

## Peace Presbyterian Church Congregational Survey Executive Summary

After suffering a serious conflict with a pastor in 2012-13, Peace Presbyterian Church in St. Louis Park (PPC or Peace Prez) suffered dramatic membership loss. Writing this mission study provided us the opportunity to discover something that surprised us: during this conflict, we lost 50% of our membership in one year. We had not realized how precipitous our decline had been. The writing of the mission study has helped us to see ourselves and our church's recent history clearly.

An anecdote told by our current pastor is helpful to understand where we're at now. When she came in 2017, she called her husband after the first session meeting she moderated. "This church wants to close," she told him. A retired executive presbyter (and a former associate executive of PTCA), he assured her this was not true. "Unfortunately, I have closed a lot of churches, and Peace is nowhere ready to close," he explained. "They just need someone to listen to how hard it's been." He was correct. We have talked it through and prayed a lot. She has listened carefully. And together we agree that do not – and never did – want to close. In fact, we are more energized and optimistic now than we have been in recent memory.

As hard as it was to accept our current reality, we have done so. We no longer have a children's Sunday School or Youth Group. Our choir now functions as a "Pop Up Choir," a kind of informal practice-at-10am-and-sing-at-10:30am ensemble rather than a formal, well-rehearsed choir. We deal with reality: since we don't have the large congregation that we used to, we removed a lot of pews from the sanctuary, reconfigured our space, and continued to worship – joyfully! We have returned to our foundational organizing principles: serious involvement in mission, a concern for social justice, orderly but joyful worship, love of music, and a genuine passion for the gospel that welcomes all people including those of different social classes, ethnic backgrounds, abilities or disabilities and sexual orientations. We have returned to basics: a passion for community involvement, a love of music and worship, and concern for each other and the world.

Founded in 1958, Peace Prez has always been an outward focused congregation. In the 1970s, PPC partnered with the City of St. Louis Park to found the St. Louis Park Emergency Program (STEP) to help people in need. STEP has always been interfaith and independent of PPC, but the church has maintained a close relationship with it. We support local and global mission projects as well – in fact, led by a 15-year old new member, we are inaugurating an international mission effort in Liberia.<sup>1</sup> With the help of funds from a presbytery Congregational Development Grant, we soon will be inaugurating a senior outreach program called 3B: Body, Brain & Belief.<sup>2</sup>

We are also a very social congregation, mutually supportive of one another and welcoming of new members – though sometimes we need to be reminded that when people "don't act right" it might be because they are autistic or recovering from traumatic experiences of

---

<sup>1</sup> The Liberia Schools Project will provide books to under resourced public scholars in the Todee province of Liberia by working through St. Paul-based international nonprofit Books for Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Developed by Smock Senior Ministries of Fort Wayne IN, 3B – Body, Brain & Belief – will be inaugurated by PPC. We hope to share it with other churches in the PTCA. Funded with money left over from the 2019 Congregational Development Grant that we were not able to spend because of the pandemic, the program will be staffed by a member of Liberty Community Church who is a licensed physical therapist & a seminarian at UTS.

poverty. In the past, PPC always fostered friendships within the congregation, but in the past people came from a similar social stratum. Now as we have to be more intentional about our friendships, we have discovered that we're still good at mutual support. We have discovered that visitors and new members find us welcoming, nurturing and fun. They tell us that they feel God's love through us.

The pandemic has been a challenge for us because we were just beginning to turn things around when public health protocols required us to close the church building. In February 2020, we took in 9 new members – a 7% increase in membership. But then in March we had to close down the building and discontinue in-person worship. While we have maintained a cohesive bond through the worst of the pandemic crisis by creative use of technology and such efforts as summer parking lot worship service, we were not able to continue to grow. We are now ready to get back to work prospecting for new members. In fact, we are organizing a new member class that will start in September. We anticipate continued growth in numbers, spirit and giving.

A survey was conducted in the spring of 2022 by a committee of Peace Presbyterian Church in St. Louis Park, MN. This is a summary of the results, a description of what we learned and, as a result of these findings, a description of what we are seeking in our new pastor, and a description of what we want in the future. In addition, we are including a statement regarding our fiscal viability.

40 people completed the survey. The findings indicate these strengths that show **how we see ourselves now:**

1. Meaningful worship is provided.
2. Personal spiritual growth is deepened.
3. We do a good job of supporting local and global missions.
4. Members help each other out in times of trouble (including new members!)
5. Morale is high among the congregation.
6. Members and groups get a lot of support and encouragement for trying something new in the congregation.
7. Our congregation feels like one large family.
8. We give strong expression to our denominational identity.

The survey indicates that there is quite a bit of unanimity and little conflict in the congregation. Perhaps this is the result of quarrelsome people leaving during the period of conflict. It may also be the result of us realizing that, as we have aged and started to grow smaller, that we have to stop sweating small stuff and, instead, focus on our commitment to community involvement & mission

### **What we are seeking in our new pastor:**

We seek a visionary leader to help the congregation look toward a new future while affirming elements of our current identity and developing new efforts to reach new people and witness

for peace and justice in the world. We want a pastor with a warm heart and a sharp mind who will love and challenge us!

Specific characteristics:

- Dynamic speaker and leader
- Continues to develop their theological and biblical skills
- Able to guide people as they explore their faith
- Technologically savvy and/or willing to learn
- Optimistic
- Compassionate, open and caring
- Perceptive
- Accepting of differences
- Effective moderator
- Skilled at conflict resolution
- Problem solver
- Resourceful

**Why we are seeking a pastor at  $\frac{3}{4}$  time rather than full-time:** The position is  $\frac{3}{4}$  time-but it's not the regular less-than-full-time position. While we will expect the pastor to carry out all the regular duties of a pastor, we will give the pastor one weekend off every month.

We are seeking a less than full time pastor because we want to make our pastoral position as attractive as possible. We are realistic. Because we have a number of retired teachers in important positions of leadership in our church, we are aware that even the full-time pay that we could offer is lower than what a qualified teacher would expect. Therefore, recognizing that we can offer only a modest salary (even full-time presbytery minimum is not enough to support a family), we have decided to offer something else: flexibility and time away. The position as we have configured it will not only offer regular vacation and continuing education, but one additional weekend off every month. This might be a chance for a pastor to go camping with their family, finish a D.Min. or Ph.D. thesis, carry out independent research or write a book. We think that this may attract a late-career teaching elder or maybe a pastor with academic credentials who wishes to teach college or

university part-time – or maybe hip-hop artist or Moth story-teller who might need to be out late on a Saturday night!

We have several talented and highly educated church members, including medical doctors and retired teachers, who can preach and lead worship on the pastor's one weekend away. In fact, the need to preach and lead worship will be good for us. Already we have elders who have written sermons and are ready to go when called upon. .

### **FISCAL VIABILITY**

While we are realistic that PPC is in something of a fragile condition – just beginning a big turn-around from decline to growth - we are confident about the future. We have good financial leadership, led by a retired corporate CFO, who reports that even under the most dire conditions (“hope for the best but plan for the worst”) we will be able to fund the church with a pastor at  $\frac{3}{4}$  time for at least the two year period for a designated pastor. We feel ethically compelled to make promises that we can keep. Therefore, even if membership and giving do not increase, we are confident that we can meet our financial obligations. The chairperson of our finance committee, the retired CFO, has made these observations:

1. Pledges are generous. In addition to pledges, the church gives generously to denominational, international and local missions.
2. PPC has long-term reserve funds available if needed. Based on current data, we are confident that we have reserve funds that can support the church and guarantee the pastor's compensation and benefits at least through the first two years of the designated pastor's tenure.

In addition to drawing on reserves, PPC is exploring other possibilities. For example, we have started a conversation with Presbyterian Homes about the possibility of demolishing our current church building and developing our property as senior housing -- with the idea that the church would be given office and meeting space for the church alone, along with shared use of the chapel and common rooms. We understand that any change in property must be done in cooperation and with approval of PTCA