

Mission Study
Presbyterian Church of Palm Harbor

August 22, 2016

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Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	Page 3
2. Introduction	Page 4
3. Our Community	Page 4
4. A Brief History of PCPH	Page 4
5. Overview of PCPH	Page 5
6. Relevant Perspectives	Page 7
7. The Mission of PCPH	Page 10
8. Guidance for Pastor Selection	Page 16
9. Mission Study Process	Page 18

PCPH Mission Study

Executive Summary

The Presbyterian Church of Palm Harbor (PCPH) began its journey to redefine its future when its long-term pastor retired in February, 2015. With congregational membership of a little more than 300 people, PCPH views itself as a close-knit family that warmly welcomes all. Our journey began with a period of reflecting on the past to remember our history and the attributes of PCPH that brought us together. We then identified a wide range of ideas to look beyond where we are today. By exploring and challenging these ideas, we collaborated on a mission that gives us direction toward an exciting future.

We summarize our mission in the following mission statement.

Our mission is to create a close church family that grows in our relationship with God and demonstrates his love. We bridge people's diverse worship needs for energy and peace, study God's Word to guide our daily lives, care for one another, and serve needs in our community.

In the statement is the concept that we are striving for a close, extended family atmosphere and that our mission is to actively demonstrate God's love both to one another and to those outside of our walls. We realize this means we have to find ways to worship that is meaningful for all of us. It also means we have to focus on how to actively practice our beliefs every day. We believe the foundation of our mission is caring for and serving others, both internal and external to our congregation.

We have room to grow in many of the areas that are necessary to realize our mission. We need to improve and increase our offering to young and middle-aged adults. We must build on the successful development of a vibrant program for children and youth. We have room to improve our internal care system and desire to become more active in local mission work. We hope to evolve our worship service so that we may worship together in ways that are meaningful for all. The wonderful possibilities presented by this direction are endless and we embrace them whole-heartedly.

Introduction

In the coming year, we will be welcoming a new pastor into our church family. Preparing this Mission Study has been a time of reflection and celebration of our history and planning for the future. Beginning in 1979, PCPH began a legacy of strong Christian belief and mission. From then until today, PCPH has provided a spiritual and caring home for our members. Today, we serve as not only the stewards of this legacy but we accept the responsibility for looking to the future and discerning the path that PCPH will take.

This mission study has set us on a journey of reflecting on the past while preparing for an exciting future. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we have been led to this place in time and have been reminded of the unique and blessed gifts which we have been given.

Thoughtful study and prayer have resulted in this mission study document. Through surveys (traditional and electronic) and facilitated small meetings, the entire congregation has had the opportunity to contribute to the process. We invite you to read and learn more about where PCPH has been, who we are, and what we need for a future filled with spiritual growth and vitality. We are confident that God is with us in this process, walking beside us and guiding us to the pastor He is calling to lead us into the future.

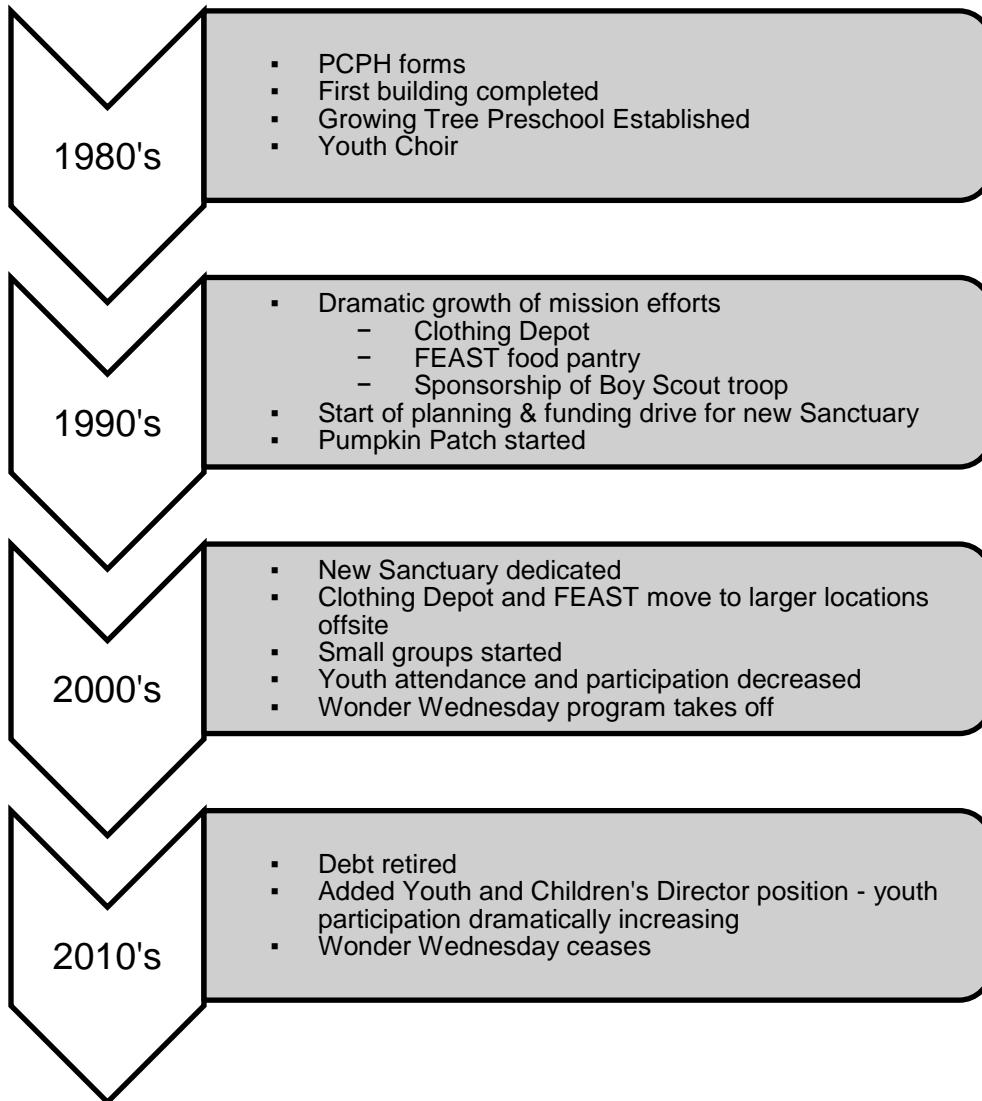
Our Community

PCPH is located in Palm Harbor, an unincorporated area in Pinellas County in the Tampa Bay area of Florida. Palm Harbor has as neighbors the small cities of Dunedin, Tarpon Springs, Oldsmar, and Clearwater. The downtown areas of the larger cities of Tampa and St. Petersburg are both approximately 25 miles away. The immediate area is primarily residential with supporting retail and residential service businesses scattered throughout. The median household income in Palm Harbor is between \$50,000 and \$60,000 and the area has a high density of retirees, including many who are seasonal residents. The nearby Gulf of Mexico beaches and mild winters also draw many seasonal visitors.

A Brief History of PCPH

PCPH first met and organized in the spring of 1979, with slightly under 100 people. By the fall of 1981, the church was meeting in a newly constructed building at its current location. The church grew both in numbers and physical facilities over the years. The initial building was expanded several times until a new sanctuary building was

constructed in 2000 and 2001. The church grew to a membership of just under 400 and retired its debt in 2010.



Overview of PCPH

PCPH has approximately 325 formal members, though more than half have been members for 10 years or less. There are four other Protestant churches within a block of PCPH and over 20 Protestant churches within 5 miles. Considering the available alternatives, PCPH currently attracts people looking for a small, close-knit church family that has a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere, a service that has not abandoned traditional elements, and a growing children and youth program. We pride ourselves on striving to make everyone, whether long-term member or visitor, feel welcome and at home, although we currently are not meeting our own expectations in this area.

Worship attendance generally ranges between 130 and 230, with the majority of the variation being seasonal. During the transition between pastors, attendance has been down about 25%. There is one worship service each Sunday at 10:15 and it is fairly traditional in style. We do, however, have worship services where we depart from the more traditional and enjoy a non-traditional format. A much-loved choir supports the services along with special musical guests.

PCPH staff is currently comprised of a full-time pastor, a full-time youth and children director, a part-time music director, a part-time office assistant, and a part-time nursery attendant. The church also sponsors a Christian preschool, the Growing Tree, which has a full-time director and part-time teaching staff.

The membership of PCPH spans the demographics of Palm Harbor. With regard to the age demographics, in particular, the age range from 25 to 55 years old is significantly under-represented at PCPH. The following chart compares the age distribution of PCPH membership with that of the Palm Harbor community.

	Total		Female		Male	
	Palm Harbor	PCPH	Palm Harbor	PCPH	Palm Harbor	PCPH
Age 25 & Under (PH above 15)	12%	13%	11%	14%	13%	12%
Age 25-45	23%	14%	23%	13%	24%	16%
Age 45-55	20%	7%	20%	7%	20%	7%
Age 55-65	18%	11%	17%	11%	18%	10%
Age Over 65	27%	55%	29%	55%	25%	55%
Female	54%	62%				
Male	46%	38%				

Note: PCPH had 73 youth and children participating in activities at the end of 2015. If applying a similar proportion of children to adults in the general Palm Harbor population to a group the size of the PCPH congregation, we would expect 70 youth and children. In other words, the children and youth numbers relative to the PCPH congregation size are close to that of Palm Harbor.

Financially, PCPH is fairly conservative. All debt related to building programs were retired in 2010 and the church is currently debt-free. The church has an annual operating budget of between \$250,000 and \$300,000. The vast majority of this budget is fixed operating spending (salaries, utilities, worship costs and required facility upkeep) and stretches the regular giving levels of the congregation. Special initiatives and emergency maintenance generally require dedicated giving or solicitations.

For the past several years, there have been a few areas of special effort. Most notably, the children and youth programs have grown substantially with strong support from the congregation and the momentum of these programs continues to increase. Attempts to create programs for the age group of the parents of the children and youth have been less successful. Similarly, efforts to grow the participation in small groups have only met with marginal success. The existing small groups, which engage 15% to 20% of the membership, are sustaining well, but not growing.

Relevant Perspectives

As the decisions regarding the mission of PCPH were evaluated, the perspectives of those that are either significantly involved in or affected by PCPH were strongly considered. These relevant perspectives were reflective of:

- Active participants - both formal members and non-members of the congregation
- Visitors to the church
- Members of the local community
- Those we serve in the broader world

Active Participants

The active participant group includes both members and a significant number that are regularly involved but are not members. There is a large seasonal population in the area and many of these individuals attend regularly when they are living in the area but are still affiliated with churches in their other base locations. Our youth group has a number that participate regularly but are not members and their families are not participants in any way. We also consider the church staff as part of the active participants. For purposes of this study, no distinction is made between formal members and regular participants who are not members. Other than formal decision-making, we function as one church family.

One element of perspective within the active participants is the age or stage-of-life demographic. We categorize our active participants by retirees, middle-age working,

younger-adult working, young-adult college students, youth, and children. We recognize that the young-adult college students group is a small and transient group considering our location.

Probably more important than the demographic-driven perspective are the personal preferences and needs of all those involved. The active participants have a broad range of diverse viewpoints. The range of perspectives and preferences is observed within *each* of the demographic categories. The following are examples of the range of preferences and needs we observe and therefore consider:

- Worship preference varies across traditional, contemporary, innovative, and hybrid styles
- Worship needs vary across re-energization, peace, connection, guidance, and reflection
- Involvement priority conflicts vary across work, support for children, support for spouses, support for parents, service organization work, and personal time
- Willingness to get involved varies across proactive engaging, waiting for a call, physical ability constraints, time conflicts, burned-out, 'I've done my share and need a rest', and looking for low-burden involvement
- Music preferences vary across classical, traditional, gospel, praise, other contemporary, and various mixes of styles
- Mission preferences vary across financial, non-contact mission, high-contact mission, non-church mission involvement, and low mission interest
- The history and stage of Christian journey varies across life-long Presbyterians, life-long Christians, later-in-life Christians, recent Christians, and those still exploring
- Change perspectives vary across 'I need consistency', 'Tradition is important', 'Change is what leads to vitality and growth', 'Variety is the spice of life', and 'I can change but I don't like it'.

Though there is great variety in viewpoints, there are two perspectives that are fairly consistent across the current active participants. First, it is a priority that PCPH remain vital and be a sustainable entity. Secondly, even though we have diverse preferences, we are a family and will need to adapt in recognition of this diversity. The staff members have the added perspective of looking for opportunity to grow in their abilities and effectiveness in their mission of ministry.

Visitors

PCPH has visitors attending with family who are active participants, seasonal residents, short-term tourists, people who attend only for special services (such as Christmas and Easter) parents of children who are active participants, local groups who meet in the church facility, and people searching for a church home. We recognize that their needs are generally for a meaningful worship service that includes them and results in their feeling actively accepted, welcome, and connected.

Members of the Local Community

The members of the local community have been categorized as physical neighbors, Growing Tree Pre-school families, the local population, and Tampa Bay area residents. The needs of this community were also considered as the mission study process was being conducted.

- o Physical Neighbors – The physical neighbors of the PCPH facility are looking for the church to be a positive presence in the area. They want the facilities and property to be kept up and they do not want the activities of PCPH to infringe on their activities and lives. Simply, they want a good neighbor.
- o Growing Tree Preschool Families – While several families with children attending the Growing Tree are active participants in PCPH, most are not. They are looking for a quality preschool experience that instills Christian values for their children.
- o Local Community – For purposes of the study, the local community was viewed as the people that observe PCPH as an entity and that interact with our active participants in their daily activities. This group looks for PCPH, as an entity, to be a positive contributor to the local area. They look to PCPH to be a place to celebrate Christmas and Easter. They also look at PCPH and its members as examples of Christian behavior.
- o Tampa Bay Area Residents – The Tampa Bay area is a metropolis with surrounding rural and agricultural areas. There are many people with a broad range of needs in the area. Their perspective of any church is that it is a possible source of support and help.

The Non-Local World

PCPH views the world as broader than its physical location. There are many people, throughout the world, who are in need and are looking for active support, help, and a

Christian example. There are also service entities that provide support that are looking for financial contributions to their work.

The Mission of PCPH

PCPH views its mission as an aspiration and a direction for us. We summarize our mission with the following mission statement:

Our mission is to create a close church family that grows in our relationship with God and demonstrates his love. We bridge people's diverse worship needs for energy and peace, study God's Word to guide our daily lives, care for one another, and serve needs in our community.

The following comments clarify the intent of several of the phrases in the statement.

- "close church family": We are not striving to grow for the purpose of being big. We value being small enough to know each other, care for each other, and to continue our family atmosphere.
- "demonstrates his love": We want to be known for living an example of God's love in everything we do. This includes how we care for each other, care for those in our community, interact with those with whom we play and do business, and care for those beyond our immediate reach.
- "bridges people's diverse worship needs": We recognize that different people have different needs and preferences related to the worship experience. We are driven by a desire to worship as a multi-generational, extended family. We do not envision providing worship that is committed to a single genre of worship style but one that we can share together.
- "study the Word to guide our daily lives": Through messages, study, and other activities, we want to address the issues we face in our daily lives and current events as Christians using the messages of the Bible for guidance. This doesn't mean being told the answer but jointly struggling, searching, and exploring.
- "care for one another": We are looking to be a caring church that knows each other, helps each other through life's challenges, and actively welcomes all with whom we come into contact.
- "service needs in our community" – We want to have broad participation in active mission work focused in the Tampa Bay community in addition to our financial support of service organizations.

Direction Underpinning Mission Statement

The mission direction of PCPH is based upon decisions made regarding key questions for a church's direction. A broad range of alternatives were considered. Together, these decisions start to give us a vision of what PCPH may look like as it pursues its mission. A matrix of the alternatives considered and the decisions among those alternatives is depicted below.

PCPH Mission Framework							
# Church Members	Age Focus	Programmatic & Education Focus	Internal Care Focus	Mission Focus	Evangelism Focus	Teaching Focus	Worship Impact
<200	Retired	Create a strong foundation for Children & Youth (CY)	Pastoral care	Contributions from church	Presence and observation	Bible in context	Comfort
200-400	Youth	CY plus a strong new Christian foundation	Pastoral care + friends looking out for each other	Tithing contributions from church	Presence, observation, & active electronic presence	Biblical – theological & interpretive	Feel connected to a rock (tradition)
400-700	Adult	CY plus maintenance for interested adults	Pastoral care + a group providing internal congregational care	Contributions from church + youth mission activities	Directed evangelism action	Biblical application to daily life today	Feel connected to a family
700+	Retired & Youth	CY plus aggressive development for adults	Pastoral care + a large internal congregational care system	Contributions from church + local all-congregation mission activities	Directed action plus advertising	Biblical application to current issues	Reflection and profound contemplation
	Adult & Retired	Intergenerational growth		Contributions from church + non-local mission activities		Daily life guidance from Christian perspective	Re-energized
	Youth, Adult, & Retired					Dealing with current issues from Christian perspective	Uplifted
						Daily life guidance & dealing with current issues from Christian perspective	Meaningful impact whether the individual's need is comfort, feeling connected to a family, reflection and profound contemplation, re-energization, or uplifting

The following describes some of the thoughts behind each of the directions selected:

- a) Church Size: We value being an intimate church that knows and cares for each other as family and are not driven by being too large. Our estimate of size where that is reasonably achievable is up to approximately 400 *active participants*. That would translate into a *membership size* of 400 – 700. The objective is to fill the niche of a congregation for those seeking a close-knit family where they know or recognize most people. At the larger end of the spectrum, we might support up to two worship services and have critical mass to be able to sustain most initiatives without depending on a few key people.

- Church Size**
- <200
 - 200-400
 - 400-700
 - 700+

- b) Age Focus: The congregation has a drive to be an extended family and as such needs active participants across all age groups. For PCPH, this means bringing together people in a way that we are a family and not just having representative demographic numbers.

- Age Focus**
- <Retired
 - Youth
 - Adult
 - Retired & Youth
 - Youth & Adult
 - Adult & Retired
 - Youth, Adult, & Retired

- c) Programmatic & Education Focus: For a multi-generational congregation we need strong active programs for children/youth and for all adults. While we embrace intergenerational interaction, we do not intend to focus on intergenerational program activities because this adds an additional challenge for our limited resources.

- Programmatic & Education Focus**
- Create a strong foundation for Children & Youth (CY)
 - CY plus a strong new Christian foundation
 - CY plus maintenance for interested adults
 - CY plus aggressive development for adults
 - Intergenerational growth

- d) Internal Care Focus – We need to improve how we look after each other. We want to do this using a combination of pastoral care and an intentional system that engages much of the congregation in providing the care. This is intended to be a hallmark of our congregation and as such needs broad participation. There will likely be several lay leaders, but the desired overall approach is some type of system or structure that involves many members. We don't view this as a designated body to provide the care but something that structurally involves much of the congregation.

- Internal Care Focus**
- Pastoral care
 - Pastoral care + friends looking out for each other
 - Pastoral care + a group providing internal congregational care
 - Pastoral care + a large internal congregational care system

- e) Mission Focus – Our target is to have broad active congregational involvement in serving our local area. This supports our serving others, brings us together by working together, and is the example we want to set for the community, aligned with our evangelism approach. While the youth are currently active in this endeavor, broader active involvement, rather than mostly passive financial support, is the direction for the future. This will not only extend our impact on the community and set the example we want to set, but it will bring us closer together in the active effort.

- Mission Focus**
- Contributions from church
 - Tithing contributions from church
 - Contributions from church + youth mission activities
 - Contributions from church + local all-congregation mission activities
 - Contributions from church + non-local mission activities

- f) Evangelism Focus – We see our evangelism style as having an active presence in the community, setting examples of Christian behavior and Christian mission both as a church and individuals. The nature of our congregation is not “hard push,” but witness by example.

- Evangelism Focus**
- Presence and observation
 - Presence, observation, & active electronic presence
 - Directed evangelism action
 - Directed action plus advertising

- g) Teaching Focus – There is a general hunger to develop guidance in dealing with the challenges of daily life and the world issues we face as Christians.

- Teaching Focus**
- Bible in context
 - Biblical – theological & interpretive
 - Biblical application to daily life today
 - Biblical application to current issues
 - Daily life guidance from Christian perspective
 - Dealing with current issues from Christian perspective
 - Daily life guidance & dealing with current issues from Christian perspective

- h) Worship Impact on Participants – Since we are targeting a multi-generational and varied-background congregation, our congregational members look for the worship to have a broad range of impacts on them. There may not be just one particular approach, style, or method that can deliver that. Consequently, we are looking to explore, support and accept a variety of worship styles and formats. This does not suggest a complete abandonment of what we are doing today, but an evolution of our approach to reach a multi-generational group worshipping as a family.

- Worship Impact**
- Comfort
 - Feel connected to a rock (tradition)
 - Feel connected to a family
 - Reflection and profound contemplation
 - Re-energized
 - Uplifted
 - Meaningful impact whether the individual's need is comfort, feeling connected to a family, reflection and profound contemplation, re-energization, or uplifting

These decisions about our direction recognize that this is not where we are today but rather, where we see ourselves headed in the future. The portions highlighted (in yellow or gray) below, reflect our assessment of our current status; those circled (in red or gray) indicate where our target for the future.

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Guidance for Pastor Selection

Consistent with the mission for PCPH, there are several critical challenges for the new permanent pastor in leading the congregation. These challenges include:

- Leading us in fine-tuning the mission study as our new leader and establishing a tactical implementation approach.

- Re-engaging a congregation that has been through several years of transition. This will include personally connecting across the broad spectrum of generations through personal interaction and motivation.
- Establishing a worship approach that bridges the needs of our diverse congregation. The results of such a “bridge” would span from an energizing worship experience to one that offers opportunity for reflection and peacefulness. This may be accomplished through a flexible approach to worship including the consideration of varying styles and a blending of long-held traditions with innovation.
- Leading the charge in establishing a system to better provide congregational care using both pastoral and broad congregational participation.
- Helping us increase our active mission involvement in the local area.

The Pastor Nominating Committee has the responsibility to determine the details of the approach to attracting and nominating a new pastor. While the study did not lead to any suggested demographic attribute (i.e. age, gender, level of experience, etc.) as being significant for success for the next pastor, it did suggest several competencies that are important. The characteristics described below are offered to the Pastor Nominating Committee as a non-exhaustive list of characteristics for their consideration of pastoral candidates.

Some Key Competencies/Characteristics	
Characteristic	What do we see
Engaging Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conveys energy & passion - Message is encouraging & hopeful - Message is relevant for dealing with daily life or current issues
Interpersonal Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proactively connects with everyone - Enjoys and values interaction with people - Cares about others - Is involved where others are involved
Mission focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Views congregational care as a mission - Fosters a culture and practice of care for the world around us in a scope and scale that makes a difference - Is personally engaged in mission efforts

Some Key Competencies/Characteristics	
Characteristic	What do we see
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognizes the need for change and is open to it - Appropriately balances change and continuity - Adapts to the needs of others - Innovates and tries new things (doesn't view non-success as failure but as learning) - Not the same thing all the time - Tolerance & understanding for other views
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thinks strategically & conveys vision effectively - Engages & empowers others in working in a common direction - Establishes structure to implement vision - Works to develop others (both staff and congregation)

Mission Study Process

The transition between permanent pastors has been a long period for PCPH. Our previous pastor of about 10 years retired in early 2015 and we undertook a process to find an interim pastor. At the time, PCPH had good momentum on its strategic objectives through the establishment of a vibrant and substantial children and youth program. The opportunity to evaluate the mission was ideal as PCPH was ready to assess its next direction having made good progress toward its previous goals. The mission study process started with a comprehensive review of the past under the direction of an interim pastor. As we were preparing to explore alternatives for our future direction, our interim pastor passed away unexpectedly and we had to repeat the process of finding an interim pastor. Our second interim pastor has now led us through the necessary process of discernment, resulting in the preparation of our Mission Study. The Mission Study will serve to inform our Pastor Nominating Committee, assist in the pastor search process and guide our forward planning.

Following are the high-level steps taken in executing the mission study.

1. Study and understand the approach, intent, and steps in a mission study.
2. Engage the congregation in reflecting on the history of PCPH by creating a PCPH history timeline marked with personal memories.

3. Survey the congregation for their reasons for being part of PCPH and their perceptions of PCPH today.
4. Compile the information from the survey and share it with the congregation.
5. Hold small group meetings with PCPH participants (congregation members and active participants) to solicit views and ideas for the future of PCPH
6. Review the information from the congregation and develop a consolidated view of direction and mission for PCPH.
7. Document the mission study.

From the outset, the session functioned as the mission study team. This was fortuitous considering the long transition period and the evolutions of the session leadership during this period. At different times, different subsets of the session completed the primary work on a step in the process with subsequent review by the remainder of the session. Decisions have generally been made by consensus.

The survey mentioned in step three above received 139 responses. The data is consolidated in a document titled, "Presbyterian Church of Palm Harbor, Survey Number One – "My life at PCPH"," and dated October, 2015. Analysis of the data confirms the diversity of perspectives in our congregation. The congregation had a significant period of time to reflect on the information from this survey during the transition to a second interim pastor.

The mission study effort then moved to discerning the way forward for PCPH. The congregation was invited to attend one of five small group meetings, at times and places designed to encourage participation, in order to explore a vision for the future. There were 69 participants across the five meetings. Each meeting was facilitated by two people and the five questions used to initiate the discussion at the meetings follow.

- Describe the kinds of new people you want to see worship with us in the next few years?
- What do you sense God is calling the PCPH church family to be and do in the next five years?
- If God were to do one great thing at PCPH in the next few years, what would it be?
- What is our vision for what our worship should be like?
- What changes do you believe need to happen at PCPH in order to grow our congregation?

During a subsequent Saturday working meeting, a subset of the session analyzed the available information, including the input from the congregational survey and concepts

suggested in the small group meetings, and developed the key elements of mission and vision for the future. This direction and the associated decisions were reviewed by the remaining members of session before documentation began.

While this study has helped those consolidate an exciting vision for the future, we recognize that we will have a new leader with the addition of a permanent pastor. Our intent is to revisit our vision for the future with the new pastor within the first year, either for confirmation or adjustment. We believe this is important to ensure we are fully aligned as we develop the approach and strategic plan to achieve the mission of PCPH.