

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF CHESTNUT HILL

Report of the Mission Study Committee September 2023



I. Where We Are

A. A Brief History

In the fall of 1850, when Chestnut Hill was little more than a small village on a well-traveled road, Rev. Roger Owen, the head of a boys' boarding school in Chestnut Hill, began holding Sunday afternoon religious services. The area's small but mighty Presbyterian community asked him to hold Sunday morning services at his school, and the first was held a year later, on November 16, 1851. The First Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill was chartered in May 1852 and was built at the corner of Rex and Germantown Avenues. In 1889 a schism among members over Christian education resulted in the formation of Trinity Presbyterian Church. Trinity Church was built on the northwest corner of Gravers Lane and Germantown Avenue.

In a very short time, however, it was felt by many that it was a mistake to have two churches of the same denomination in such close proximity. Talks of a merger began. Finally, in December 1929, Trinity Presbyterian Church and the First Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill joined to become The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill. The congregation occupied a building on Rex Avenue. Corydon Curtis Tyler of Trinity and William Colin Lee of First Presbyterian served as co-pastors. After a few years, Trinity Church was demolished, and the land sold.

The new united church grew, and facilities became strained. Plans had to be made for the future. Dr. Burleigh Cruikshank was called to the pulpit in 1941. When asked by the members how big a new building should be, he replied, "Make it as big as you want. I'll fill it." But World War II put everything on hold. Nevertheless, a gift of land for the new building from Annie Laughlin, as well as several unexpected and substantial gifts from individuals outside the congregation, and the monies from the sale of the old building, led to a ground-breaking. When the foundation for the new church was dug, enough Chestnut Hill stone was removed to construct the new building. On November 14, 1948, the cornerstone was laid and on March 12, 1950, the first service of worship

was held in the present sanctuary.

During the next ten years, the growth of the congregation was remarkable. Membership reached 1,300. Two Sunday morning services were necessary, and the Church School had 75 teachers serving 500 children. Soon it was time to build again. A long-range planning committee was formed and recommended that the church add a Church School wing, offices, a choir room, a reception room, a new kitchen, an organ, a chapel and an expanded parking space. Within a year of these additions, the church decided to open a pre-kindergarten school that continues to this day. During these years the church was led by a beloved minister and teacher, Dr. Joseph E. McCabe, whose book, *The Power of God in a Parish Program*, recounted his ministry in Chestnut Hill.

Following Dr. McCabe's tenure, the church continued under the leadership of Paul Stauning, Lincoln Griswold, and C. Vincent Wilson. In 1996, the congregation called its first female head of staff, Cynthia Jarvis. Under Ms. Jarvis, the church underwent the total renovation of the sanctuary, Widener Hall, the chapel and staff offices as well as the installation of a magnificent Mander pipe organ. In addition, during Ms. Jarvis' tenure, an active ministry to older adults was made possible by a gift of \$2 million to the endowment. In 2019, after 23 years, Ms. Jarvis retired, and the congregation called Dr. John Wilkinson as head of staff. Under Dr. Wilkinson's tenure, additional renovations, including a full kitchen upgrade and the installation of accessible restroom facilities, were completed. In April 2023, Dr. Wilkinson accepted a call to serve as the Director, Ministry Engagement and Support for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

The thriving Center on the Hill and preschool programs have made the church a regional center for lifelong learning. The established residencies of a number of superior music organizations – including the Grammy-winning Crossing choir - has earned the church a reputation as one of the region's premier centers of musical excellence.

B. The Surrounding Area

The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill (sometimes known affectionately in the community as "Ches Pres" but also as "PCCH" by members of the congregation) is located in Chestnut Hill, a "suburb in the city" of 11,000 people. While located within the city limits, much of its congregation is drawn from suburban communities in Montgomery County. Approximately 20% of the membership lives in Northwest Philadelphia (the neighborhoods of Chestnut Hill, Mt. Airy, and Germantown) and 80% in Montgomery County communities such as Wyndmoor, Erdenheim, Flourtown, Lafayette Hill, Plymouth Meeting, Fort Washington, Ambler, and Blue Bell.

The village of Chestnut Hill was part of the German Township laid out by Francis Daniel Pastorius and came to include the settlements originally known as Sommerhausen, Crefeld, and Cresheim.

It served as a gateway between Philadelphia and the nearby farmlands. During the American Revolutionary War era, the area was one of many summer vacation spots due to its higher elevation, 400–500 feet above sea level, and cooler temperatures than the historic central Philadelphia (Center City). From the mid-19th century through the mid-20th, the neighborhood served as both a "railroad suburb" and a "streetcar suburb" of Philadelphia, although it is within the Philadelphia city limits. Two regional rail lines still carry thousands of commuters and shoppers to and from Center City. The neighborhood contains a wide variety of 19th and early 20th-century residential buildings by many of the most prominent Philadelphia architects.

The communities from which the church's congregation is drawn are some of the most affluent and well-educated communities in the Philadelphia region. The median home value in Chestnut Hill is \$650,000; in Montgomery County, \$415,900. By comparison, the median home value in Philadelphia is \$213,300 – an increase of more than 44% over the past five years.

Household incomes and levels of education are consistent with real estate values. Over 69% of all adult residents of Chestnut Hill have a college degree or higher (compared to 32% in the city of Philadelphia and 38% in the Philadelphia metro area). Median household income in Chestnut Hill is \$122,000, and in Montgomery County is \$99,300, about twice the median in the City of Philadelphia (\$52,000).

II: Who We Are: The Congregation & Our Facilities

As a result of Covid-19, over the last four years church membership has declined slightly from 555 to 510 although growth has begun to rebound. To date in 2023, we have added 15 new members. In 2021, the church installed live stream/on-line worship capability, and returned to in person worship. As of 2023, weekly worship attendance finally has returned to pre-Covid levels – albeit in a slightly different configuration. As of 2023, weekly worship attendance (including live streaming and recorded viewing) has averaged 200 participants. Online worship (live streaming and recorded viewing) accounts for, on average, 25% of total worship participation.

The congregation is largely white (94% in 2022), affluent, and well-educated. There are more female than male members (40-60% range over the last four years).

Results of an anonymous church-wide survey (the “CAT” survey, which will be discussed in more detail below) conducted in 2018 show that 90% of respondents have earned at least a college degree and nearly half reported earning a graduate degree. The same survey found that two thirds of respondents reported a household income greater than \$100,000.

PCCH sits on approximately 3.3 acres. In addition to the 4,500 square foot sanctuary, which was completely renovated in 1998, including the installation of a magnificent pipe organ built by the Mander Organ Company of London, the church complex contains several other facilities which are all connected. In the main building, the ground floor contains the Center on the Hill, staff offices, the choir room, and the Harris Room, which serves as a meeting space. In addition to the sanctuary, the first floor of the main building contains Widener Hall, which serves as a large meeting space for the congregation after worship as well as providing space for meetings and activities throughout the week for both church and outside groups. The adjacent commercial kitchen – which was completely renovated in 2019 - enables us to use Widener Hall for dinners and receptions as well. The church administrative office and the reception room are also located on the first floor of the main building. The second floor (which is not currently accessible by elevator) contains the Melcher Room and an additional staff office.

Handicap accessible restrooms are on the ground and first floors of the main building and the first floor of the Strouse building.

The Strouse building houses the Burleigh Cruikshank Memorial Chapel, Church School rooms, several Preschool rooms, a youth lounge, and a wheelchair accessible bathroom on the first floor. The ground floor contains more Preschool rooms and another wheelchair-accessible bathroom. Seating in the 800 square foot chapel is open, making it easy to configure for many events, including small worship services, funerals, play readings, concerts, and Church School. In the courtyard between the main building and the Strouse building is a memorial garden, which is the final resting place for about 175 former members of PCCH.

III: What We Do

A. Worship



Above all things, the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill is an inclusive community of faith. We strive to keep God at the center of our lives in worship. As our Book of Common Worship states, "Our attention is drawn to the majesty and glory of the triune God, who created all things and by whose power all things are sustained..." The worship service at PCCH begins with a voluntary intended to prepare us for worship and center our thoughts on God. After a hymn of praise, we offer words of contrition, acknowledging our sins and our dependence on God's grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. At the center of our worship is the word read, sung (we sing the psalms most Sundays as was the custom of the earliest Reformers), proclaimed, and acted out in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Our children come forward after the reading of Scripture for a conversation about what the story might mean to them.

In the sermon, the minister seeks to interpret the meaning of Scripture through the work of the Spirit, the help of the church's theological tradition, and biblical scholarship, as well as the best and brightest voices from the sciences, the arts, and the humanities. This is truly a church whose preachers have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. After the word is proclaimed, the rest of the service is our ordered response to what we have heard: through our prayers for the world, our gifts offered for the work of the church, and our affirmation of the church's faith. Often the final hymn sends us out into the world as bearers of the news of God's love, justice, and mercy. On the first Sunday of each month, we celebrate the Lord's Supper.



Our worship service is also graced by our excellent Gallery Choir, under the direction of our music director and organist. The choir, which sings a variety of challenging music from all periods, is composed of members of the congregation and paid soloists. Occasionally the choir also performs public concerts for the community which have received enthusiastic critical reviews in the local press. Services are held on Sunday at 10 a.m., with two services on Easter Sunday. We hold an evening service on Ash Wednesday in the Chapel in which ashes are given to those who wish it. On Maundy Thursday, we hold a Tenebrae service of lessons, meditation, and communion. On Christmas Eve, a family Service of Lessons and Carols with a children's pageant is held in the late afternoon and a Service of Lessons and Carols in the evening.

B. Leadership and Governance

Our congregation is led by our 24-member Session, but the day-to-day operations of PCCH are run by the staff, as follows:

Rev. M. Craig Barnes (Interim Pastor and Head of Staff)
Rev. Russell Sullivan (part-time Minister of Visitation)

In addition, the church employs the following lay staff:

Dan Spratlan, Director of Music
Jeffrey DeVault, Organist and Associate Director of Music
Rachel Cline, Church Administrator
Julie Snyder, Director of Children's Education/Director, Joyful Noise and Youth Choir
Katherine Magid, Director, Youth Ministries
Megan Cullen, Director, Preschool
Mariangela Saavedra, Director, Center on the Hill
Leslie Lefer, Communications Coordinator
Evelyn Carpenter, Administrative Assistant
Felix Delgado, Sexton
Donna Marciel, Sunday Sexton
Debbie Lambeth, Sunday Child Care Giver

Over the past four years, PCCH has experienced a complete turnover of pastoral staff. In 2019, Rev. Jarvis retired after 23 years as pastor/head of staff. Dr. Wilkinson served in the same role for 3.5 years before accepting a position with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In May 2023, the Session appointed the Rev. Dr. M. Craig Barnes as Interim Pastor during our time of transition. The Session further appointed The Rev. Dr. Russell C. Sullivan, Jr. as part-time Minister of Visitation.

During the lengthy pastorate of Rev. Jarvis, there was extensive continuity with the associate pastors including the Rev. Austin Shelley (2012-2021) and the Rev. Brian Russo (2009-2023; ordained 2018). Within the past two years, both Revs. Shelley and Russo accepted calls to lead other churches as pastor and head of staff. According to the Philadelphia Presbytery, the departure of these two experienced associate pastors is neither completely unexpected, nor uncommon.

Prior to the departure of Dr. Wilkinson, the church had begun the process of discernment to define the appropriate scope of either an associate pastor position or multiple non-ordained part-time positions to replace Revs. Shelley and Russo. A number of listening sessions with the congregation were held in the first quarter of 2023,

In the summer of 2023, Session appointed Julie Snyder as part-time, Director of Children's Education/Director, Joyful Noise and Youth Choir. Session further appointed Katherine Magid as part-time Director, Youth Ministry.

Finally, a 24-member Board of Deacons serves as the hands and heart of the congregation for those who welcome our ministry of care. Providing pastoral care is a critical part of our church's ministry.

In addition to the Session, we have many standing committees that help to lead the church.

- *Adult Education Committee*- provides educational opportunities that work to increase the spiritual growth of the congregation. Additionally, the committee assists the staff in

planning programmatic educational series and collaborates with other committees to diversify the educational offerings of the church.

- *Christian Education Committee*- provides and oversees opportunities for Christian education for children and youth.
- *Finance and Budget Committee*- The Finance Committee and the Treasurer facilitate the adoption of the annual operating budget for PCCH. The operating budget is the financial roadmap for the church as we journey through the calendar year.
- *Hospitality Committee*- coordinates events in the church involving food as needed (including but not limited to brunches, High Coffees, receptions, potlucks) and creates a community among those who volunteer to staff hospitality events.
- *Music and Arts Committee*- advises and supports the ministers and music staff in the planning and promotion of the arts (music, visual arts, drama, poetry, literature) in the life of the church; increases literacy and appreciation of the arts in the congregation through educational opportunities; plans and coordinates music and arts events throughout the program year.
- *Nominations Committee*- places before the congregation the names of members of the church to serve as elders, deacons, at large members of the Nominating Committee, and members of the Audit Committee at the annual meeting of the congregation in February of each year. Occasionally this committee will be asked to fill vacancies on the Session or Board of Deacons that occur during the church program year.
- *Personnel Committee*- The Book of Order of the PCUSA states that the Session has the responsibility to provide for the administration of the church, including employment of non-ordained staff. The pastor and head of staff supervises the ordained staff and works with the church administrator and Personnel Committee in the hiring and supervising of non-ordained staff.
- *Preschool Committee*- acts as liaison between the school and the Session, providing oversight and support to the Preschool Director and advising the Session of any financial, personnel, or programmatic concerns that may arise during the school year.
- *Property Committee*- has general charge of the administration and upkeep of the grounds and building under the direction of the Church Administrator and with the oversight of the Session.
- *Social Witness Committee*- seeks out and provides opportunities for the congregation to be witnesses in the world to God's love as well as to support, oversee, and act as

advocate for these ministries.

- *Investment Committee*- oversees and actively manages church investments.
- *Stewardship* - seeks to nurture and increase the financial generosity of the congregation, as together we grow towards a tithe, remembering that our lives depend upon God and not just our bank accounts.

A congregational meeting is called once a year to receive the budget and approve the ministers' terms of call. An annual report of the church's activities is distributed at this meeting. Weekly communication with the congregation includes news emailed to everyone and the weekly bulletin distributed at worship and posted on the website. In order to be better stewards of the environment, whenever possible PCCH communicates by email instead of regular mail.

PCCH also has an active and informative website at www.chestnuthillpres.org.

C. Christian Education

Our goal is to love God and to love each other by sharing the story of our faith. To that end, we seek to teach and remind children of all ages that they are unconditionally loved and compassionately claimed by a gracious God. We work to engage children in actively and imaginatively learning the stories of the Bible and the traditions of the church. We help children to experience the love of God as it is manifested in our life together as a church community. In our words and actions, we hope to inspire children to live the Christian faith day to day as they reach out to others in love and service and encourage children to worship and to serve God with joy and thanksgiving.

As of September 2023, our children's education and music programs are led by Julie Snyder, Director of Children's Education/Director, Joyful Noise and Youth Choir.

We believe that children and family ministries include ministry to and ministry by children and families. All children and families of all shapes and sizes are invited to participate in our life together. Perhaps no scene better captures the vitality of PCCH than a flock of children running to the front of the sanctuary for the Children's Moment during a regular Sunday service.



1. Church School

Approximately 40 percent of our households are families of three or more individuals. The number of children participating in our Church School program has not yet returned to pre-COVID levels but has shown a significant increase in 2023. Currently, 15-25 children attend Church School each week, ranging from preschool to 7th grade.

Children attend the worship service with their parents from 10:00 a.m. until about 10:20 a.m., when they are invited to the front of the Church for the Children's Moment, after which they go to Church School. Teams of volunteer teachers lead the classes.

The Church School classes are based on the Godly Play curriculum, which focuses on storytelling and invites children to locate themselves within each story of God and God's people. This method goes beyond content acquisition by encouraging students to wonder at the mysteries of Christian faith, listen for the spirit of God, and make room for questions and doubt. We currently have two classes. The younger class engages with simpler lessons and includes children up to 2nd grade. The older class broaches more challenging narratives and includes children from 3rd through 7th grade, though our middle school participation is low and sporadic.

Following Church School, children in grades 1-5 (older and younger children are welcome) gather for Church School Sings - a children's choir and musical instruction class led by Julie Snyder, our Director of Joyful Noise. The children sing in worship on the first Sunday of each month, in addition to other special services such as the Christmas Eve pageant and Palm Sunday.

2. Youth Program and Confirmation

We currently have a strong and active youth program at PCCH. Until January 2023, the youth program was led by our Associate Minister for Youth and Senior Adults. As of September 2023, our Youth Ministry Committee is led by Kate Magid, Director, Youth Ministry with the support of the Parent Youth Ministry Committee. Our high school youth group averages 15-20 members per year. Periodically middle schoolers join the high school youth group activities. The youth group meetings every Sunday evening average about 8-10 attendees. The confirmation classes at PCCH are run every other year and include 8th and 9th graders. Five youth joined the church in 2023.

The youth group participates in a wide variety of service activities including work with Urban Resources Development Corporation, as well as partnering and enjoying worship and fellowship with West Kensington Ministry. There is also a popular monthly meeting called "Theology and Pretzels" in which the youth spend a Sunday brunch discussing and debating faith, theology, ethics, and current events. Each year the youth organize and lead the entire congregation in worship on Youth Sunday. The youth group also organizes outings to escape rooms, laser tag, day trips to Center City, college visits, basketball games, and other opportunities for fellowship.

An annual highlight of our youth program at PCCH is the summer mission trip. These trips have included both domestic and international locations and have been very well attended. In the last four years, a contingent of 11-25 have traveled to Calgary in Alberta, Canada; Rapid City, South Dakota; Detroit, Michigan; and the Ghost Ranch Education and Retreat Center in Abiquiu, New Mexico. The youth complete volunteer projects to help the local community,

worship together and with the local community, reflect on faith, and enjoy fellowship together. In addition to the strong attendance, the commitment to our youth program is illustrated in congregational fundraising for the youth mission trip. An annual congregation-wide spaghetti dinner, which the youth prepare and serve, is a popular fundraising activity for the mission trip.



Youth in grades 6-12 are invited to sing in our Youth Choir, which meets Sunday afternoons in conjunction with Youth Group and/or Confirmation Class. The participants learn more advanced musical concepts, how to read and perform challenging parts of our liturgy such as Psalm chanting, and anthems for worship services. The Youth Choir sings in worship several times a year. In addition, members of the youth choir serve as student mentors for Joyful Noise and provide instrumental music for worship services. Advanced musicians are also invited to sing with the Gallery Choir. The Youth Choir also provides music for special events such as the Christmas Eve Pageant, Melody and Comedy, and Youth Sunday.

3. PCCH Vacation Bible School

Before the pandemic, during the last week of August, the church organized a week-long Vacation Bible School, which was open to the community as well as the congregation. Called YMGA Camp, it attracted as many as 50 children and provided a study of Bible stories through fun and a spiritually enriching mix of activities in yoga, music, gardening, and art. In summer 2020, Vacation Bible School was provided virtually through Zoom. In summer 2021 and 2022, we returned to an in-person format, but modified, with children attending three evenings in August and participating in Bible study, music, yoga, and mission-related activities. This summer, we again held Vacation Bible school which was open to children ages 3 through 5th grade in both the church and the community. We explored what it means to be “called” through music, drama, yoga, art, and mission activities.

4. Adult Education

Our ministry to children and youth may be the most visible manifestation of our dedication to Christian education, but we provide several educational opportunities for adults in the

congregation, as well. As John Calvin asked in his Institutes, “Is it faith to understand nothing, and merely submit your convictions implicitly to the Church?” This question serves to remind us that ours is a religious tradition that encourages discussion, intellectual debate, and lifelong learning.

Our weekly Wednesday morning Bible study is consistently well-attended and provides an opportunity for ministers and members to discuss and wrestle with the lectionary readings for the week. Additionally, the Adult Education Committee plans additional programming for Second Hour, a period after the Sunday worship service. This program typically sees 10-20 participants and has included everything from book clubs to conversations with guest preachers and mission partners. Our book clubs have tackled topics such as the life of Abraham as seen from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perspectives, the legacy of racism in the United States, and most recently, environmental philosophy. Examples of other topics discussed in Second Hour include sacred music, challenges facing indigenous peoples in the United States, human trafficking in the Philadelphia area, and a series exploring sustainability and intersection of environmentalism and Christian faith.

On the third Tuesday of each month, we hold Theology on Tap at a local restaurant. It is well-attended and provides an opportunity for members of the congregation to discuss theological questions and issues in a relaxed setting.

D. Social Witness

PCCH bears witness to God’s love through mission work to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, protest lives lost to gun violence, bring joy to children in poverty, welcome refugees, provide a safe harbor for victims of domestic violence, educate children, free the innocent, and so much more. As a Matthew 25 congregation, we aim to build congregational vitality, work toward dismantling structural racism, and eradicate systemic poverty; the work of Matthew 25, per the Presbyterian Mission Agency, is a “direct response to the good news of Jesus and a faithful expression of what it means to be Christ’s disciples in this time and place.”

In the Germantown neighborhood (a 15-minute drive from our church), we actively support the work of the Germantown Avenue Crisis Ministry (GACM)--of which we are a founding member--and Face to Face Germantown. Both mission-focused nonprofits serve residents in our community with meals, food pantries, and social services. Our members prepare and serve a community meal monthly, cook casseroles, prepare lunch bags, donate food and funds, donate Thanksgiving turkey and “fixings” baskets in the fall, and assemble “reverse Advent boxes” of home goods at Christmas. One of our members currently teaches six-hour financial literacy sessions as part of GACM’s THRIVE life-skills program.

We provide financial support to the West Kensington Ministry, and we have also had volunteers assist with their on-site clothing drives and with their annual golf fundraiser. WKM is actively involved with refugee resettlement efforts, and we are in discussions with them to see how we

can most effectively support them in that work. We have recently partnered with Urban Resources Development Corporation of Germantown (URDC) to make home repairs for residents of Northwest Philadelphia who cannot afford to pay for services or who have been scammed by contractors; one of our members currently teaches insurance and financial fundamentals to senior homeowners as part of their HomeStrong program. These residents are primarily elderly.

As part of our Matthew 25 efforts, the Social Witness Committee plans and leads three “Weekends of Service” throughout the church’s program year. In addition to providing volunteers to URDC on the Saturday, we encourage congregation members to stay after worship on the Sunday to assist with numerous projects to support our mission partners. Activities include making and freezing casseroles and assembling lunch bags for Face to Face Germantown to distribute to their clients; assembling toiletry kits; sorting donated clothing; and relocating the PCCH raised garden beds, which provide fresh produce we will take to the local community fridges.

We actively support the work of organizations that shelter the homeless. We contribute financially to Habitat for Humanity and Family Promise (formerly PIHN). We hold a late summer back-to-school drive for Family Promise and donate 30-50 backpacks filled with supplies for preschool and elementary students. At Christmas we annually support 45 children who participate in ACHIEVEability’s transitional housing program in West Philadelphia.

Our members are active in efforts to end gun violence, primarily through attending vigils and being active in the work of Heeding God’s Call to End Gun Violence. Recently, an artist in the church founded the art movement Souls Shot Portrait Project which pairs artists with those left behind when a loved one is killed by gun violence to create a portrait of the victim. PCCH’s Music and Arts Committee’s annually sponsors the Souls Shot Portrait Project exhibit which begins its display at the church and then travels around Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In addition, we annually display a Memorial to the Lost to recognize lives lost to gun violence in Philadelphia over the prior 12 months. The Memorial is prominently displayed for several weeks on our front lawn – which faces busy Germantown Avenue.

We also financially support, through our Social Witness budget, all of the organizations with which we are involved. In 2019, we created the Cynthia A. Jarvis Endowment Fund in honor of retired pastor Rev. Jarvis. The purpose of the fund is further to support mission and benevolence beneficiaries as designated by the Social Witness Committee. A campaign to increase the Fund is projected for Fall 2023. Special collections for specific needs are held throughout the year, including support for One Great Hour of Sharing, Turkish and Syrian earthquake victims, and similar events.

Two other organizations we support financially are Dawn’s Place, which improves the lives of women who have been victimized by commercial sexual exploitation, and Centurion Ministries, which works to free people on death row who were wrongly convicted. We also participated in a faith coalition created to support a young Syrian woman who came from a refugee camp in Turkey to study at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, mostly with financial support.

In addition to what is noted in this section, our youth are witnesses to God's love through the work they do on their annual mission trip, described in more detail in an earlier section. The congregation supports these trips financially through the Social Witness budget.

E. Financial giving and stewardship

PCCH serves its congregation and communities with about \$975,000 per year in income. In recent years, approximately 70% of the church's income comes from regular contributions; another 14% from other income (including rentals and program fees); and the remainder from investment income. Our stated goal is for each member to grow their contribution towards a tithe.

The church budgets and spends its funds conservatively. Historically, income has met or exceeded expenditures; however, the past few years have been witness to significant budgetary anomalies. Despite the disruption presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the temporary pause of in-person attendance, the received annual pledges remained above \$500,000 throughout that period. Bridging the gap during this period was a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan which helped to ensure a balanced budget. Our current 2023 budget includes \$595,000 in pledges made by the congregation, which represents a trend toward stewardship levels not seen since the church enjoyed a period of relative stability prior to 2020. While the average annual pledge per giving unit has increased 25% since 2017, the total number of pledges has declined in that same time period.

The church has an endowment greater than \$4.5 million which continues to grow through sound investment and new gifts. In particular, a small but growing Legacy Circle consists of members who have included a bequest to PCCH in their wills. These bequests have been of enormous importance to the church and its mission over the years.

In the last 20 years the church has also held three successful capital campaigns, each of which raised between \$1 and \$1.5 million from the congregation. With those funds, the church was able to execute important capital improvements to renovate the sanctuary, chapel, kitchen, and other spaces that provide meaningful venues for fellowship and community engagement. As a result, our facilities continue to remain modern, accommodating for an evolving style of worship, and a celebration of the music and arts that we cherish.

In all of our capital campaigns, the Session also decided that one-tenth of all pledges would be given to mission outreach.

F. A Hub of the Community

Over the last 20 years, PCCH has become an active community for music and the arts, early childhood education, and continuing education for older adults. Its resident groups position PCCH as the most important musical hub in Northwest Philadelphia and one of the most significant in the entire Philadelphia metropolitan area. The Gallery in Widener Hall is also

frequently in use to exhibit important works by regional artists that give visual voice to the church's mission and social witness. Each fall, we sponsor the Souls Shot Portrait Project exhibition, a powerful show of portraits painted of victims of gun violence in Philadelphia over the preceding year.

Whenever possible, the church tries to go out into the community, to make our presence known and (we hope) to attract new members. For example, PCCH hosts a wide variety of civic leadership and educational activities, including a weekly meeting of the Rotary Club, a monthly community speaker series luncheon, classes sponsored by the Mount Airy Learning Tree, a local Boy Scout troop, and a variety of community support groups.

1. Music and the Arts

PCCH is a hub for great music in Philadelphia. In addition to its strong internal music program, the church is host to several of the region's most acclaimed ensembles. It is a sought-after performance space for local and touring groups.

The PCCH Gallery Choir is composed of 28 singers - 8 professionals and 20 volunteers. In addition to providing music for weekly worship services, the choir maintains an active performance schedule throughout the year. This season the choir collaborated with the Drexel University Chorus and a professional orchestra for a performance of Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* in March and presented Victoria's *Requiem* as part of our Souls Shot Portrait Project weekend in November. Last season featured a collaboration with St. Martin's in the Field Episcopal Church for two performances of Fauré's *Requiem*. Recent seasons of the professional Cantatas and Chamber Music concert series featuring the PCCH soloists have included Bach's *Christ Lag in Todesbanden*, Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsories*, Buxtehude's *Membra Jesu Nostri*, and Philadelphia Orchestra Concertmaster David Kim performing alongside our soloists and his personal accompanist, PCCH organist Jeffrey DeVault.

The Crossing is a professional chamber choir conducted by Donald Nally and dedicated to new music. It is committed to working with creative teams to make and record new, substantial works for choir that explore and expand ways of writing for choir, singing in choir, and listening to music for choir. Many of its nearly 160 commissioned premieres address social, environmental, and political issues. With a commitment to recording its commissions, The Crossing has issued 29 releases, receiving three Grammy Awards for Best Choral Performance (2018, 2019, 2023), and eight Grammy nominations.

Philadelphia-based Baroque orchestra **Tempesta di Mare** is named after a concerto by Antonio Vivaldi. Translated to mean "storm at sea," Tempesta di Mare reflects the composers' view of instrumental music as a vivid, rhetorical craft, capable of conveying emotional drama to its listeners. Led by directors Gwyn Roberts and Richard Stone, with concertmaster Emlyn Ngai, Tempesta defines itself by this rhetorical approach to baroque music through concerts, recordings, and broadcasts. To experience Tempesta is to experience nonstop discovery of repertoire both in

and outside the canon: groundbreaking, modern rediscoveries, essential music by forgotten composers, overlooked works by famous composers, and even famous works by famous composers revealed in new ways.

Piffaro delights audiences with highly polished recreations of the rustic music of the peasantry and the elegant sounds of the official wind bands of the late Medieval and Renaissance periods. Its ever-expanding instrumentarium includes shawms, dulcians, sackbuts, recorders, krumhorns, bagpipes, lutes, guitars, and a variety of percussion — all careful reconstructions of instruments from the period.

Established in 2004 by PCCH's then-music director Mark Anderson, **the Pennsylvania Girlchoir** performs repertoire reflecting diverse musical traditions and cultures. PG sings an expansive repertoire from classical to contemporary and has participated in performances of major works including Tod Machover's Philadelphia Voices with The Philadelphia Orchestra, Bernstein's Chichester Psalms, Mendelssohn's Elijah, Britten's Ceremony of Carols, Rejoice in the Lamb, and St. Nicolas Cantata, and John Rutter's Mass of the Children among others. PG also prides itself in outstanding performances of the American traditions of gospel, spirituals, jazz, and Broadway, as well as folk, traditional, and contemporary world music. In 2023, PG's brother choir – the **Keystone State Boychoir** – and its parent organization – the **Commonwealth Youthchoirs** – will relocate their headquarters to PCCH.

2. The Center on the Hill

The focal point for PCCH's educational outreach to the community is The Center on the Hill, which bills itself as "the place for active adults." The Center on the Hill provides a variety of programs, activities, and resources to enrich the lives of older adults in the greater Chestnut Hill area. This beautifully renovated space on the ground floor of PCCH is dedicated to activities and classes for active adults from Monday through Friday throughout the day.

Founded in 2009, The Center on the Hill partners with other organizations and individuals in the community to create a wide assortment of programs. These partners include a variety of local health care facilities such as neighboring Chestnut Hill Hospital, local academic institutions such as Chestnut Hill College, and senior advocacy groups such as the AARP Safe Driver Program, Meals on Wheels, and the Alzheimer's Association. Since 2013, the amount of programming offered has more than doubled. Programming includes health and wellness classes covering topics such as dementia, bone and heart health, and nutrition, as well as weekly fitness and wellness classes including yoga, T'ai chi, and meditation. The Center also offers classes on singing, foreign languages, arts, and crafts such as jewelry making. The Center organizes trips to popular attractions around the Philadelphia area and hosts holiday parties and community luncheons, which regularly bring in 150-200 people, including ~80% from outside of our church membership. There are typically 3-8 programs offered daily, bringing 40-125 people through our doors.

The Center on the Hill is largely supported through the church's Senior Adult Ministry endowment, although Director Mariangela Saavedra has also acquired outside grants and gifts to help support this important ministry. Of particular note, she organized and executed a fund-raising campaign in 2016 that brought in \$12,000 and oversaw a \$22,000 gift from a partnering organization in 2017. Fees collected for some of the programming (\$2-\$15 per session or class) also contribute to the financial strength of the Center. The strong leadership, responsive program offerings, and enterprising fundraising have combined to make the Center on the Hill an indispensable resource for active senior adults in the Chestnut Hill community.

3. PCCH Preschool

For more than 60 years, the PCCH Preschool has prepared children in our community for kindergarten. Its mission is to be an inclusive community of learners that partners with families to create children who are kind, curious, creative, courteous, and kindergarten ready. It is a mission, but not a ministry, of the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill.

Social and emotional learning is the primary focus for our youngest learners. As children progress through our program, the structured curricular content increases. The school draws from well-researched and highly acclaimed play-based early childhood curricula including Wilson Phonics, Hegerty Reading, Singapore Math, and Core Knowledge. All children have music with a music teacher, Spanish with a native of Barcelona, and soccer during the week. One afternoon per week, a ballet teacher comes for experiential learning. A large playground, installed in August 2022, is located at the far end of the PCCH property.

The preschool program is well-enrolled and financially self-sufficient, even contributing to the church budget to help cover the cost of overhead expenses. Financial assistance is offered to needy families and the church social witness committee often makes a small annual gift to help a family experiencing hardship such as a family with a seriously ill child, a family who has refugee status, or a family in which grandparents are fostering a grandchild. The preschool aims to keep tuition affordable while still compensating faculty better than peer schools and offering programs to offset undergraduate and graduate tuition for faculty finishing degrees.

4. Other Community Groups

The PCCH facilities are also used by numerous other community groups throughout the week, including the Boy Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers, and even an area Scottish folk dancing club. The building is occupied, and the parking lot is busy, nearly every day of the week and on many evenings.

G. Church Life

There are many ways for members of PCCH to



share in fellowship outside of worship.

Coffee Hour is held immediately after worship each week in Widener Hall or on the church lawn when weather permits. We gather together four to six times a year after the service for all-church brunches in Widener Hall or for BBQ/potluck lunch on the church lawn.

The church holds a variety of social events with the goal of bringing church members and friends into community with each other. Even during the pandemic, PCCH worked hard to identify safe, fun ways to stay in community. In the past few years, activities have ranged from Kentucky Derby and Shrove Tuesday parties to a night at the theater, family game nights, March Madness, carol singing to the homebound, and family-friendly hikes. Occasional Texas Hold 'Em poker nights are popular events that raise money for the mission trips.

The Music and Arts Committee also plans our annual Music and Arts Festival, which includes art exhibitions in Widener Hall, play readings performed by members, and musical performances. The performances are typically preceded by a wine and cheese reception. For the past few years (even during the pandemic), the church has held an annual Evening of Melody & Comedy in which members and friends (including children and youth) get up on stage and sing or perform, with proceeds going to support the Music and Arts program.

Artistic gifts are also offered to the glory of God every Sunday through the work of a robust and very engaged flower guild.

IV. Transition

In March 2023, Dr. John Wilkinson announced his intention to accept a position with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as Director of the Ministry Engagement and Support. His last day in the pulpit was April 23, 2023.

In May 2023, the Session appointed Dr. M. Craig Barnes as Interim Pastor/Head of Staff, and Dr. Russell Sullivan as Minister of Visitation.

Further, in May, the Session approved the formation of a Mission Study Committee to create a 2023 Mission Study. Because much of the 2018 Mission Study information still accurately reflects the life of the church, the Mission Study Committee, with the approval of Session and the Philadelphia Presbytery Committee on Ministry, has updated the 2018 Mission Study rather than creating a completely new study. In July 2023, the Session and the Philadelphia Presbytery Committee on Ministry approved the 2023 Mission Study. The congregation elected a Pastor Nominating Committee in September 2023 and it has begun its work.

V. The CAT Survey: A Portrait of PCCH

In the spring of 2018, in order to gauge the opinion of the congregation as we began our search for a new pastor and head of staff, the Mission Study Committee commissioned a detailed survey of the congregation, the Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT), produced by Holy Cow! Consulting. One hundred and eighty members of the congregation (close to 90% of the average weekly attendance) completed the survey. The Mission Study Committee held an after-church interpretive session, led by a consultant from Holy Cow!, and also three informal listening sessions to enable members of the congregation to ask questions about the transition process and to state their opinions face to face.

A. Overview: high energy, high satisfaction

It was gratifying to learn that the large majority of our congregation is happy with PCCH, its program, and its direction. Nearly 90% expressed agreement with the statement that they are “satisfied with how things are in our church” and nearly as many disagreed with the statement that “we are just going through the motions of church activity.” Overall, respondents expressed a high level of satisfaction with our church and its energy level.

There was widespread agreement with the statement that “Our pastor articulates a clear vision for the church and keeps it before the people in a compelling way.” This support extended to our worship services, preaching, and music. Nearly 91% of respondents agreed that the worship services are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content. Furthermore, 93% of respondents felt that the music at the church is outstanding in quality and appropriate in style to our congregation.

Support for the then-current way of doing things was not unanimous, of course. Although ours is a congregation that for the most part embraces theologically complex and challenging sermons, a few respondents expressed their belief that the sermons were of a “highly cerebral caliber” which sometimes left hearers behind. Others remained uncomfortable with two particular changes that had been made in the service of worship over the last several years: changing the communion service to intinction and a weekly passing of the peace. Some members felt very strongly that we should return to serving communion in the pews and limit passing of the peace to once a month. As these changes were made several years ago, the enduring nature of these concerns illustrates the sincerity of the feelings of those members. Furthermore, that these members continue to remain active in the church and work to restore the worship services to the previous format is testament to their dedication to PCCH.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) reported that a friendly atmosphere prevails among the membership of the church, but a perceived political bias in sermons and services had left some members feeling uncomfortable. One member commented that there are times when conservative members “wonder if there is still a place for them at PCCH.” While it is not surprising

that our clergy and congregation may discuss when the teachings of Christ have application to current events, PCCH strives to be a welcoming environment for individuals of diverse political beliefs and, as noted above, there is a strong belief that a friendly atmosphere prevails. As our sign out front says, we are an “inclusive community of faith”—and that applies across the political spectrum. It is incumbent on the leaders of the church—both lay and clerical—to ensure that there are avenues for dissatisfied members to raise concerns within the church and to see that concerns are addressed and resolved fairly and openly.

The survey also confirmed that the congregation feels PCCH provides high quality Christian education that is appropriate to every age and stage of life—with more than 90 percent of the congregation tending to agree, agreeing, or strongly agreeing with that sentiment. More than half of us agree that we have a responsibility to continue our learning and spiritual formation throughout our lives. When compared with other congregations who have answered these questions, our commitment to and rating of our quality of Christian education are extremely high.

The CAT survey did show a widespread belief that there is room for improvement in readiness for lay ministry. Only about 40% of respondents believe that we do a good job of helping our members understand that each of us is called to ministry, as well as preparing us for ministry by helping us discern our gifts. However, most of us do believe that those who are involved in lay ministry are well supported.

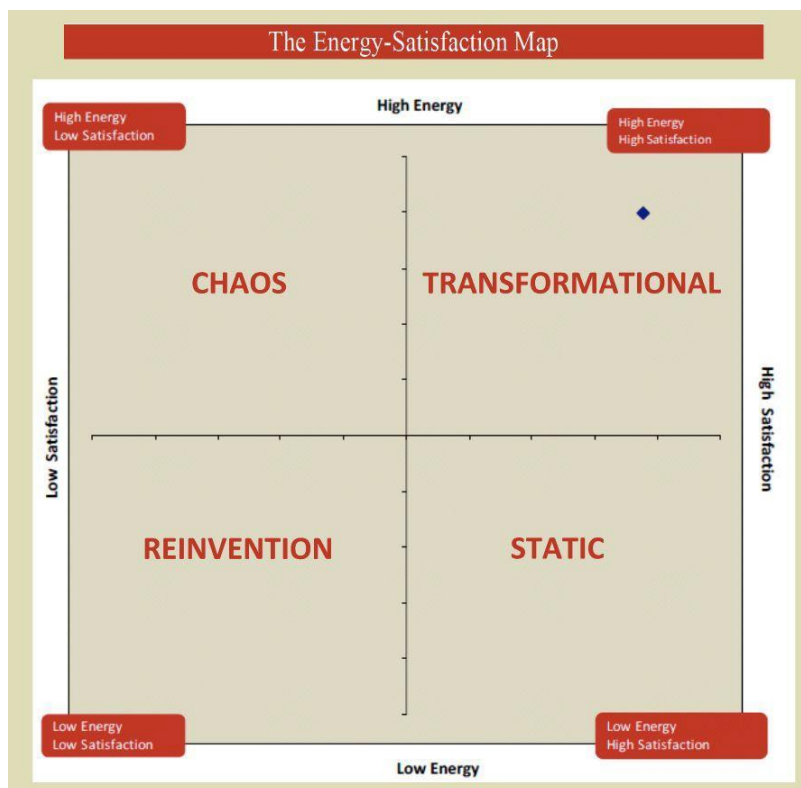
The congregation was supportive of the decision-making structures of the church. Substantial majorities of the congregation agreed that our leaders were representative of the church, showed a genuine concern to know what the congregation was thinking regarding important decisions, and provided adequate opportunity for consideration of different approaches. Although about 30 percent of the congregation agreed with the statement that the “same small group of people” make most of the important decisions in the church, the survey creators noted that the share of the congregation holding this view is lower than in 90 percent of other similar congregations. Nevertheless, this is a concern of which church leaders, and the Nominating Committee, should be cognizant.

On the whole, the congregation believed that our church manages internal conflict well and that conflict within the congregation is resolved appropriately. More than 90 percent of the congregation believed that problems between groups in the church are usually resolved through mutual effort. Similarly, fewer than 10 percent of the respondents agreed with the notion that there was a disturbing amount of conflict in the congregation.

Overall, the creators of the CAT survey, Holy Cow! Consulting, tell us that the “health and vitality” of a church can be measured by how much energy and engagement the congregation sees in the church and how satisfied the congregation is with the church overall. Through the results from the survey, we see that our congregation experiences a high level of energy and excitement in our

church and is also highly satisfied. Nearly two-thirds believe that PCCH has been effective in fulfilling its mission. This assessment is underscored by the fact that no specific issues internal to our church were identified by more than 20% of respondents as needing to be discussed so that satisfaction could increase.

Along the same lines, when asked if the church needs to rethink its basic purpose and mission to be effective in the future, nearly 50% of respondents disagreed. About 20% of those responding support moderate change (undefined), half the respondents believe some (less than moderate) change is necessary, and about 20% call for no change at all. There is no clear focus for improvement.



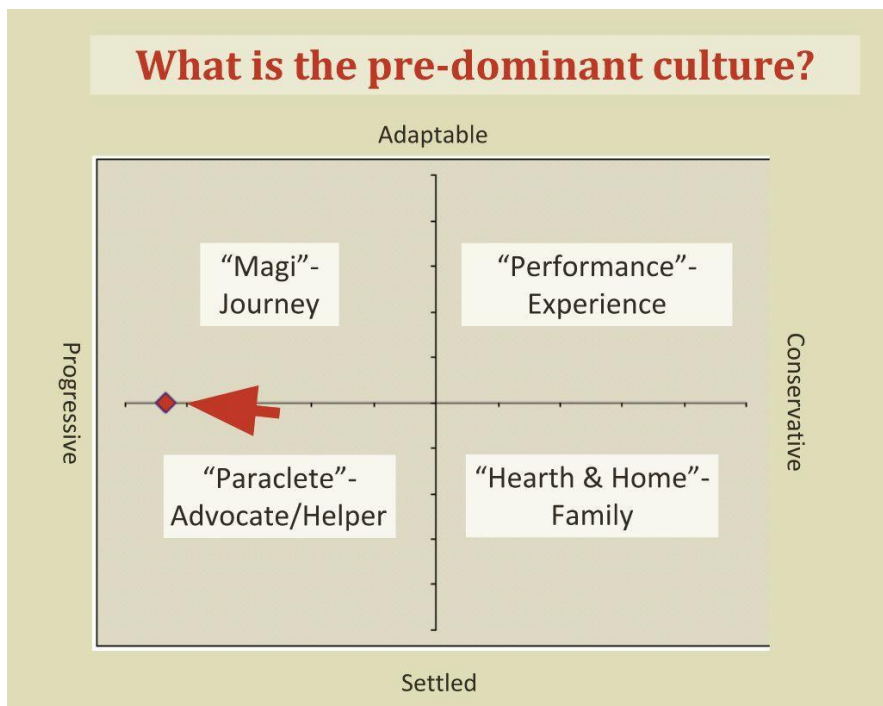
B. A “Magi” and “Paraclete” Church

Holy Cow! Consulting uses some survey responses in order to “map” where a congregation lies on two axes which lead to characterizing a congregation among four different types. The axes are: approach to change (ranging between “adaptable” and “settled”) and theological perspective, (ranging between “conservative” and “progressive”). Our responses show us as a congregation that is strongly (but not extremely) theologically progressive, while in equal measure adaptable and settled - placing us on the edge of two types--the “Magi” church and the “Paraclete” church. This reflects the diversity within our membership. According to Holy Cow! consulting, a Magi church is one that is “ultimately concerned with the rational integrity of their faith, the just application of faith to life, and the journey of understanding and discovery”. Such

congregations value the faith journey of questioning and discovering and are strong advocates for those who are not in the majority or cannot advocate for themselves. A “Paraclete” church, on the other hand, is “ultimately concerned with the development of communities that are intellectually open and reflective but pay attention to structure and ritual.” Paraclete cultures, then, “tend to be less demanding of a particular understanding of faith but clearer about the benefits of a particular liturgical tradition.”

Taken to their extremes, of course, these strengths can become weaknesses. Magi churches, the consultants say, can sometimes seem cold or uncaring, can “overthink” issues, and can forget that, for many, it is emotion that leads to action, and not just rational thought. Paraclete churches can appear “wishy-washy” regarding values and unable to balance openness with reasonable expectations of others. Any pastor of PCCH should embrace these models while also striving for balance.

We believe, however, that the outlook for our church is bright. Using the language of the survey creators, churches in our high energy - high satisfaction position are “transformational ...[they] are sources of new meaning and purpose for their members”. Clearly this is a positive position for a church to occupy! Our challenge, then, is to understand which characteristics of our church are that source of meaning and purpose for us, so that we maintain them while at the same time continuing to be flexible and adjusting to our congregation’s needs.



C. Challenges

When asked where PCCH should invest additional effort and energy going forward, the congregation chose the following as their leading priorities. One in particular stood out:

1. The church should develop strategies for attracting and reaching new people—and for incorporating those who join PCCH into the church’s life, so they meet people, get involved, and feel a part of the congregational community as quickly as possible.

The next four priorities were grouped closely together.

2. The church should work vigorously to stimulate the desire and willingness of the congregation to increase its financial giving and enable the development of new programs as they seem desirable.

3. The church should develop ministries to provide pastoral care to “those broken by life circumstances.”

4. The church should create more opportunities in service and fellowship for members, new and old, to develop relationships with one another, expanding and enriching the sense of family and fellowship within PCCH.

5. Finally, the church should expand outreach ministries, both on its own and in cooperation with other faith communities, serving surrounding communities.

It should be noted that members indicated in other answers that they believed that these steps are already being taken in the life of the church. We believe that by choosing these as priorities, the congregation is emphasizing the importance of putting even more planning and resources into them.

A number of members, especially in the free-response section of the CAT survey, suggested other priorities for the church to consider as it embraces its future. These challenges include, in no particular order, working intentionally to attract visitors and prospective members from Chestnut Hill itself and from nearby sections of Philadelphia; increasing diversity (defined variously) within the congregation; providing more programs to aid parents in raising children—and trying to schedule such programs while the children and young people are involved in their own activities at church; and ensuring that the outstanding work of the continuing ministerial staff be allowed to flourish.

In early 2023, after departure of both associate pastors, the church held multiple listening sessions both with the congregation as a whole as well as with focused groups (including Deacons, older adults, parents, and youth). More than 145 members participated in the listening sessions. A summary of the listening sessions reflects that the congregation continues to desire the church to focus its attention, energy and efforts on the priorities identified in the CAT survey – particularly in regard to Priorities 1,3, and 4.

Since the CAT survey was completed, PCCH has become a Matthew 25 congregation and has experienced the impact of COVID on its life as a church. Both these events will continue to shape our understanding of ourselves as a congregation in the coming years. How we expand and deepen our understanding of what it is to be a Matthew 25 congregation? How do we minister and engage our congregation and community in a post-COVID world?

VI. Critical Abilities for the Next Pastor

As reflected in the CAT survey and the 2023 listening sessions, the congregation views the following as the most important qualities in our next pastor:

- 1: Preaching, pastoral care, and teaching;
- 2: Strategic leadership, specifically the capacity:
 - a. to cast a vision that embraces the church's history and priorities while recognizing and incorporating the experiences of the past four years
 - b. to lead the church in defining and implementing the changes needed to support the vision, both spiritually and organizationally
3. Teaching and training the congregation to deepen understanding, form character, and equip members with new skills; and
4. Administration, including the capacity to manage the church operationally.

VII. Conclusion

As PCCH faces the departure of its ordained staff and a period with an interim pastor, it finds itself with many strengths. The CAT survey, our conversations with members, and our study of the data all demonstrate the combination of “high satisfaction—high energy” that is the hallmark of strong churches. Likewise, our congregation's identity—its sense of its own nature, life, and mission—consists equally of an interest in progressive theology, meaningful worship, infusion of faith with intellectual inquiry, and personal growth on the one hand and on the other its vitality through fellowship, friendship, pastoral care, and social outreach.

The congregation doesn't want to lose this identity. It doesn't want its satisfaction or its energy to decline, and it doesn't want change that would endanger its satisfaction or energy. Repeatedly, the evidence affirmed “the church's *vision* of itself and its ministry”. Yet the congregation recognizes that there is a time to embrace change. The challenge is how to retain what is best in how we have been shaped as a church and at the same time be open to a new future—new leadership, new approaches, new initiatives, new directions of the Spirit. In short, satisfaction must not become complacency or resistance to change. Rather, there is a recognition within the congregation of the importance of celebrating its past, appreciating its foundation, and preparing for a new chapter in its life.