



CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2023 MISSION STUDY

Central Presbyterian Church

Montclair, New Jersey

May 23, 2023

Overview

This Mission Study starts with a brief description of Central Presbyterian Church (“Central”), presents our Mission Statement, provides a description of the operational structure of the church, its mission and the hopes and desires of Central.

As we transition towards hiring a new pastor and with the recent reorganization of the Session as outlined below, we realize that our understanding of God’s plan for us is always being revealed. This document is our best attempt to measure our resources and goals in order to help prospective pastors match their spiritual call to us.

This Mission Study reflects both who we are now and who we aspire to be as a Church. Each area of activity within our Church attempts to flow from our Mission Statement, which guides and directs how we do God’s work.

Process

At the end of 2022, the Session of Central appointed a committee to draft a Mission Study for approval and submission to the Presbytery. The committee reviewed an Executive Insite Report provided by Presbytery for the population within a 15 minute drive of Central. The committee then collected internal feedback in several ways. A meeting was held for the entire church population to 1) review the history of Central in context to the times 2) review and discuss the relevance of our Mission Statement 3) discuss and examine the talents that we as a church are looking for in our next pastor. A separate 4-hour retreat was held with key leaders of the church to perform a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. The Mission Study team created a survey and asked the entire congregation to participate in the survey in order to gather further feedback on how we see ourselves now, what we are looking for in our next pastor, and where we see ourselves in the coming years.

About Central: Past and Present

Central Presbyterian Church in Montclair can trace its roots to the 1667 founding of The Church in Newark. Desiring their own local church, in 1796, the Presbyterian Society of West Bloomfield was created, which built the First Presbyterian Church of Montclair, "Old First." After a split in 1886 that created Trinity Presbyterian Church, the two were reunited in 1913 to become Central Presbyterian Church of Montclair. The current sanctuary and church house were completed and dedicated in 1922.

Today, Central uses its sanctuary for regular worship and occasionally rents that space for events, including to local synagogue Bnai Keshet for their High Holy Days. The church house houses office space for staff, several rooms for Sunday School as well as a nursery used during Sunday worship for younger children. Additional office space is rented to a local non-profit, Family Promise, and classroom space is rented to Park Street Academy pre-k. Central is currently in the process of reclaiming the chapel space in the church house building for smaller worship services and small group gatherings. In addition, Central is working towards upgrading its nursery facility for Mint Daycare @ Central, a weekday daycare for children ages 0-3, with plans for the daycare to become a nonprofit organization and mission partner of Central. Central also fully owns a manse just several blocks away from the Church buildings.

Central's membership is becoming increasingly diverse, and is currently made up of approximately 20% BIPOC and ranges through all age groups. This is a slight increase from our last Mission Study in 2012. There are a number of families with children who regularly attend and are becoming the leaders of the church. We have also noted that

Central is changing as the community around us is changing, as both our visitors / non-member population and the youth of the church are more racially diverse than the membership.

Our Mission Statement

In 2012, Central adopted this Mission Statement:

“As disciples of Jesus Christ and good stewards of God’s Grace, we are a caring, inclusive congregation that strives to grow in Christian Faith, proclaim the Good News, and provide service in ministry to each other, our diverse community, and the world.”

Recognizing the changes in the world and in our community, we have reexamined our ministries in light of our Mission Statement. We have discovered the following areas where life and ministry at Central has and is changing.

The Current Context of the Ministry at Central Presbyterian Church

As we have prayerfully approached the task of preparing and recording this snapshot of Central, we recognize the changes in dynamics that have impacted Central, the community of Montclair, the United States and the world, that informs both this document, but also the future ministry at Central.

Among the powerful factors that are impacting Central include:

- The Covid-19 pandemic affected everyone. Central and all churches faced the challenge and stress of making adjustments to every aspect of life, worship and ministry. We made significant changes in worship through the need of providing online options. People gathered remotely as Zoom provided a method for people to meet. Decisions were made differently as needs changed and as the church sought to adapt to the changing dynamics. As we move into the world that has been changed forever by the pandemic, we are continuing to sort through how we share Jesus Christ in this community and the opportunities God is presenting to us.
- The changing spiritual environment in the United States is impacting how people choose to participate with churches. According to the research organization Barna Group, one in three practicing Christians has stopped attending church.

- The changing role that technology plays both in the life of the church and people's lives. Over the past ten years we have experienced the expansion of the role of Social Media in people's lives and the greater U.S. culture. iPhones were released in 2007 and people's use and dependence upon phones, tablets and other devices have changed how we communicate both in style and substance. Within the context of the church, the need to be comfortable living in this environment has changed how we share the Good News and how we communicate. It is becoming increasingly apparent that a church's website is being transformed into the primary portal of sharing and introducing new and curious people to the church and provides a central place for members and friends to keep connected.
- We recognize the changes that have taken place both at Central and in Montclair. Montclair is becoming a more diverse and affluent community where people are moving here from New York City and surrounding communities. There is a greater diversity of people who have not only lived in many countries, but come from different religious and spiritual backgrounds. During the past ten years, Central began to recognize the community changes which led to a reexamination of the mission and ministry of the church, leading to the completion of the New Beginnings Process about eight years ago. The process informed the church of the need to broaden its identity by recognizing the importance of reaching out and developing relationships with neighbors. The church began to intentionally create opportunities to connect and communicate with families who have children less than three-years old. The church's vision of ministry has and is broadening.
- Central began to examine how it seeks to execute its ministry plan. Around the same time that the New Beginnings process was being completed, the leadership recognized that there was the need to change the methods of making decisions and fulfilling its mission and ministry goals. In the midst of moving towards making structural changes, the Covid pandemic along with the departure of Pastor David Noble caused the church to delay this process.
- There is the realization that Central is a smaller church. The membership is 117. Numerically, the changes in membership have not been significant in the past few years. However, the church's organization and ministry plan is predicated on having large boards and lots of committees. Human resources are being stretched thin. We are finding that we have a growing number of people who are participating in the life and ministry of the church, but are not "joining the church." We are understanding that this dynamic of people participating in local churches but not joining is not unique to Central.

Within this context we prayerfully share our Mission Study Report with the Session of Central Presbyterian Church, the Congregation of Central, and the Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey. We are ultimately curious how the discoveries and sharing by members and friends of the church, our research into our community, and the profound conversations that we have had throughout this process will inform how we will move forward to share Christ in this community and world.

Among the important discoveries is that the Mission Statement, created in 2012, continues to reflect the church's understanding of its current mission and ministry. This has been confirmed through conversations with the leadership and congregation over the last few months.

Currently the mission and ministry at Central is lived out through the workings of the following areas.

Worship:

Worship is a central part of life at Central Church, with regular worship attendance averaging over half of the membership. The worship service follows a traditional structure and tone. We stream services weekly through Facebook, which began during the pandemic. We continue to attract a number of new and regular visitors to worship. Carrying on the tradition of one of Central's past congregants, William Batchelder Bradbury, composer of "Jesus Loves Me" and "He Leadeth Me," music plays a vital role in our worship experience. Led by Music Director Ed Alstrom, we have a choir of approximately 12 which is now often supplemented by two paid section leaders. We use our pipe organ along with other instruments to enhance our worship experience and are blessed with talented musicians in the congregation who provide additional musical offerings.

Christian Education:

Sunday School is provided during worship for children through grade 6. A youth group (grades 7-12) meets on an occasional basis. Central has met for small book groups on Wednesdays for 6-8 week periods several times over the past year. A lay-led Men's Bible study meets twice per month on Saturday mornings via Zoom.

Finance:

Central's operating budget is approximately \$525,000 for fiscal 2023. Operating expenses will be covered by pledge income and general giving of an estimated \$145,000, projected rental income of \$245,000, interest and dividend income of \$50,000 and withdrawals from endowment of \$85,000.

The most significant change with our financial condition has been the reduction of pledges and general giving over the last decade, in part due to members passing away, members moving away from the area, and the impact of Covid. We are fortunate to have facilities that generate rental income to offset lower pledge and congregational giving.

Fellowship:

Led mainly by the Deacons, fellowship is one of the things that Central does best. Coffee Hour is held weekly after worship. There are also several major fellowship events held throughout the year - the annual church-wide picnic in June and the Thanksgiving Dinner in November. It is at events like this that Central earns its reputation as welcoming and friendly.

Social Justice:

Central Presbyterian Church is a Covenant Network congregation, a community within the Presbyterian Church, USA, that seeks to be inclusive, particularly with regard to welcoming LGBT persons as members and leaders. A contingent of Central members attended the 2022 Out Montclair pride festival together that took place nearby the church.

In 2021, Central chose to make a more public statement about the intense and widespread national examination of inequality and injustice, and approved placement for signage outside the front of the church asserting support for Black lives and LGBT lives, along with others who regularly experience injustice or disrespect. The resulting 2 banners are meant to be a public witness to justice and respect based on Christian faith as well as a call to Central to not only be aware of the issue in our community, but also to be re-dedicated to creating an environment in our diverse congregation where “all are welcome.”

Mission

In 2022 Central gave Mission funds to PCUSA Disaster Relief, providing blankets, mattresses, and food assistance; Doctors Without Borders, providing medical care; CARE, providing food, shelter, and hygiene assistance; and UNICEF, providing water and sanitation.

Buildings and Grounds

Central makes every effort to use its space in a manner befitting the church’s Mission Statement. While the buildings and grounds require ongoing attention to upkeep and maintain, we are blessed to have spaces for community groups to gather. In addition to

the afore-mentioned tenants, we also rent space to AA, the Police Athletic League, a children's music program, and other churches and groups to use for special events.

1-2-3 Kids

As part of the New Beginning process that Central undertook in 2015, outreach towards families with young children was identified as a key undertaking that the church should take. With the hiring of a coordinator for the program, a series of monthly 1-2-3 Kids events was created, ranging from magicians to hands-on science activities to holiday events, including the most popular, our annual Halloween event. Some of these were held via Zoom during the start of the pandemic. With the loss of the paid position and loss of momentum post-pandemic, there were just three 1-2-3 Kids events held in 2022.

What We Learned About Ourselves

Executive Insite Report

In comparing our church family to the population of the surrounding area, per the Executive Insite Report, we mirror the "neighborhood" including our diversity, income, and general demographics. One area we do not reflect our community is age. Our active congregation is 10-15 years older than the surrounding community. Another point of interest from that report, where we see ourselves reflected, is the section highlighting what is very important to people in religious programs or ministry preferences (in order):

- Social justice advocacy works
- Cultural programs (music, drama, art)
- Health/weight loss programs
- Involvement in social causes

And what is modestly important (in order)

- Quality sermons
- Warm and friendly encounters
- Traditional worship experience
- Opportunities to develop personal relationships
- Family oriented activities
- Seniors/retirees activities
- Religious activities for children

We recognize with people returning from COVID and the retirement of Pastor Noble the following activities and programs are not currently happening:

- Community Movement Project, a pay-what-you-can movement program for kids and adults

- Human Needs Food Pantry collection
- Vacation Bible School
- Wednesday Lunchtime Bible Study
- Decrease in social activities
- Recurring Adult Education opportunities after Worship during Coffee Hour

Leadership Competencies

The Top Leadership Competencies the congregation would like to see in our next pastor, as identified the competencies as listed on the PIF and MIF:

- Preaching and Worship Leadership
- Flexibility
- Spiritual Maturity
- Motivator
- Advisor
- Self Differentiation
- Personal Resilience
- Culturally Proficient
- Collaboration
- Teacher
- Communicator
- Organizational Ability

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Members of the Mission Study Team and key leaders of Central gathered together for a workshop to perform a SWOT analysis at Central in March 2023, working together through discussions and in small groups to discern where Central is today. Below is a summary of our findings.

Strengths:

We are a welcoming, genuine, and caring congregation located near Montclair's business district. Our church life centers around a traditional Sunday Worship service which includes a strong musical program. Those who attend Central are diverse in age and demographics, talents and skills, and we have a core of active leaders and volunteers. At this time we are financially sound, with church buildings that serve us and the community.

Weaknesses:

With a long history of fellowship, mission, and Bible study opportunities, we are not currently consistent with activities in these areas due to our small numbers, transient

members, and volunteer burnout. We need modernization of our systems through technology and building upgrades. Large, older buildings require significant ongoing financial support. We are finding that we are relying on a greater dependency upon rental income and withdrawals from our endowment to fund our ministry.

Opportunities:

Central is a small congregation with creative people, ideas, and potential to engage deeper with our community due to our location and spaces. We see opportunities to increase fellowship and outreach activities by focusing on engagement in small groups, and see that technology and building upgrades could enhance how we do programs, activities, and engage with each other and our community.

Threats:

While Central has a committed core of members and volunteers, over-reliance on this core has a pattern of burnout. We are a small church trying to be big, at times able to adapt to new ways, at times tied to patterns of past decades. We have an over-reliance on the pastor due to our size. We need more engaged congregants to lead and implement programs and activities. This is one of the challenges we face in light of busy schedules and overall ideological secular dynamics in society.

Congregational Participation

Following our conversations with the congregation and SWOT leadership workshop, we conducted a survey to shed light on the positives and negatives of life at Central and the opinions of its members regarding the church's direction. Among the important discoveries was the realization that some of the congregation sees the future of Central in a positive and hopeful light, at the same time some of the congregation is less hopeful as they look at the future of ministry at Central.

Positives:

People feel a strong sense of belonging at Central, and a majority feel they would be missed if they stopped attending. Most also feel supported through prayers and that Central cares for its members. A huge majority believe Central is welcoming, fosters an environment of diversity, and is open to change.

Negatives:

More than half of respondents answered that they are not heavily involved in church beyond attending worship. People are split regarding feelings of hopefulness and ability to trust the leadership to make good decisions in these challenging times. Looking at

outreach, a majority feel that we emphasize self-preservation over mission. Since the pandemic, our involvement in actions to alleviate suffering and fight inequality and racism have decreased. There's a concern whether we have a healthy sense of mission.

In terms of individual and corporate spirituality, a majority feel that we are not spiritually vital and alive. The church needs to improve the cultivation of participants' God-given gifts, prioritize faith formation and disciple-making, engage in evangelism or spiritual outreach, and equip people to fulfill our mission and respond to needs outside of the church.

Key comments from the congregation when asked about what the church should focus on in the next five years:

- Build community by providing service in ministry to our diverse community and world
- Start to bring back some of what we used to do
- Develop small group activities that attract families and reach into the community
- Grow membership, develop leadership and effective staff team
- Bring attention to protocol and policy in order to execute mission in the community beyond

Respondents mixed feelings about how we see the life, in general, of Central changing over the next 5 years:

- Central is growing and expanding and needs to continue becoming more outward and service focused
- Central is declining and perhaps may close without increased membership, fellowship, and involvement

What have we learned from the information that we gathered?

We recognize the following about Central's sense of call and purpose as we move forward:

We find ourselves grounded in the words of our Mission Statement:

"As disciples of Jesus Christ and good stewards of God's Grace, we are a caring, inclusive congregation that strives to grow in Christian Faith, proclaim the Good News, and provide service in ministry to each other, our diverse community, and the world."

Our life together is transformed through our faithfully living out the Great Commandment:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* (Matthew 22:37-39, NRSV)

We affirm as a faith community that God in Christ Jesus has called us into the relational experience of sharing and receiving love.

Our grounding in faith is experienced through Sunday Worship. We believe as we gather, experience varied and good music, hear and respond to the Word of God, pray and celebrate sacraments, that we are God's visible community in Montclair.

Our life together is strengthened as we provide opportunities for people of all ages to grow and be nurtured in faith. Educational and learning experiences that are created and adapted for people of all ages provide the context for all to deepen one's relationship with God and others.

Our life together is transformed as we share Christ through the participation in mission activities. Our service to others provides concrete ways that people can express their faith commitment.

Our life together is strengthened through our genuine desire to be an open, loving community. We value relationships and delight in the ways we grow as we learn from one another. We value the gifts of all people as we grow as children of God. We accept people as we recognize the humanness of us all. We are not perfect, we simply want to be God's children.

We recognize that our future is predicated upon our ability to be Spirit led. For example, in our changing world, how are we being called to utilize the rapidly changing tools provided through technology.

We recognize that we will have experiences of success and failure. Successes often provide the confidence to move forward. Failures and losses educate us on how we might face future challenges.

We are excited and a little anxious as we face the "next" chapter of life and faith. As we understand these underpinnings of faith, we believe the future direction of the church involves the intentionality of building and growing. The leadership of the church has identified several vital aspects that Central needs to focus on in the coming years:

First, to adjust to the changing patterns of how people lead their lives by strengthening our use of technology in worship and in our communications, both internal and external. Second, meeting the needs of young families already in our church and those in our

community. Third, to become more involved in social justice and mission in partnership with others in the community already doing that well.

We need to do this while being mindful of maintaining who we are as a welcoming and friendly congregation who likes being together, celebrating God in community. We also need to be honest about who we are as a smaller church with limited resources but also more agility, and that it is with God's grace that we are entering this new phase in our church's life.

We recognize the importance of growing. We desire for all people to grow and deepen their faith in Christ. We believe our growth will be built upon nurturing the relational nature of our faith through small groups which will provide specific ways for the church to grow numerically.

It is out of a sense of life and with a sense of humbleness and determination to move forward into the future, we share this Mission Study document.

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Links:

<https://www.centralpresbyterian.net>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Presbyterian_Church_\(Montclair%2C_New_Jersey\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Presbyterian_Church_(Montclair%2C_New_Jersey))

<https://www.facebook.com/CentralPresbyterianMontclair>