

Be Thou My Vision

Pursuing Transformational Commitment, Investment, and Engagement at White Memorial Presbyterian Church

October 2022

At White Memorial we worship, embrace, and serve in order that we might lend our voices to the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his love. Our most ardent hope is to be a community dedicated to the testimony of God's good news and serving our neighbors. We envision a congregation that deeply commits to, joyously invests in, and fervently engages with our community of faith in pursuit of White Memorial's mission to worship, embrace, and serve.

Background

Nationally church membership has been declining steadily over two decades, and for the first time, less than half the US population is church-affiliated. Despite this general trend, our numbers are encouraging:

- WMPC membership has continued to move upward in recent years with young families constituting a significant percentage of our new members
- While fewer households within the church are pledging, overall giving is up
- Combining in-person and online numbers, worship attendance is higher than pre-COVID numbers
- Church programs continue to thrive with both strong staff and lay leadership

The foundation set by those who came before us is strong, and this endeavor comes, not from crisis, but in search of opportunity.

The Process

This vision is the result of dozens of interviews since April 2022 with all pastors, select staff and lay leadership, and peer churches. Our search acknowledges that there is so much to rejoice about in the life of WMPC. During this period, we heard story after story from staff and congregational leaders expressing gratitude for the many ways WMPC is already excellent:

- An expert, enthusiastic, and empathetic pastoral staff

- A worship experience that both challenges and encourages
- An impressive and enriching music program
- Purposeful programming for children of all ages
- An extensive youth program for middle and high schoolers
- Leadership in our community and our Presbytery

Indeed, we have an embarrassment of riches –talents, resources, relationships, and opportunities to engage.

Additionally, we heard recurring themes around challenges that WMPC currently faces – some newly emerging, some longer term. These themes include a desire to be more intentional with our efforts in several areas, identifying ways to increase engagement of our membership, and enhancing communication based on these objectives. These challenges led to the creation of a set of strategic directions underpinning our vision of congregational commitment, investment, and engagement under three key areas: Christian Education, Outreach, and Congregational Care.

As we deliberated possibilities and defined strategic initiatives, we used a few guiding principles:

- We aspired to create “moon shots,” harkening to John F. Kennedy’s ambitious assertion in 1962 that we would have a man on the moon within 10 years. As far-fetched as that sounded at the time, it took only seven years.
- We aim for these strategic initiatives to inspire and perhaps even take your breath away because they seem unattainable at first glance.
- We identified these initiatives irrespective of current roles and responsibilities/organization structure, believing that the initiatives can transcend current reality, and may inform shifts as priorities are crystallized.

We draw inspiration from the words of Ephesians 3:20-21: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, a world without end.”

2022 Strategic Vision Team

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Gather at the River

Membership that Welcomes

- **Create an office of engagement that yields higher overall involvement as measured by worship attendance, household giving, supplemental program attendance, and other measurements with noticeable improvements within 5 years**
 - Develop a systematic approach for integrating new members into the church over their first 3 years
 - Links to existing members who can serve as mentors or church “hosts”
 - Specific invitations to events
 - Opportunities to usher
 - Programs to specifically “touch” each household annually
 - Personal invitation to (1) an event, (2) outreach volunteer events, (3) volunteer opportunities within the church
 - Staff letter or call
 - Create multi-generational opportunities for family participation to serve
 - Identify a Membership Engagement Coordinator to recruit strong lay leadership and develop and maintain an energetic training program
 - Within 15 months, outline program to equip lay leaders with training, and identify lay leadership succession (ideally a 3-year rotation) in each ministry
 - Within 15 months, identify from current staff, outsource, or hire a membership engagement coordinator to recruit and engage lay leadership (this is a position that is for the entire church and spans congregational ministries, faith formation and outreach)
 - Within 2 years, host a retreat to engage the network including pastors, member engagement coordinator and key lay leadership
 - Every 2 years, host an engagement retreat to energize leaders and share best practices

How Firm a Foundation

Christian Education that Inspires

- **Empower staff to craft a strategic approach to adult congregational learning**
 - Add a Director of Christian Education by summer 2023, to create and/or coordinate curricula within 4 years for strategic faith formation for WMPC adults, complementing programming implemented by the children's ministry.
 - Measure congregational participation (target: 50% within the next 5 years) and gather congregational feedback for ongoing development.

- **Become a leader in Christian education within the next 5-10 years by developing innovative and accessible educational programs in physical and virtual spaces**
 - Within 3 years, establish a committee to create/offer five entry-level educational opportunities annually (Theology 101, Presbyterianism 101) geared to intergenerational audiences, with the Pastoral Resident as volunteer support
 - Host quarterly limited scope programming complementing other ongoing programs (Wednesday night speakers, special Sunday seminars) that can inform small group convenings
 - In the next 1-2 years, re-energize the Theologian-in-Residence program as an integrated part of the faith formation curriculum
 - Develop a library of recordings that are easily accessible online as an outward facing part of the church's educational growth
 - Invest in technology and training to enable effective hybrid programming within the next year
 - Host annual meetings with Presbyterian seminaries and area colleges/universities for idea exchange and new program concepts beginning within the next 5 years

- **Develop shared ownership of faith formation among the congregation and staff through training and leadership development**
 - By the 2023-2024 academic year, develop, train, and deploy a network of lay leadership to bring these programs to our congregation concurrently with curricula development and/or implementation
 - Convene quarterly a committee of staff and lay leadership, to begin meeting in 2024, to review these programs, measure progress against targets, assess new opportunities, connect with each other, and share best practices
 - Cultivate staff culture of regular involvement in educational programming

- **Build a thriving small group culture that prioritizes innovation and flexibility**
 - Within 1 year, identify a set of criteria that defines small groups at WMPC, enabling current groups to continue successfully meeting
 - In 2023, pilot six to ten time-limited small groups that meet twice per month around an established curriculum
 - Some small groups should be in-person and some should be virtual, but no small group should intend to mix in-person and virtual attendance
 - Curriculum may be either pre-existing and purchased, or created by pastors through limited series of live and recorded lectures
 - Groups each assigned ten-twelve members by topic, meeting time, and if appropriate, geography.
 - Groups should initially be led by pastor facilitators for up to six weeks, at which point each group should transition to a congregational facilitator if successful.
 - In summer 2023, contract with a representative from a similarly situated church with a successful small group program to consult on opportunities for a WMPC program
 - By winter 2023, establish a twice-yearly onboarding period where current and new small groups are encouraged to welcome new members, if appropriate, clearly communicating the joining opportunity to new and current church members

We are One in the Spirit

Outreach that Empowers

- **Make WMPC a vehicle of choice for charitable financial giving and volunteering opportunities to vetted and established partners.**
 - Within 3 years, establish an “Outreach Placement Committee” to serve as a clearinghouse for cataloging beneficiaries and matching committed volunteers to organizations in need. This committee will keep track of WMPC members serving on boards and regularly volunteering at various organizations, assisting the Outreach Allocations Committee. This placement committee will work to bring our WMPC “missionaries” together, increasing the sense of community.
 - Within 5 years, WMPC will work to receive and create consensus grants from other philanthropic organizations to do big things.
 - We will engage funding organizations and endowments to match monies from WMPC to fund deserving organizations for a finite period of time (e.g., 3-5 years).
 - Within 8 years, WMPC will build a coalition with other local churches to provide a self-governing group of community-oriented giving organizations.
 - Over the next 8 years, WMPC will identify 2 organizations similar to StepUp Ministry nearly 35 years ago -- fledgling organizations on the cusp of becoming integral to the community.
 - These entities, with proven committed leadership for a minimum of 3 years, will require more substantial funding to get off the ground.
 - WMPC will support them with more money for a shorter, concentrated yet finite period of time (e.g., 3-5 years).
 - Over the next 10 years, WMPC will move gradually to a model defining that 80% of the outreach allocations budget goes to 10 mission objective charities, and the remaining 20% goes to the rest. This will concentrate our impact on key organizations that align with WMPC’s overall mission.
- **Improve our communication about outreach, both within our congregation as well as to the outside community**
 - Within 6 months, establish regular, repeated communication updates via the bulletin, the newsletter, the WMPC website/app/social media.
 - Within 6 months, ensure outreach efforts are regularly discussed by our ordained staff (e.g., a quarterly outreach-related update from the pulpit)
 - Within 1 year, categorize all current outreach allocation recipients into groups (e.g., feeding the hungry, medical, homelessness) and regularly promote them. Publications targeting the congregation and detailing our

involvement and accomplishments will make use of videos, marketing pieces, social media, website updates, newsletters, etc.

- **Improve our outreach program from the perspectives of both participation and benevolent giving.**
 - Within 10 years, double our outreach program participation to create more opportunities for fellowship, faith development, and benevolence.
 - Assure that outreach, as defined as service to others, is a component of every activity and group within the church.
 - Success will be measured by the number of participants in outreach activities, funds given, and numbers of giving households.
 - Ensure that WMPC members are active board members and/or regular volunteers in all WMPC-sponsored outreach.

It Is Well with My Soul

Congregational Care that Restores

- **Strengthen our Congregational Ministries by activating a network of leadership to effectively care for the membership through all life stages from cradle to grave.**
 - Perform ongoing evaluation and provide framework for pastoral support of current ministries
 - Within 12 months, complete evaluation of current ministries to continue to identify overlapping duties and gaps in congregational care
 - Within 12 months, assign pastoral staff to each ministry based on the demographics of the group served
 - Every 2 years – complete comprehensive assessment of all ministries and training perhaps in connection with Pastoral resident assignments
 - Within 10 years, become the pastoral care model to leverage leadership training with other churches
- **Energize, Activate and Refocus Diaconate as a major arm of Congregational Care**
 - For the 2023 nomination process, revise forms and continue to provide communication to clearly articulate roles and responsibilities and commitment to consider when nominating Deacons.
 - For 2023 entering Deacon class, host a retreat including entire Diaconate. Consider a “buddy” system where experienced Deacons mentor new class one on one
 - Continue to centralize and improve communication to Deacons about member needs and clarify care teams based on individual gifts.
- **Nourish our Pastoral Staff and fully staff Congregational Care positions to provide flexibility in times of crises and allow our staff breathing room as they lead the congregation in Christ centered care**
 - Within 6 months, Personnel Committee approve a plan for professional teambuilding and spiritual development opportunities providing resources for ongoing care to sustain our pastoral staff
 - Retain a Parish Associate within 12 months to assist with the heavy load of bereavement Pastoral Care
 - Review options for hiring or partnering with a Social Worker/ Trained Counselor within 2 years to oversee development of programs addressing physical and mental health issues at all stages of life (this is a suggestion to address primarily issues with adolescent addiction, anxiety and depression and their families)

Come Labor On

Next Steps to Bringing the Vision to Life

To enact our vision of congregational commitment, investment, and engagement in the strategic directions listed above, our team suggests the Session:

- Establish an Implementation Committee to oversee the efforts to bring the vision to reality; there may be Sessional sub-committees for each strategic initiative
- Establish benchmarks/metrics for success
- Look at roles and responsibilities in light of the vision to determine any realignment of focus areas for staff
- Consider focus on communications and events aimed to engage dialogue and enhance buy-in for the vision, such as a “road show” led by Session members with the support of Strategic Vision team members