

First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton Self Study Team Report

February 2018

“Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve, and teach, and live the Word they’ve known.
Here the outcast and stranger bear the image of God’s face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger;
All are welcome; all are welcome; all are welcome in this place.”

From “Let Us Build a House” by Marty Haugen

In life we have many challenges to face but with the gift of the Holy Spirit and a sense of community we can look to the future with confidence. As the First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton looks to the future and prepares for a new pastor, the Session appointed a Self Study Team (SST) in the fall of 2017. The team was comprised of Mike Hachquet, Connie Talboy, Darcey Ridgway, Ernie Cristler, Gail Turner, and Interim Pastor Kathy Keener. The team met weekly throughout the fall and winter.

The Process

First, the Self Study Team reviewed our membership and how it is changing. We viewed videos and read reports on the changes taking place in our denomination and in others. According to some of these reports, we are in the midst of a new emergence or a new way of “doing church.” We considered how these new norms affect our congregation and our future.

Over many weeks, the SST reviewed the 2008-2010 Long Range Strategic Plan. As the SST discussed church goals, determinations were made about which goals were completed, which goals are still on-going or not yet completed; and which goals were no longer relevant. SST member, Ernie Cristler was one of the original drafters of this document and gave us valuable insight into the workings of the group. He stated many ideas for the Long Range Strategic Plan were considered from surveys and small group meetings, as well as from the congregation as a whole.

The SST considered three questions about the membership: 1. Who are the people who attend our church? 2. Who are the people who no longer attend our church? 3. Finally, possible reasons as to why our membership has decreased beyond the normal attrition.

The SST wanted the congregation to be part of our process. We organized several small group discussions scheduled at various times to accommodate as many members as possible to attend. Sixty members signed up and attended the 90-minute discussions. Each small group had five to ten members, a facilitator, a scribe, and a SST host. The SST carefully designed ten questions that were asked in the discussion groups (see Appendix A for the questions).

All along, the SST sought to discern God's will for the congregation. Reviewing data, experiences within the church, listening to members and in discussion among ourselves, we found faith, hope and fear.

In order to keep the members informed on our progress, we made a report to the congregation, completed monthly reports regarding team activities that were presented at each Session meeting, and reports were published in the "Circuit Rider." SST team members were present at each small group discussion to answer any questions.

Who Are We as a Community and a Church?

Our Community

The town of Pendleton has a rich western culture and is the second largest town in eastern Oregon. The Round Up has been voted the best large outdoor rodeo in America three years in a row. But we are not just a cowboy town. This is a small enough community in which you can know others and be known. There are a large number of service clubs such as Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, and Altrusa. Our community places high value on education as demonstrated by new schools and our community college. The local community college, Blue Mountain Community College has a plethora of resources and knowledgeable faculty. Additionally, Eastern Oregon University, a four-year university is within an hour driving time. We have a new acute care regional hospital. Additional medical specialists are within 60 minutes. Our community has vibrant art and cultural centers. There is an active community theater, men's and women's choruses, three museums, and a symphony. There are many opportunities for outdoor recreation with 121 acres of parks in Pendleton. We have a popular Farmer's Market and we have a competitive swimming pool with a water park. Hiking, snow sports, and camping are available in the nearby Blue Mountains. There are many opportunities for hunting and fishing as well. We have two 18-hole golf courses. Pendleton has the best fiber optic cable in Eastern Oregon which connects to businesses and residences. Pendleton has an extremely low rate of violent crime. We recently passed a bond for a state-of-the-art 10-million-dollar fire station.

Pendleton is located on the original 1855 boundaries of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Cayuse Walla Walla Indian Reservation. The reservation has the Wildhorse Casino and Resort with many amenities which is 10 miles from town. Tutuilla Presbyterian Church, on the reservation, is a sister congregation.

Pendleton has a 10-minute commute to any part of town and no traffic jams. The Tri-Cities has the mall experience for shopping which is 70 minutes away. There is an affordable commuter airline to Portland for the big city experience and connection to international airlines. We are four hours of driving time to Portland, Spokane, Bend or Boise.

Our Church

Pendleton is a town where people who want to make a difference can do so and it has many opportunities for leadership. We have a wonderful sense of community with outstanding volunteerism which meets the needs of many of our eclectic citizens.

As a church, our commitment to making a difference in our community remains strong. Our members are active volunteers at our church and in our community. During the small group discussions, it was reiterated that our church has many strengths. Our members are well-educated, open-minded, dependable, and caring. We have traveled the world and have a better understanding of our place in it. The musical talents of our membership are seen community-wide in the Men's Chorus, Oregon East Symphony, College Community Theater and jam sessions at the Great Pacific, a local coffee shop.

Local mission work continues to be important for many people in our congregation. We are trying to improve the lives of people around us in a variety of ways offering workshops on Aging, and Death and Dying, helping with homelessness (Hope4Home, Pendleton Warming Station, CAPECO House--Community Action Program of East Central Oregon, Helping Hand), and hunger ("Souper" Bowl, monthly Salvation Army lunches, and our Deacons' Pantry). We are in mission with other churches to try and improve unmet needs and conditions in our local community.

Our church property is being utilized for community outreach by making the CAPECO House available to house young people aging out of the Foster Care program. Weekly, we invite the community to join us at a local pub for the "Wired Word" which discusses faith and news stories.

Along with the Eastern Oregon Presbytery, we sponsor annually an International Peacemaker, who brings information on peace and justice concerns in his/her country to our church and community. In our congregation, we have two individuals (Mary Davis and Barbara Clark) who have traveled to international mission fields, and they have presented ideas about how our church and Presbyterian Women can be more involved with our international partners.

Pendleton churches have a long standing tradition of Lenten soup suppers with communion vespers. A lectionary study group meets year-round. With reduced

resources, many of the churches are working cooperatively. There are many opportunities for worship, study areas, and spiritual growth within the community. As the largest church in the Eastern Oregon Presbytery, we make a real difference for the 13 other churches. One congregation member is the Stated Clerk, and several of our members serve on Presbytery and Synod committees. Pendleton Presbyterian Women are leaders at the local, Presbytery, Synod, and national organizational level.

The size of a congregation affects how members and visitors interact with each other and the pastor. It is important to be aware of the dynamics before searching for a pastoral leader. Our congregation's size has fluctuated between two different church sizes: a program-size church and a pastoral-size church. A program-size church has 150-350 members, multiple pastoral staff, and new members come into church through small groups. A pastoral-size church has 50-150 people, single pastor, and new members come into church through the pastor.

It has been many years since we were a program-size church and this congregation is now recognizing that it is a pastoral-size church (See Appendix B for demographics). Session is going through the process of defining our programs and how this will affect our future ministry. Recognizing that the pastor carries extensive responsibilities, it is very important that the church have safeguards to protect the pastor from burn out because he/she can feel pressure to do it all.

Financials

The congregation has a financial base that supports the current pastor-led model. Generous gifts have allowed the congregation to operate debt-free. The congregation has small endowments for program expenses and a million-dollar endowment to support the Westminster Woods Camp and Conference Center. We recently completed a \$38,000 campaign to fund new carpeting and air conditioning for the church building. As our membership has declined, so have our giving units. At some point this is going to have an impact. So far we have been able to trim and balance the budget to meet our available income. As our current congregation ages, the challenge will be to grow our giving units and encourage members to consider other income instruments such as a planned gift.

Staffing

We currently have staff positions for a full-time pastor, a secretary/treasurer (32-hours weekly), a part-time custodian, part-time employees--an organist, a choir director, a preschool director, a preschool teacher and two aides, a summer camp director, and a Westminster Woods Camp host. Previously, we had a bell choir director, more hours for the secretary, and a Youth and Family Ministry Director (20 hours). Our last full-time associate pastor left in 2007.

First Presbyterian pastors find this call satisfying and have long tenure. Our most recent pastor, Roger Harwerth left for a new call in November 2016 after an eleven year pastorate. The preceding pastor, Doug Acker, served twenty years. Myron Nichols was pastor 25 years. Staff associate pastors served 9, 3, 8, 4 and 4 years.

Facilities

The Pendleton Church facility encompasses half a block in downtown Pendleton. The 16,400 sq. ft. building includes a Sanctuary, offices, meeting rooms, nursery and the Rogers Room Fellowship Hall with an unlicensed commercial kitchen and stage. The Presbyterian Preschool meets in upper level classrooms and has a playground. Sunday School and Boy Scout Troop 700 meet in classrooms in another part of our building.

The bright Sanctuary with pews and balcony has a multi-rank pipe organ, grand piano and stained glass windows. During early 2018, we have installed new carpeting and a Hearing Loop system. Existing equipment that broadcasts services on local radio is being evaluated vs. livestream.

Next to the church is a small house which church members upgraded last year. We lease it to a non-profit which houses young people who age out of the Foster system. Included on the church property, we have a newly paved 20-space parking lot. There are many on-street parking spaces.

Westminster Woods is a 66-acre camp and conference center located 27 miles from Pendleton in the Blue Mountains. The retreat features a modern 1600 sq. ft. chapel/ multi-purpose meeting room, kitchen facilities, dormitory, RV sites, campgrounds, and a bath house. During the summer-fall season, the church worships monthly at the chapel followed by potlucks and in October a fall festival. Presbyterian Women enjoy a retreat day. Westminster Woods commission offers snow play days for families. Each summer, we bus 100 children from Pendleton to Westminster Woods for a week of VBS Day Camp. Families and guests have many camp activities available including hiking trails, amphitheater, volleyball, soccer, disc golf, and outdoor chess. A piece of the Oregon Trail runs through the property. The Camp is halfway to La Grande, Oregon--the Presbyterian congregation from there meets us at camp for shared summer worship a couple times a year.

We need to be good stewards with our resources and include our new pastor in this process of continued discernment: "How will we use our building and the Woods in the future?"

Looking Forward

As we near the end of the Self Study Team process, we are thinking about where our church is headed in the future. We believe that there is and still will be a personal need for individuals to feel connected to God and others on their spiritual journey.

Our members are inspired by those in our congregation who help others in their faith journeys (See Appendix C for a first-hand reflection). Members express the desire to have ongoing conversations about their relationship with God, deepening personal faith and broadening their spiritual journey.

As might be expected, in small group discussions, we heard comments from people who long for the church they used to know. Their first wish was to bring back youth groups and a youth director. Many participants talked about their youth group experience and want the same for their children and others. They agreed that youth group provided a fun and safe environment to learn about and worship God.

There is a passion in our church to serve kids and young families. As a congregation, we are having a tough time figuring how to attract and serve them. Last year, during confirmation classes and retreat, the only day we got all five middle and high school students in the same room was the day of their confirmation. These are busy young people, whose social needs are largely met elsewhere. Many weeks there are 1-2 children but sometime we have 6-10 for Sunday School. It is hard to plan when we can't predict attendance.

We recognize that our church dynamics are not what they were 30 years ago. Society is changing and church attendance is not a priority for everyone. Sixty percent of the children on our Sunday School roll are related to the church through their grandparent rather than a parent.

Christian education is led by volunteers. Our last compensated Youth and Family Ministries director ended her half-time position three years ago. Our last youth pastor left in 1996. The congregation would need significant growth to justify hiring a youth director.

With few children in Sunday School, we look for other ways to reach children's lives. We want to explore ways to develop spiritual growth for children--such as providing online and take home resources. Our Day Camp Vacation Bible School teaches over 100 kids every summer about Jesus. For over sixty years, The Presbyterian Preschool has been a place where young children learn Christian values and basic Bible stories while preparing for Kindergarten. Caring members of our congregation volunteer in local schools and education boards.

We do have members who are in the last quarter of life. They will need pastoral care, insightful accommodations, connections, meaningful activities. Recent retirees have new flexibility, and may travel extensively, limiting their willingness to commit on a regular basis. Life changes such as death, moving to assisted living, moving to be closer to family, and failing health issues lead to shifts in participation by the individual and his/her grandkids in the life of the church.

Recommendations to the Pastor Nominating Committee

We recommend that you seek a pastor with the following attributes to lead our congregation into the future:

Teacher/Preacher--Our new pastor needs to lead the congregation in worship, study, and spiritual growth. This person should offer thought--provoking and interesting sermons and Biblical lessons.

A Coach--This person needs to be able to guide and nurture us as we make adjustments to the societal changes that affect our church. To help grow the congregation, we need a pastor who will actively lead us, coach and encourage us to intentionally invite others.

A Leader Beside Us--Our new pastor needs to be someone who wants to join us to make a difference in this community. S/he will participate in community activities beyond the church. We need someone to help us figure out how to make a difference in our troubled world and to grow deeper spiritually.

Strong Personal Skills--Our new pastor needs to be confident, resilient, compassionate, flexible, and friendly. The role includes engaging newcomers and developing relationships. We value pastoral visitations by Deacons or the pastor, but feel that significant life events need to be attended to by the pastor--i.e. death in the family, birth of a child, etc.

Recommendations for Session

The Self Study Team repeatedly encountered the following suggestions and pass them on for your consideration:

- a. Name tags -- for members (like the Lutherans)
- b. Beef up our website to reflect a better visual of our mission work
- c. Get our name out in the community better (better branding)
- d. Mentors for new members and anyone who wants one.
- e. People from many age groups expressed preference for hands on activities that can be completed in a short period of time.
- f. New membership drive--Invite a friend/neighbor to church Sunday
- g. Invite members who don't attend regularly to events (vs. only worship) new members' orientation
- h. Host/Hostess at coffee hour (one of the members whose group is putting the food out) so they can introduce new people to others, make sure they have coffee, etc.
- i. Media specialist who is basically the PR person for the church (press releases)
- j. Usher training (possible other trainings)
- k. Review and revise the long range strategic plan every two--three years
- l. Article Club (pastor or others who come across interesting articles--pass them along to the congregation through the website, Facebook or paper copies)
- m. Highlight a commission every so often so people know who they are and what they do
- n. Bring back adult Sunday School
- o. Continue to have small group discussions annually
- p. Review the roll
- q. Contact non-attending members--phone call, letter, postcard, etc.
- r. Relationship building with members (best tool for resilience in face of change)
- s. Members need to know the process for starting a new program/idea.
- t. How do members get answers to their questions about anything?
- u. Interest/talents survey for members, new members, and regular visitors (and use it!)
- v. Look at the format and size of church boards
- w. Many of our commissions are short of members. We need to get real about how to staff our ministries in the future and present.

Appendix A

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. What has changed for better or worse since the last time our church searched for a minister (2004) besides that our membership has declined and the average age of the members has increased?
2. What do we expect of church members and of ourselves?
3. What are the gifts and challenges of who we are and where we are going as a church now?
4. What is the congregation doing to help you on your faith journey?
5. What do our friends, neighbors, and the larger community say about our church?
6. What are the positive aspects of our larger community? Are there other opportunities that our congregation could assist or benefit from in our community?
7. What are the unmet needs in our larger community? Where are there opportunities to join with others to serve our neighbors?
8. What are the reasons a minister would want to become our minister?
9. What are three things our congregation does best today that you hope we will keep as we change and grow into the future?
10. If nothing was impossible, what would you wish for our congregation? Think outside the box...

Appendix B

Demographics of First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton

Membership	2012	2013	2014	2015 **	2016	2017	Loss	% retained
Total Membership	288	286	274	223	219	212	76	74%
Age 25 and Under	14	18	12	8	8	13	1	93%
Age 26 to 45	64	67	35	35	37	35	29	55%
Age 46 to 55	23	25	21	29	22	25	-2	109%
Age 56 to 65	64	66	56	51	52	52	12	81%
Over Age 65	94	98	99	96	89	87	7	93%

**The drop in 2015 was the result of reviewing the church rolls.

Appendix C

A first-hand reflection of a member's church history

REMEMBERING YESTERDAY

My family first became associated with the First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton in the early 1960's. For approximately three years we attended services, but being busy with a young family, we did not become deeply involved in the programs and activities of the church. The senior pastor was Dr. Myron Nichols, a highly educated man and an elegant pulpit speaker. In 1964 we moved and did not return to this church until 1983.

The "new" minister, at that time, was Dr. Douglas Acker. It's interesting to note that beginning with Dr. Nichols predecessor, Rev. Earle Cochran through Dr. Acker, all three of these pastors served long terms and retired at FPCP. The congregation came to accept this as "normal", and some were quite shocked when Rev. Roger Harwerth left for another position, after "only" 11 years.

Looking back over the last three & one-half decades since returning, I am amazed by the differences I see. Many of the people I regarded as mentors are no longer with us. The dear lady who first invited me to a Presbyterian Women's meeting went to her reward 25 years ago. With great respect, I remember the retired librarian who advised me on some inspirational reading, and talked with me about her own life lessons. I missed her when she moved away. Also, I fondly remember the very nice gentleman who loaned me his garden gloves when I showed up to a House & Grounds clean-up without being properly equipped. He joked "he didn't want me to ruin my manicure". He only recently died. Other saints have disappeared from our midst. These people were the Elders, Deacons, leaders of committees and organizers of programs. Many were leaders in the community as well. These were the people I looked up to and hoped to emulate as I grew in my own faith.

It's sometimes difficult not to feel nostalgic, but there are certainly still many dedicated, devoted and capable members in our congregation who continue to work, teach and live by the Word of the Lord. It is a fact many in leadership roles are no longer young but graying. Perhaps, new programs will be developed that require less strength or time commitments. My hope is they will be able to continue for a time or until "reinforcements" arrive, in one form or another.

Connie Talboy, SST member