190	100	53%	\$1,496
Pleasant Hill	384	239	62%	\$1,465
Unity	1,055	455	43%	\$1,884

Grace is the second largest of the congregations in terms of membership, third in attendance at worship and percentage of members at worship, and in contributions per worship attendee. It is likely that when 2009 statistics are used, Grace will be second in attendance at worship and percentage of members at worship.

Conclusions

In 2008 and 2009 the Session of Grace has been diligent in removing from membership anyone who is not participating in the work and worship of the congregation. Unlike "historic" congregations, Grace does not have inflated membership numbers of generational families. This often happens due to generational families being unwilling to have relatives placed on inactive lists.

Grace does not, however, have an efficient or effective system for tracking or contacting members who are becoming less active.

How Do We Feel About Our Church Today?

Process

We utilized the information from the church survey (Appendices D & E). We also gathered information in groups at the congregational gatherings. (Appendices A & B)

Findings:

In the congregational gatherings, attendees reported that the things that make us different from other congregations are our friendly members and welcoming atmosphere, our casual atmosphere and that we are mission minded.

In the congregational gatherings, most of the members of this congregation reported that they joined Grace because of our friendliness and the informal worship atmosphere. Many people also joined Grace because they had family members or friends who were members here. The location of the church and the youth group were also big draws for people to come to church at Grace.

Of respondents to the survey, people reported that the minister (58%), the worship style (54%) and the denominational ties (37%) originally attracted them to the congregation. As for why they remain part of the congregation, the denominational ties (69%), the worship style (62%), the minister and people's friends (56% for each) and the music program (34%) were the main reasons. (The totals in this segment will not equal 100% since it was possible for people to pick more than one.)

Most meaningful to us are our mission endeavors, our music and youth programming, and the work of our worship and arts team.

Some of the things that we feel good about are our mission trips and local mission work, the construction of and community use of our facilities, and our youth ministries.

We like gathering for worship, and enjoy the candlelight and worship-in-the-round on Christmas Eve. Our tradition of distributing the elements for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper by intinction in gathered circles is important to us. The youth group at Grace is also really important to us.

There was not a lot of agreement about things that we want to change, except that there was a desire to change the format of the Christmas Eve service, and a desire to install a pastor.

Grace is clearly not a congregation that has experienced major congregational conflict, or other trauma. We cited the following as our biggest difficulties; the retirement of the founding pastor, and other staff changes and problems. Three groups were concerned that the congregation had not been growing appropriately, and for two groups, the building addition was one of the biggest difficulties the congregation has endured.

Tasks of the Church:

Respondents are generally satisfied with the congregation's current performance in many areas.

They are overwhelmingly (91%) satisfied in the areas of: providing worship that provides a meaningful experience and that expresses the Gospel in contemporary language (95%), providing opportunities for fellowship (94%), and supporting the global mission of the church (94%). More than 80% of us are satisfied with our work in providing Christian education opportunities for adults, helping members deepen their personal and spiritual relationship with God, encouraging members to act on the relationship of the Christian faith to social, political and economic issues, helping members understand their use of time, talents, and money as expressions of Christian stewardship, and expressing our denominational heritage.

The lowest satisfaction score of any category was that of sharing the Word with the unchurched. 69% of us are satisfied, but 31% of us think that we need to do more of this. Close to this was a desire to participate in activities and programs with other religious groups. 70% are satisfied with our current level of activity, but 31% of us would like to do more.

Other possible areas of attention would include our provisions for Christian education for children and youth (21% would like to see more); and engaging in acts of charity and service to persons in need (again, 21%). Both of these areas have had expanded opportunities this year (see the transitions section).

Also indicated areas for potential improvement were: providing a caring ministry for the sick, shut-ins and bereaved (26%, see the recommendations section); providing pastoral counseling to help members deal with personal problems (22%; the former pastor intentionally did no pastoral counseling; currently pastoral counseling is available); and helping members discover their own gifts for ministry and service (28%).

The Church's Identity

The congregation is overwhelmingly (93%) satisfied with the church's identity, with the ability to communicate the uniqueness of this congregation (91%), and have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation (94%).

A strong majority (86%) have a clear understanding of what our church stands for. A minority, but enough to warrant attention (25%), do not believe that an effective effort was made to instruct them in our church's mission, or that being at this church has made a difference in their spiritual lives.

Organizational Characteristics:

98% of our congregation believes that members of Grace help each other out in times of trouble. 92% of us believe that the current morale of the church members is high and that there is a sense of excitement among members about our congregation's future. 92% of us also believe that members and groups get a lot of support and encouragement for trying something new in the congregation, and that members are encouraged to discover their particular gifts for ministry.

More than 80% of us believe that members are well informed about what the various committees and groups in the congregation are doing, that every member who is capable and interested has an equal opportunity to hold key leadership positions and that it is easy to summarize for visitors and non-members how our congregation differs from other congregations in the area.

More than 75% of us believe that the activities taking place in the congregation are well publicized to the surrounding community, that study of the needs of the congregation and the community is regularly undertaken as the basis for church planning, that the theological and biblical implications of important decisions are regularly discussed, and that important decisions about the life of the church are rarely made without open discussion by church leaders and members.

A solid minority (20%) does not believe that cooperative programs with other churches of other denominations are highly valued in our church.

The highest number of people responding "don't know" to any questions about our organizational characteristics were to the questions of whether lay leaders are provided the training they need for their committee and task assignments (19%) and whether disagreements and conflicts are dealt with openly rather than hushed up or hidden behind closed doors (22%). 16% said that they believed that disagreements and conflicts have been dealt with behind closed doors or hushed up. How congregations deal with conflict is an important issue in the life of a church, and this number needs to change. While the session is committed to confidentiality in their discussions, they have also committed to making sure that disagreements and conflicts are dealt with openly and cleanly.

Congregational Identity

The results of the survey place our congregation in middle ranges of all questions of congregational identity (see the section on Congregational Identity in the Church Planning Inventory results).

Size and Condition of Facilities

The respondents (over 80%) believe that the size of our facilities (worship, educational and parking) are adequate or excellent, while nearly a quarter believe that the size of our fellowship and office spaces will require attention soon.

In terms of the general condition and aesthetic appeal of our facilities, over 75% believe that worship, educational space, fellowship space, and office spaces are adequate or

excellent. 35% of us are not satisfied with the general condition and aesthetic appeal of our parking area, and 48% of us believe that the exterior and grounds needs attention. (The Building and Grounds team is working on beautifying the grounds; see the transitions section.)

Christian Education for Children

Only 56% of us are satisfied with the number of children that attend our programs (24% are dissatisfied and 20% don't know). Only 4% are dissatisfied with the time and day at which classes for children are held. 6% are not very satisfied with the training provided teachers.

Nearly all (94%) of respondents believe that the children of this congregation are given the feeling that they are loved by God and the church.

Most of us (76-83%) are satisfied with the way that the children of this congregation are:

- taught about the Bible and church,
- given a sense that Christian love includes respect for and service to others; (80% are satisfied, but it was the #1 response for what members believe ought to be the primary focus of the children's program)
- provided examples of what it means to be a Christian in today's world;
- offered enjoyable fellowship activities; and
- included appropriately in the worship service.

Notable minorities believe that we need to do better in teaching about the Bible and church (17%), developing service for others (19%) providing examples of what it means to be a Christian in today's world (21%) and offering enjoyable fellowship activities (22%) although neither of the last two were cited by many (<10%) as that which should be a primary focus of children's education.

Changes in children's programming have ensued since the survey was taken, so many of these figures could already have changed (see transitions section).

Christian Education for Youth

87% of the respondents believe that appropriate fellowship opportunities are being provided for our youth (15% believe that should be the primary focus).

A significant majority are generally satisfied that our educational program:

- is biblically centered (74%),
- helps youth clarify values and beliefs (78% are satisfied, and 50% believe that this should be the primary focus),
- involves the youth in serving others (76%), and
- encourages youth participation in the worship service.

A small majority of respondents (51%) believe that we need more or better youth choirs or musical groups.

Adult Education and Small Group Programming

A majority (87%) of the respondents believe that we offer enough study groups dealing with the Bible and theology (although 39% said that they would attend if we offered more) and contemporary issues (32% would come...), prayer groups, and literary/culture groups. Of the participants in the congregational gathering, 55 people said that we need to become more informed about the life and ministry of Jesus. While 76% of us think that we offer about the right number of fellowship events, 33% said that they would come if we offered more.

Small majorities (60-63%) are satisfied with the number of support groups we offer and social concern groups. 10% said that they would come to a support group, and 16% of us said that we'd come to a social concern group.

A significant minority (32%) believe that we should offer more evangelistic outreach and visitation groups, but only 8% would attend them.

Small majorities believe that we should offer more recreation and athletic activities (55%) and classes that explore marriage, family and parenting issues (50%) but even those who believe that we should offer them would not attend (only 16% said that they would attend athletic events and 15% marriage and family classes).

Worship

Overall, our congregation is very satisfied with worship. Over 90% are satisfied or very satisfied that we provide worship that is intellectually challenging, that proper attention is given to the sacraments, that we provide part of worship especially for children, and with our practice of corporate prayer.

An overwhelming majority of respondents (80-90%) are satisfied or very satisfied with our worship:

- that provides members time to greet one another (although 13% say this receives too much attention),
- that is emotionally moving,
- that includes lay participation (which has recently changed to include the elder-on-call);
- that uses inclusive, non-sexist language (11% believe this gets too much attention),
- that uses of creeds or statements of faith,
- that meets at times other than Sunday morning, and
- that uses of contemporary worship styles, music and language.

22% of us would like more silent prayer/meditation in worship, and 27% believe that the use of new or unfamiliar hymns receives too much attention (although 68% of us are happy with current practice).

Overall, 91% are satisfied with Sunday worship other than music, and 86% of us are satisfied with the music during Sunday worship. 85% of us say that our spiritual needs are met during worship, and the current worship schedule meets the needs of the majority of people.

What are our Priorities?

Process

This is another area that is mostly addressed by information from the Inventory (Appendix D). There were questions from individual participation in the church, to annual giving, to qualities needed in the next called minister, to roles and emphases the minister and congregation should focus on.

Findings

Functions of the Minister

Respondents prioritized these tasks of the minister in the following order (high to low, with percentage of people ranking the function either “high” or “very high”).

1. Preparing and preaching inspiring sermons (96%)
2. Planning and leading worship sensitive to the needs of the congregation (94%)
3. Emphasizing the spiritual development of the members (90%)
4. Visiting the sick, shut-ins, and bereaved (76%)
5. Providing administrative leadership for the congregation’s ministry (69%)
6. Pastoral counseling of members (68%)
7. Directly involving laity in planning and leadership (67%)
8. Developing and supporting religious education programs for children & youth (64%)
9. Developing and leading adult education programs (61%)
10. Actively and visibly supporting the church’s stewardship program (51%)
11. Supporting the world mission of the church (46%)
12. Planning and leading a program of new member recruitment (43%)
13. Participating in denominational activities (39%)
14. Participating in local community activities (35%)
15. Holding social justice issues before members (22%)
16. Visiting members in their homes (22%)

What the Qualities Are of a Good Sermon

Respondents ranked in the following order qualities that to them make a good sermon (high to low with percentage of people ranking the function either “high” or “very high”).

1. Is Biblically based and illustrated (97%)
2. Is challenging and thought-provoking (95%)
3. Touches directly on my everyday life (95%)
4. Makes me reflect on issues and events that go beyond my personal life and local community (94%)
5. Sets forth a clear faith position as a guide for making decisions and living a faithful life (92%)
6. Is carefully composed and skillfully delivered (91%)
7. Is spiritually moving and inspirational (91%)
8. Obviously flows from the depth of the preacher’s own personal faith and spiritual convictions (76%)
9. Based on a clear, unambiguous religious authority (70%)

10. Is comforting and reassuring (68%)
11. Sets forth various sides of an issue without advocating one position as the only Christian position (67%)
12. Contains scholarly or literary illustrations (60%)

Community and Social Involvement

Respondents would prioritize ways the congregation could be involved with community and social issues in the following order (high to low with percentage of people ranking the function either “high” or “very high”):

1. Providing or supporting social services for persons in need (68%)
2. Providing meeting rooms in the church for community groups (60%)
3. Calling attention to social, community and world issues from the pulpit and in study groups (37%)
4. Giving money to denominational programs (31%)
5. Helping organize or support disadvantaged groups to pursue their own causes (30%)
6. Linking interested lay members to denominational or other groups (29%)
7. Encouraging the minister to use a portion of his/her time working with community and social action groups (24%)
8. Giving money to ecumenical or non-denominational programs (22%)
9. Organizing social issue advocacy or action groups (21%)
10. Lobbying and petitioning corporate and governmental officials on peace and justice issues (12%)

Stewardship Development

Regarding the priority they would give to efforts to encourage the congregation’s stewardship program, respondents prioritized efforts in the following order (high to low with percentage of people ranking the function either “highest” or “very high”):

1. Encourage membership pledging (68%)
2. Special giving appeals for a charitable cause or mission effort (56%)
3. Tithing or proportionate giving (54%)
4. Adult education programs on the meaning of Christian stewardship (52%)
5. Mailings to members clearly setting out the reasons for Christian stewardship (49%)
6. Strong appeals from the pulpit (34%)
7. Encourage giving to a church endowment through wills and bequests (33%)
8. Every member canvass or visitation (18%)
9. Fund-raisers such as fairs, bazaars, yard sales, etc (12%)
10. Hiring a professional fund raising consultant or group (5%)

Imagining that significantly more money than is currently budgeted were available, respondents prioritized possible uses in the following order (high to low with percentage of people ranking the function either “highest” or “very high”):

1. Increase budget for educational and program materials and resources (58%)
2. Increased support for community social service programs (52%)
3. Renovate, enlarge or add to current facilities (50%)
4. Increased support for world missions (43%)
5. Begin an endowment or add to an existing one (32%)
6. Increased support to our denomination (27%)
7. Increase evangelistic efforts and advertising (26%)
8. Increase current staff salaries (21%)
9. Hire additional staff (16%)

Evangelism

Members prioritized the possible ways that the church could share the Good News in the following order (high to low with percentage of people ranking the function either “highest priority” or “high priority”):

1. The use of a church web site (79%)
2. Developing church programs especially targeted at unchurched persons in our community (68%)
3. Mailing church literature to newcomers in our community (56%)
4. Stressing from the pulpit the importance of members inviting others to visit our church (46%)
5. Developing home Bible, prayer and study groups to which friends who are not members are invited (46%)
6. Pastoral or lay visits to newcomers in your community (44%)
7. Appeals to members to make a personal witness about their faith to others (32%)
8. The use of newspaper advertisements (20%)
9. Changing the style of worship to make it more appealing to the unchurched (17%)
10. Using a group of lay volunteers to canvass the neighborhood (12%)
11. The use of radio or television (8%)

64% of the members believe that the congregation needs to increase its efforts in evangelism, and 31% of the members state that they are willing to be more involved in the evangelistic efforts of the congregation (26% to a moderate extent, and 5% to a great extent).

What Do Others Say?

Process:

Our Mission Strategy Team interviewed nine of our community leaders (Appendix M). Interviewees included local politicians, a school system administrator, real estate agent, business owners, and pastors of local congregations.

Findings:

1. What do you look for in a church?

The common thread between our respondents was that each indicated that a sense of community or family or home was a priority in what they would look for in a church.

2. What do you think that this community needs or is looking for in a church?

The answers to this question were quite diverse, indicating that there is not a gaping hole in the types of churches being sought after in our community.

3. What do you see as the (church or other) needs of the people moving into this area?

There was some commonality in responses in beliefs that people are looking for a welcoming community, a chance to engage in authentic relationships with God and with other people, and blended worship.

4. Related to the above, which of those are not well-met by current congregations?

The answers seem to indicate that current congregations do offer good options to meet the needs of the people moving to this area.

5. What role should the church play in the community?

All responders see a role for the church and the community, and have differing opinions on what that might look like. Whether being engaged in the schools and the school system, social services, or helping neighbors, being a moral compass or spiritual lighthouse for the community, these are seen as a community role for the church.

6. What are the future trends that you see in this area? What are your observations about the changing patterns in this area?

All responders believe that this area will continue to grow, but there was disagreement on whether growth would be maintained at previous rates. There is a sense that this area will become more urbanized and that we will need to work hard to maintain the sense of community that exists here.

7. What are the needs of the folks with whom you come in contact in your work?

Relationships and stability seem to be common threads.

8. Where are the gaps in services in our community?

Hungry and homeless people seem to be invisible in our community. The community leaders who responded to this question, however, believe that our community is not responding sufficiently to the needs of these people, and the churches need to provide leadership and cooperation in making that happen.

9. What are your perceptions of Grace Presbyterian Church?

While all responders have differing takes on Grace's origins, worship, and patterns of congregational life, all seem to hold Grace in high regard.

Observations:

People are looking for a way to connect with others in the community, and are seeking a spiritual connection to cope with everyday life. They are seeking a loving/caring support group and look to the church to fill these needs.

The church needs to be involved with and meet the needs of the community.

Churches of the future will have to be less traditional to meet the needs of the community, and Grace's blend of a traditional/non-traditional worship experience fills a good gap between the totally traditional and totally non-traditional options.

Churches need to do a better job of partnering with other churches and the business community to fulfill needs of/support the community.

Churches need to be aware/sensitive to the needs of the community and adapt in order to continually meet those needs as they change over time.

Our Hopes for Grace

Process

The congregational gatherings had open-ended questions (Appendix A), as opposed to the Inventory (Appendix D), which except for the comments section (Appendix E), asked only statistically quantifiable questions. And while the individual responses (Appendix B) for hopes and goals for the congregation are interesting, of most value to the mission study team were the group responses (also Appendix B). We wanted people to have both the opportunity and the necessity to negotiate the priorities in small groups.

Findings:

Four of the groups cited mission work as their highest priority for the next five years. Two groups want Grace become more recognized in and strengthen ties to the community, two groups want to build a sanctuary or move in that direction, two groups want to reach more people spiritually, two want to reach out more to the unchurched, two want to continue our membership growth, and two want to move into the future in all ways.

In terms of their one-year goal, seven groups want to see the columbarium come to fruition, seven look forward to installing a pastor, five groups want to increase membership (two even specify 10% growth) and four groups want to focus on growing the youth programs for older youth and college students.

Transitions

While many congregations choose not to make changes during the transition between called pastors, Grace has chosen a different route. We have been attempting to follow where God has been leading, including some new directions.

The congregation has had neither the need nor the temperament to be idle. As needs have emerged, the leadership has responded.

1. Joining Grace

New members have historically been received into Grace by elders assigned to that task on any Sunday morning. The Session had conversation about whether that pattern allowed people to connect with other new members, and have a good sense of Grace's history and programs. The Session discussed having a series of classes as is done in many churches, and rejected that idea. The Session's conversations resulted in new member Lunch and Learns, wherein every other month, anyone who wants to know more about Grace's life and programs is invited to come to lunch, hear about the congregation, share their stories, and join the church should they choose. Several Session members attend each Lunch and Learn, on behalf of the whole Session. This program has been very successful this year, and at a gathering of people who joined the church this year, new members reported the Lunch and Learns to be very helpful. We have welcomed 47 new members in 2009.

2. Administration, Building and Grounds, and Finance: Jackie Johnson writes:

2009 has been a year of learning and change for the office staff at Grace. We started the year out by attending a seminar sponsored by Providence Presbytery to enhance our interpersonal communication skills becoming more effective in our jobs. The training was not only a great learning experience but inspirational and fun. A new staff evaluation procedure was put into place by the Grace Personnel Committee which allowed us to be evaluated by our co-workers, Grace Members we work with most often, and our supervisor. This was a very positive experience and helpful as we serve others while we carry on the activities of the Grace office.

The formation of the Grace Technology Team was a big plus for the church office. The team looked at how the technology we had supported the vision and mission of the church, church staff, and the communication and outreach of Grace. The team then evaluated the computers and other tools the church was using. It was very noticeable that our equipment was outdated and needed to be improved for effective communication. Thanks to the successful "Catch Up" weekend, Finance Committee authorized the Tech Team to purchase new computers for the church office as well as a color copier. The former office computers are now used in our Children's Ministries programs. We are grateful for the talent of this group and their willingness to spend hours in getting the equipment up and running. Members of the Tech team also designed and evaluated a new website for Grace, which enables all staff to maintain their own areas. The website is still a work in progress, as we seek to make it an effective means of education about the church for both potential and current members.

2009 brought a shift in the focus of the Finance Committee. Instead of talking about money and financial campaigns, they began to talk about a theology of stewardship that

affects everything the congregation does. Thus, the committee is now being called the Stewardship Committee and communicating to members ways in which stewardship is a year round commitment of time, talents, and finances.

Joanne sends out a weekly "e-note" with news and prayer requests to any who sign up for it, and we in the church office send emails when we need to get an urgent message to the congregation. We recognized that a monthly newsletter was no longer a particularly helpful form of communication and certainly not economical. It often contained information that had already been in the bulletin for several weeks. As a result of trying to have more effective and efficient communication methods, combined with a desire to increase stewardship education and help communicate "big picture" information about the church rather than simply repetitive bulletin announcements, we have initiated a quarterly stewardship newsletter, each with a particular focus. These are sent with the quarterly financial statements, in order to illustrate our belief that a financial commitment is only one part of stewardship.

Grace, as a place to worship and meet, has seen a lot of improvements. Our Building and Grounds Committee was busy spreading new mulch on a spring work day. Several of the classrooms and hallways were painted over the summer. The sanctuary was also painted and is a much brighter place to worship. Thanks to several designated gifts we were able to make improvements to the side yard and plant grass in hopes of having a green area in the spring. We have added an additional permanent sign at the corner of Stockbridge and Hwy 160, and one member keeps both annuals and perennials as a beautiful welcome out at the sign and near the church building.

The Grace Endowment Program that was established to offer members and friends of Grace the opportunity to leave a legacy of faith for future generations was able to grant two requests for funding from interest earned on the investment. Grants were made to the Grace Columbarium and Grace Ringers.

3. Children and Family Ministry: Christi Flansburg, Program Director

For Christian Education, the focus for 2009 has been to enrich children's education. Early in the year, the Children's Council met and decided to hold a lunch for Grace families to help determine their desires and availability. The team was able to determine that there was great interest in having a children's educational program during the 10:15 am worship time as well as interest in Sunday morning education. In response to the feedback, Bible Learning and Study Time (BLAST) was created for children in 1st - 5th grade. BLAST invites children to have a conversation with Pastor Joanne about the lectionary scripture and then go to a separate space to engage in worship and creative arts activities about the scripture passages. On average we have 10 - 15 children attend BLAST each Sunday. On Communion Sundays, children stay in the sanctuary with their parent(s) and are encouraged to participate in the sacrament with their families.

The Children's Council identified Sunday morning education as another priority area to focus attention and resources. A project team from the group previewed curriculum options and visited a local church using the desired curriculum and learning format. We began using the rotation workshop model of education where the kids use different activities to engage with the same story for approximately eight weeks. We've added three computer stations for the computer game weeks, and the kids have enjoyed cooking, games, music, drama, video, and art as they have explored the 10

Commandments and Christmas Around the World. This program is called D.I.G. It! (Discovering in Grace).

Also, the Council decided to create a Sunday morning education group for children ages 4 - 6/Kindergarten called WEE Believe. Each Sunday, the children engage with various Bible stories through games and crafts. During this time they also participate in music instruction for the WEE Believers choir.

The Council also determined that families at Grace needed to have information to take home with them so that they could discuss the lectionary passage as a family. We have added a "Family Bulletin" to the children's worship packet that kids 3 - 12 can pick up each Sunday. The bulletin includes descriptions of our education programs for children, upcoming events pertinent to families, and a discussion guide for the family to use at home to discuss the day's scripture.

4. Worship and Music:

Grace Church has a wonderful tradition of engaging worship, employing an informal style and fairly traditional structure. The music is a combination of traditional and praise music. The past has included several permutations of worship planning teams, and fall of 2008 brought a new iteration of a worship and arts team. This team has planned a number of new services for the congregation, including World Communion Sunday, Longest Night service, Epiphany Sunday, Ash Wednesday, and others. These and other services have included drama, new liturgies, and the creation of new banners and other sanctuary decorations.

Partly in response to both Joanne's and the congregation's desire for more lay leadership in worship, partly in order to "introduce" the elder on call to the congregation each week so that they might feel more comfortable calling the elder, and partly to encourage the session members as spiritual leaders in the congregation, this year we began having the elder on-call also serve as liturgist for Sunday worship.

When Ken Lake, the Director of Music, asked to take a leave of absence for the summer of 2009, the session agreed, and the understanding was that the choir would take the summer off. Soon thereafter, choir members approached Accompanist Ginger Deaton and Joanne and asked that the choir resume. Ginger agreed to work with the choir for the summer. During that time, several new members joined the church bringing talent and new energy to the choir. Nearly 1/3 of the members of our choir now are people who joined the church this year. When Ken returned to work, a series of conversations ensued related to the division of labor in the music area. The result of the conversations was an agreement to make Ken and Ginger Co-Directors of music, with Ginger taking responsibility for creating a children's choir and music administration. She reports the following:

The Grace Children's Choir kicked off in October 2009 with great enthusiasm. This is an open-invitation program where any child is welcome and encouraged to participate on his/her comfort level. The stated ages are grades 1 through 5, but that is not enforced. It is important to let every voice sing who is willing! The children sing, play instruments and have fun! They meet on Sundays following the 10:15 worship service for 45 minutes.

For these first 2½ months, the main goal was to prepare a Christmas musical to present in December. The focus was learning the Christmas music and script, and relating the songs and story they were learning to the story of Jesus' birth. *Starry Night, Noisy Night* was presented as part of the annual Live Nativity on December 6. The children had the chance to lead worship that night by sharing this cute story and their talents with the congregation. The children's choir is singing in the Christmas Eve family service and will resume in January.

5. Youth: Schaap Freeman, Director of Youth Ministries

In August of 2008, Grace lost long time and well loved youth director, Cathie Smith, when her husband was transferred to Pittsburgh. A search team was assembled, the position advertised, candidates interviewed, and the Rev. Schaap Freeman was hired as the Director of Youth ministries. Schaap brings a seminary education, and pastoral experience, but her responsibilities are limited, as is her time, as she has chosen to work part-time while raising small children. Schaap began her work on January 1, 2009. About her work area this year, she writes:

The Youth Groups have continued to participate in activities to strengthen their own faith and to reach-out to the congregation and community.

In the summer 2009, the High School Youth's plans to travel to Honduras changed because of the political unrest in the country. This was a disappointment for those planning to participate in the Mission Team, but we were able to redirect our energies at the last minute and serve with Project Crossroads, a housing assistance ministry in Southwestern Virginia. Four adults and nine youth spent five days working to replace the front porch, install siding, and offer hope to a grandfather with physical disabilities who cared for his grandchildren on a daily basis. The Grace Youth was an energetic workforce and enjoyed building relationships within the group as much as they enjoyed getting to know the homeowner and his family.

The Youth have also reached out to the Grace family and the Fort Mill community. This fall, the youth helped the Senior Adult Members with yard projects and hosted a Thanksgiving meal to say thank you for their church family. The Youth also hosted a Fall Festival on Oct. 18, which brought Grace members and community members together for games, cookie decorating, and an afternoon of fun.

This fall the Youth also returned to eating a weekly meal together on Sunday evenings. This has provided extra time for youth fellowship, and has helped the parents of youth get to know each other as they have helped prepare the Sunday evening meal.

Schaap has also reintroduced praise dancing to worship.

6. Local Missions:

One area of need which emerged was a focus of energy for local missions efforts. Congregational gatherings and the congregational survey both highlighted local missions as a priority for our members. The pattern of the Grace community has been that informal groups would gather to engage in mission in the community. We have been involved in distributing Christmas presents through RAIN and the Department of Social

Services, Habitat for Humanity, blood drives, and more. A group of women gather every Sunday to knit caps for babies born at Carolinas Medical Center, Pineville, and prayer shawls for members of our congregation in need as well as for hospice patients. As the congregation has grown, it seems there are people who have not found ways to join in those efforts. Lori Ochsner was asked to coordinate a local mission effort and put together a team. She has done so and writes the following report on their activities:

The Local Missions Team is a loosely organized group of 14 individuals whose goals are to:

- Disseminate information about Grace's local missions opportunities to new and existing members.
- Raise awareness and increase visibility of current missions.
- Help everyone to become more engaged in local missions.
- Assist members as they engage in potential new missions.

We created a handout describing the various local missions Grace participates in and distributed it to individuals who visited the annual yard sale. We have increased visibility of the Fort Mill Care Center food collections by placing a shopping cart in the entrance to the sanctuary, which seems to have increased participation. We started collecting personal hygiene and cleaning supplies for RAIN/Catawba Care Center as well as food gift cards for that ministry. We participated in the 2009 Faith Build for Habitat for Humanity of York County that was organized by Providence Presbytery. Members also assisted a Sunday School class as they hosted a Poverty Simulation. We believe that we have been able to plug several individuals into various ministries as they have expressed interest.

Future goals include learning more about the ministries in our church and community so that we can better inform members about the groups and agencies that we support. We also hope to get more information on Grace's website.

7. Columbarium

Several years ago, an effort was made to create a columbarium at Grace. This effort did not come to fruition, as a result of a number of factors. In the fall of 2008, a new team volunteered to study issues related to a columbarium. It was clear from the congregation that there was interest in this effort. A design has been approved by the session, a site has been chosen, and we have begun to sell spaces in the as yet unbuilt columbarium. The congregational gathering indicated a high desire for the columbarium to be built; early 2010 will see a push to make this happen.

8. Other new programs

Other programs initiated in the last 15 months include Secret Saints, wherein Grace members anonymously partner with our college students to help them remember that they are cared for by their church community; the mothers of college students gather to create and send care packages and provide support for each other; reintroduction of a men's breakfast and Bible study held once a month; Grace Family First Night, an opportunity for the whole congregation to gather as a church family for dinner, worship, and an intergenerational activity. In an effort to ensure that the Mother's Morning Out program is considered a ministry of the congregation by both the congregation and the Mother's Morning Out program, Joanne Sizoo has begun to meet weekly with both four-year-old classes for a Bible story time.

For consideration

The matter of congregational care:

One challenge we face is in the area of congregational care. New congregations tend to be made up of younger people. Older people only occasionally leave current congregations to join new congregations, and elderly or infirm people are unlikely to be moving to new locations and seeking a congregation. In addition, small congregations take care of themselves informally.

Grace Presbyterian Church is no longer a small congregation or a new congregation. Grace is a vital and growing congregation. However, not all members know each other, or are involved in activities where they have affinity groups, and some of the longer-term members are now in their 70's and 80's. Congregational care is currently handled by a loosely affiliated care and concern team, which is staffed by the church administrator.

The mission study team believes that its time for the congregation to consider having an ordained Board of Deacons. While some understand the role of the Board of Deacons to be managing finances or building and grounds, both the Book of Order and the Bible are clear that the Ministry of the Board of Deacons is one of care and concern. Deacons, in the Bible, are to care for the "widows and orphans," and the Book of Order instructs us that the deacons are to care for the temporal needs of the people.

A Board of Deacons would provide Grace with a group of people who have been called by God and ordained in the Presbyterian Church USA to serve the congregation in the area of care and concern. Ordination would highlight the importance of this responsibility and organization of a Board of Deacons would provide structure for their work.

Questions of staffing:

The unique staffing pattern of Grace, in that program staff are not housed on site, but work from home, provides great creativity and freedom for the staff, and enables us to employ very competent people who might not otherwise be interested in working at Grace. A successful head of staff would be skilled/experienced in working collaboratively with staff colleagues not working right down the hall, and with small children present. Our current staffing pattern and growth require a head of staff who can provide leadership, direction and vision without sacrificing flexibility.

A second challenge of our current staffing pattern is that we do not offer benefits for part-time work. The combination of offering part-time work and not offering benefits limits the pool of potential candidates for any program staff position. We are very fortunate to have the two part-time program staff people we currently employ, however we need to be aware that our pattern may limit the availability of suitable future candidates.

A final staffing issue is that our current active membership and number of programs result in our staff being stretched pretty thin. Additional programs have increased time spent on congregational programming by the head of staff, and the program director and director of youth ministries work to their full capacity in their part-time roles. The regular use of the facilities by community groups, the Saluda counseling center, Boy Scouts of America, Mother's Morning Out, and ongoing church programs create cleaning and

maintenance needs beyond the capacity of our very part time custodian. As we proceed into the future, in order to grow current programs or start new initiatives, we may need to add staff and/or staff hours.

Our facilities

If our current growth in membership and/or programs continues over the next few years, our facilities will be strained to meet the demand. Even now, Sunday mornings stretch us to capacity. This will challenge our ability to maintain our existing facilities and may well present the opportunity for another expansion/addition. Obviously, this is a good problem to have, but nonetheless will be challenging to resolve and fund.

Corporate Structure

The staffing challenge along with the task ahead for each ministry team, suggests that Grace has reached a critical point in its growth. Clearly over the last 12 - 15 months, we have begun to move from an informal corporate structure to one of more formality (i.e. increase in the number of ministry teams). This is a natural progression in the life of a young, growing church and is one of necessity. The challenge going forward will be to ensure that our corporate structure does not constrain our current strength of permission-giving, congregational empowerment and creative problem solving.

What's Next?

This is a dynamic document. By that, we mean that it is not to be read and filed, but to be wrestled with and lived with. Each ministry team and organization in the church should read and talk about this study and address the following question - what are the parts that each group should pay attention to and make plans for?

The Session is asking each ministry team to establish appropriate goals that they develop from the priorities listed in the Mission Study, and that each team develop a process by which to meet these goals.