

TRANSFORMING

Further Rationale and Reflection on the 2014 Session Vision Statement

Introduction

The Vision Statement is the result of the prayerful consideration and deliberation of the Leadership of Hawfields Presbyterian Church. As a result, while it may be tempting to dismiss portions of it out of hand or to accept those portions that appeal to us, it should be clear that what is present in the Statement is God in conversation with us as a church as to our future. The success or failure to achieve what is written is secondary to the principle goal of seeking to be God's church and God's people, whatever comes.

Conviction

If Jesus Christ is the Head of this church, then we must take very seriously what God says through the voice of our church's elected leadership. This is not because they are better in some fashion than the rest of the congregation. This is not because they are more spiritual or smart or dedicated or skilled than the rest of the congregation. It is because, by God's grace, they are chosen.



What Was the Question?

Some time ago, the Session was asked to define our neighborhood. Among the various answers given, one estimate was perhaps a 10 mile radius around the church. This answer exemplifies not only our rich history (we have been a family-farming community for generations), but also our deeply embedded cultural beliefs about who we are as a church.

But the reality is Mebane is changing. It is changing fast and it is changing without us. The farms that sustained for so long are, in some cases, a Honda plant, a Hampton Inn, soon to be a WalMart distribution center and a candy factory. Widening roads are





Listen & Lead

The Session's role as the spiritual leadership of the congregation involves two principle activities.

First, they should be listening.

They should be listening to Jesus Christ, through their prayers, through our Confessions, through the Bible, through each other, and through the congregation. They should also be listening to our community, to those in need, and to their own conscience. They should be listening for changes in our culture, in our living patterns, in our circumstances. They should be listening.

They should also be leading.

They should be leading us in the direction they are convicted God wants us to go, popular or no. They should be leading us in prayer, in worship and in their own examples of work. They should be leading us in giving and in the best stewardship of the money, hours, energy, staff, and other resources with which Hawfields is blessed. They should be leading with the question "Is this God's will?" and leading us to seek answers, even where they may seem unattainable. They should be leading.

evidence of how much our immediate neighborhoods are shifting demographically and our own congregation bears witness to how much we must change our thinking. A mother and her daughter are driving from Apex just to go to church here because it feels like home. One member drives from Elon multiple times a week in an expression of her commitment. At the same time, our worship attendance has been flat, averaging 120 on Sunday mornings and 55 on Saturday evenings for the last decade. While the youth group is growing steadily (they now average 25 an event) Sunday School attendance is declining and several good opportunities for faith development for all ages have been ignored by the congregation. Hard questions about our congregation's membership and participation have yet to be explored and evaluated:

- Why are many of the children of our generational, familial membership attending church elsewhere or not at all?
- We have a good number of visitors. Why don't more of them elect to stay with us?
- Of those who have transferred membership or otherwise elected to be taken off the church rolls, can the reasons be categorized or grouped in some way? Is there a pattern?



There are other questions. But in the end, the Session rightly observed that, of our skills as a congregation, Outreach was by far our weakest. In that effort, a reorganization plan was adopted for Ministry of Outreach in January. This group is now working the plan to build up our strength in this area. And it is slow going.

Meanwhile, at the end of February, 2014, the Session committed to a Leadership Retreat. It was an overnight gathering where the leadership committed hours of uninterrupted time together to prayerfully pursue our church's future and what concrete steps for our direction should look like. As a part of this process, the Session engaged our Mission Statement (in its principal three parts: build, grow, share) and was divided into three working groups. These groups were tasked with coming back to the larger group with five recommendations under each Mission Statement theme for the whole Session to consider. The present Vision Statement is a result of very hard work and pushing back and forth over many issues including feasibility, advisability, and logistics. Deadlines were established for accountability.

The Pastor's role in this midst of this process was as a resource and a scribe. David designed the Retreat, of course, but the working groups came to their recommendations independent of his direct involvement. The Vision Statement is NOT the Pastor's plan, endorsed by the rest of the Session. The Vision Statement provides marching orders for David's work as well as the rest of the congregation. This was a team effort in partnership with no less than God. As the elected Leadership, the Session's task was as it has always been: to seek God's voice, to follow God's direction, to honor God's wishes. This is why the entire process was permeated with prayer and the study of Scripture.

And so the primary and central question the Session answered is this: Is it God's desire that Hawfields Presbyterian Church grow? The answer we discerned was "Yes!"

It should be clear, this is not simply growth in "numbers." This is growth both in numbers and in discipleship: we as a congregation should be, first and foremost, growing in faith.

What follows are some notes about each element of the Mission Statement and what progress we're making thus far.

The Vision Statement

Number One:

Grow the congregation to 300 active worshipping members (that is 150 new active worshippers by 2016 in addition to our current average attendance of 150)

This is *everyone's* responsibility. It is also fair to say that this goal is the cornerstone. All the other goals of the Vision Statement either derive from or point to this goal. Without this, some of what we are called to do is impossible and impractical. This means getting behind the efforts of Ministry of Outreach and stretching ourselves as a congregation.

New people means the dynamic of our congregation WILL change. If growth really is our calling as a church, then it is behooves us as a congregation to embrace this dynamic: we cannot be territorial or selfish.

Number Two:

Hire a part-time webmaster to staff. This person would be a principal aid in setting up online giving and purchasing, setting up our process for video podcasting, and making the Library more digital-friendly)

Presently, Ministry of Communications is exploring the feasibility of this. It may be possible to find someone in the congregation to manage this piece as their act of stewardship but it is a lot to ask a volunteer.

The importance of this piece can't be overstated since a majority of people now (whatever their demographic) are finding us online and forming opinions about us long before actually visiting us in person. Having a well-managed online presence is an important part of our Outreach ministry.

Number Three:

Setup a rolling bookcart(s) for encouraging resource use located in places other than the Education Building

Our Library is not getting the use that it might. Our feeling is "out of sight, out of mind" is operating here. By giving our resources more exposure, perhaps they will become a part of people working on their faith development at home, at work, or where ever.

Outdoor signs and brochure with a campus map to make it easy to navigate the campus (including the Church, Child Care Center and the Civitans)

You can see some of the progress with this in the breezeway. Having good signage goes a long way toward our reputation for hospitality. If someone new can find their way around our space easily, that helps them to feel at home and in the know.

Number Four:

Establishing Children's (K-5th) and Youth (6th-12th) Choirs

This is has been specifically addressed with Eileen, our Sunday Music Director, with a deadline of Rally Day to begin rehearsals and the end of September to begin monthly participation of the choir(s) in worship. What remains is for parents/ caregivers to empower their children to participate. Rehearsals will be immediately following the Sunday worship service for 30 minutes starting in August.

Number Five:

Inviting a youth to serve as a Ruling Elder (for a modified term)

We should take steps to ensure that this important and growing demographic in our church is represented in our leadership. A Youth Ruling Elder would have a voice and vote on the Session but would serve only a one year term. The minimum age for this position would be a sophomore in High School. This person should be a confirmed member of the congregation and would be elected according to the ordinary nominating process for church leadership. That means the Nominating Committee would recommend a slate of officers including a recommendation for this person, and the congregation would have final say on whomever was elected. If a viable candidate is not available for a given class, it would not be a given to fill this seat for that given class year.

For this to happen, the congregation must vote for it to be so.

Number Six:

Using a "Blitz" strategy for "marketing" the church; Doing a big campaign every so often (2-4 times a year)

When LaDonna Leftwich was being considered for the Office Administrator, she reported never knowing that we had a Saturday Worship Service, for example. Rick Purcell reported the same thing. This is remarkable considering how long this service has been around. But this is in contrast to Tamara Kersey who discovered us precisely because of what she had heard about us. This shines a light on the fact that we must be far more intentional about sharing who we are and our church story with the community. People shouldn't be finding us solely by accident or incidentally.

The idea behind this goal is to put forth concentrated, planned efforts to get our name “out there” and to help raise awareness in Mebane and beyond about us as a church and even to dispel misinformation about us.

place across Mebane in various stages of establishment. Currently, we are most closely associated with the efforts of the Mebane Area Pastors Group. The challenges of starting a food pantry boil down to location, funding and who’s in charge.

Number Seven:

Cultivate our reputation as a pillar of the community; putting together a swath of people from the various areas of our church to talk about how to do this (with the goal of having a reputation that says, “Once you come here, we’re friends!”)

We must be realistic about our reputation as a closed community. This group would work to identify ways to change that reputation.

Number Eight:

Continue to bring the community onto our property (e.g Scouts, AA, Community Days, etc.)

We are doing this! As more groups and organizations come to make use of our facilities they will be exposed to our literature, to our accouterments and over time develop a natural affinity with us that will translate into being active worshipping members.

An example of this is the Childcare Center. Through their association with Hawfields Church, Center children and parents are exposed to our church and its programming, from time time resulting in visitors and then members (think of the Monroes).

Number Nine:

Form a working group to explore a food pantry for the community that actively seeks partners beyond our walls

The steps for putting this together are complicated by alternate efforts taking

Number Ten:

Have the Pastor provide a regular (perhaps a weekly article for the paper)

One of the major pieces people name as a part of their looking for a church is whether they feel a connection with the Pastor. The article presents an opportunity for the Pastor to give voice to our congregation’s thinking on various topics but also an opportunity to cause folks to want to hear more. Right now the financial feasibility of this goal is being reviewed.

Number Eleven:

Having (for example) the 1st Saturday of the month be “Church T-Shirt Day”; this would mean everyone would need a church t-shirt(at either cost or gratis)

This has been established. Ministry of Communications is presently working on a plan to offer folks an opportunity to get HPC wear very soon who desire it.

Number Twelve:

Establish a periodical Mission as Worship Weekend; Based on Isaiah 58 and John 4, this service would involve members fanning out in teams and/or as families doing acts of service throughout the Hawfields community. This might include Good Shepherd Kitchen, Allied Churches, Peace Haven Farm, Habitat for Humanity, Cross Roads Shelter, and more. All this during the time we ordinarily meet for worship. Those not able to go out will gather in our Sanctuary for a service of prayer for all those working. At the appointed time,

we will all gather in the Fellowship Hall for a common meal to debrief the experience. This will be worship for us that day.

Worship & Music and Service & Mission have established October 5th as the Sunday in question. Service & Mission are presently working on a suggested list of projects and agencies to provide the congregation.

The Scriptural rationale for this comes from Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25. In the Isaiah passage, God challenges the people to consider acts of compassion as a fast (worship). In the Matthew 25 passage, we are to recognize Christ in the face of those we serve. John 4 further states that, in the future, the people of God will worship God in Spirit and in truth, not in a particular place, but from our hearts. All of this colludes with the assessment of the generations coming after us that we don't live out what we preach. This weekend is intended to be a concrete answer to that.

Number Thirteen:

Talk to the Mebane Police Department (& other agencies) about our community needs so that we can strategize how to meet them.

Greg Massey has suggested that the better folks to talk to for this would be those working in social services. His thought is that by the time the police or the fire department gets involved in a situation, people are often in trouble or become "problems." Social Services might be a better way to assess what needs the community has that we as a congregation can help address.

The reason to do this is we should. The result of doing this is people's understanding of who we are changing (in some cases).

Number Fourteen:

Build a new Worship Center

Honestly, it's hard to talk about this when our Financial house is in some degree of disorder (outstanding loan from the building fund, savings accounts without clear use, and a convoluted apparatus for giving, for examples). That said, we really need to start talking about it. So much of this particular conversation will hinge on our outreach efforts and the joint conversation between Worship & Music and Ministry to Staff and the ensuing direction we take as a church. But the thrust of this goal has to do with the present and future needs of our congregation when it comes to technology, space (especially how flexible it is), and accommodations (bathrooms, handicap accessibility, for examples). These are all pieces difficult at best to accommodate in our present space both physically and politically (frankly).

What this goal is NOT about is gaining new members. We have many other goals trying to address that. And whether the congregation grows numerically has to do with MUCH more than whether or not we have buildings people like. The sense of this goal is that functionally our present sanctuary is bearing limits that we have already started to outgrow programmatically, technically and hospitality-wise.

For example, every church in the country that is growing makes use of projection technology. This has to do as much with culture as anything else. We live in a visual age. People are accustomed to getting information through screens. Whether we're talking about televisions, computer screens, phones and other handheld devices, screens are a part of our common language. Our sanctuary is not set up to accommodate this.

Having handicap-accessible bathrooms would mean either renovating our existing bathrooms (none of which exist in the Sanctuary) or building new space (which arguably is a cheaper exercise).

Our space being a part of the historical register is a great thing. But it also means strident restrictions on how we seek to revamp the space.

Another piece is use. Some might say, "If we build new space, it means the Sanctuary falls into further disrepair from lack of regular use." Yet by turning the present Sanctuary into a working museum (Pastor's idea) it can be made into a much larger version of the present historical room and given regular attention for special services and occasions. And those instincts to want to preserve and immortalize the space will have proper and functional space.

These Are Not Ends in Themselves

There are several additional things to consider when thinking about this vision statement. The statement represents God's plan for us as a church. As grandiose as that may seem, it is the truth. But we may not actually achieve everything on the list. Does that mean we will have failed in God's will for us? Not necessarily.

Sometimes the learning that takes place in trying to achieve a given goal is God's take away for us. Sometimes what we learn in failure is just as important (if not more so) than what we learn in success. Each of these goals involve some degree and some form of risk. We historically have been risk-averse. The time for that is past us now.

In order to know what God wants us to know then we must try. We must risk. We must take a chance that we will fail. What we gain is priceless.