

## **Questions and Answers Concerning an Adaptive Forest Hills Presbyterian Church as of 4-10-2016**

We, the Ad Hoc Gathering (Joe Blankinship, Tom Blount, Greg Hubble, Cindy Salter, David Sasser and Sandy Tew) would like to thank each and everyone of you for having open hearts and minds to the will of God. We were commissioned by the Session to explore, listen and gather responses concerning the Session's recommendation about future staffing. These recommendations were brought about in response to the insights and findings of the Mission Study. On Sunday, May 22, 2016, we will have a congregational vote regarding Co-Pastoring. Our attempt is and always been to be totally transparent. You may contact anyone of us with questions or comments. We don't know all the answers, we don't even know all the questions, but we have attempted to answer the ones both that we have thought of and that have been brought to our attention. We present them here for your discernment.

### **1. When is the timeline for these "listening sessions" to end?**

The floor will be open as long as there are unanswered questions from the congregation. We are committed to the process that is in motion. Although we would like to move forward as soon as feasibly possible.

### **2. Where do we stand with the proposal for staff changes?**

The Mission Study guided our Session to consider the idea of co-pastors. The Personnel Gathering drafted a Co-Pastor job description. This was then sent to Session members, who studied it over a four month time period. Session approved going forward with the idea so that it could be introduced to the congregation for wider discernment. The Mission Study was submitted to and approved by the Committee on Ministry of the Salem Presbytery. The Ad Hoc gathering was formed to conduct more education and discernment events. This is where we are as of April, 2016. Going forward, Session will present a job description to the congregation at a called meeting. With congregational approval, the approved new position would then be submitted to the COM asking for permission to elect a Designated Co Pastor Nominating Committee. Session would call another congregational meeting to elect members to the DCPNC. The Presbytery would submit up to 5 names for consideration. The DCPNC would then narrow names down to one, work out the specifics of the call and present the candidate to COM for suitability and for an interview. If voted favorably by the COM, another congregational meeting would be held to vote on the candidate and the call.

See Blue Think Note

### **3. What authority does a Mission Study have? Do we have to have one?**

Yes, we have done one, and in order to establish a designated co-pastor position, we needed to have done so. Guided by the Mission Study, the Session discerned that the church's mission should move forward. Our last Mission Study was done in 1993. It was imperative to repeat it because it helps us to see where God is leading us. The Mission Study is not determinative - it does not force us to do something. It is a significant tool for guiding our decision-making about our church, the community and our mission to the community. It is required if we are to create a new ordained position of any type. It would also be required if Joe were to leave and a new pastor was to be called.

### **4. How are we going to pay for this?**

If we were to eliminate the DCE position and hire a co-pastor, the difference in that salary and Joe's is \$23,314.00. A typical residency position (shared by our partner agency in a percentage to be determined) would be 19-20K plus housing. So, if we had this person half of the time, we would pay 50 percent of the aforementioned dollars. Session recommends that for this experimental time of 3 years, we allocate some amount from our Endowment return and the remainder from the Operating Fund. Percentages have yet to be determined.

### **5. Why do we need change?**

The idea of position change was spurred by the recognition of changing ministry needs identified in the Mission Study. The importance of being in the community, getting to know the people and their needs is the only way we will know how to effectively connect with people.

Having two pastors allows for more effective ministry. The division of labor depends on the gifts and passions of the co-pastors and may be fluid as gifts and energies change or as new ministry opportunities arise. Co-pastors, by definition, should possess complimentary gifts, not the same set of gifts.

Co-pastors would allow each pastor to use his/her strengths to the best advantage, both within the congregation and with potential members and others outside the church with whom we find ourselves in relationship. One pastor trying to do all of that would not be effective in any field. Future congregants may not be members, but fewer people "join" congregations, preferring instead to be affiliated, not members.

The idea of position change grew from asking ourselves this question: "*What is God leading us to be and to do?*" It grew from reminding ourselves of our vision statement and asking, "*How best can we actualize that vision?*"

The Session has decided that doing nothing is not an option. Congregations who are not looking to see where and how God is calling them to minister and what gifts God is providing to accomplish that ministry are congregations that are moving toward dying. A current cultural reality is that very few people seek out congregations, and those numbers decrease every year. The current staffing proposal is the Session's preferred option for going forward, but it is not the only option. The Session is open to other ideas and other identified calls to ministry. The Session's hope is to address the future with fresh and faithful efforts at being "church" in this time of transition. The co-pastor/resident model is a multi-part experiment that is proposed. Other proposals are welcome, but doing nothing does not seem like a faithful option to the Session.

## **6. Why grow? Why venture?**

God's people have always been called to step out into unknown territory in faith. No call has been well-defined or has had a printed instruction booklet. We know God has a call to ministry for us. We have made connections with people in our community already. God is at work outside and inside our walls and invites us to follow His lead.

We venture because God calls. We venture because if we don't, we don't grow in discipleship. We venture because God is working toward reconciliation and transformation and chooses to partner with us. We venture because those who have come before have given us a legacy of place and mission that we appreciate and value. We venture because we have recognized the gift of grace that is ours and we are called to witness to that grace which is given for all. We do not feel that we have another faithful choice but to venture and grow.

## **7. How will this be financed?**

See number 4.

## **8. Who manages the Endowment Fund should the church go bankrupt?**

The Presbytery. The Endowment is not separate from the church. All the church's assets would become Presbytery property.

## **9. What are our ministries?**

AA, NA, Mizo, Caring Services, Boys and Girls Club, Northwood Elementary, Leslie's House, our missionaries, Community Clinic, Open Door Ministries, Feed our Sheep, Congregational Care, One Can a Week, Mobile Meals, West End Ministries, Christian Formation, Provision for Worship, the use of our facility, Prayers and Squares, Labyrinth, Care for Paws and more to come!!

## **10. How can Session just push this over on us?**

Session is not forcing this on anyone. The Session and we, the Ad Hoc Gathering, are being totally transparent about the process. The Session is charged with governing, and in this case its decision must be endorsed by the congregation if it is to go forward.

The Congregation hires ordained ministers, not the Session. The Session is suggesting this staffing model based on the current ministries. If not this staffing model or these ministries, then what alternative vision is there for the church?

## **11. What is a bi-vocational resident?**

Fewer seminar students can afford to take a year of internship while they are in school. More are second career, have families, and living an extra year with no income is not something most can do. The preferred training situation is now the "residency." They provide a path to ordination, guidance as the student serves in their first call, and a level of "experience" that helps placement when they leave. Residents also provide a more stable ministry for a congregation; two to three year tenures allow better relationship and more effective ministry.

The unique niche FHPC is proposing is a bi-vocational resident. No one else is doing this and the seminaries we have talked to are very excited about meeting this need. The resident would work part-time with congregational duties and part time in a mission agency or program with which our church partners. Our resident would work with our Youth but would also have general congregational duties.

This would continue and enhance FHPC's long tradition of ministry outside our walls as well as inside. The residency program also continues a long tradition of preparing people for service to God's church as ministers of Word and Sacrament.

See green Think Note

## **12. Hasn't our membership decreased? Why do we need to add staff?**

Yes, our numbers have dropped, but slower than the national average. As of January 2016, we have 254 members. Our average Sunday attendance for 2015 was 94, and that has remained steady for the past 4 years. We are engaging more people in our missions who want to be connected but are not members. Growth is more than just numbers, it is what is happening with those numbers! Our church is growing in spiritual health, more people are involved in formation practices, giving as spiritual practice has grown over the past 3 years, we have had a mostly balanced budget over the past 3 years, and we are currently debt-free.

The staffing question hinges on what we are called to do and be going forward. Do we want to be a membership church or a missional church? Do we want to staff for decline, or for growth? Can we do the hard, faithful, work required of institutional churches today to connect with our neighbors and share the faith practice that we love, that nurtures us, and that we know can change the world?

If we are called to increase our missional activity, we believe that activity is more than one pastor can handle adequately along with our congregational needs. The complimentary gifts of two pastors will serve the congregation and community more effectively.

See white Think Note

## **13. How is this going to be different from what we are already doing?**

Currently we have a Director of Christian Formation. This is not an ordained position. The DCF cannot ordinarily serve communion, do weddings, or baptize.

A co-pastor would be able to equally share all pastoral care responsibilities. It would provide stability for the congregation if one pastor leaves; the co-pastor would serve until a new pastor was called.

Think about it like this. If we keep doing it the same way we are now doing it, we are not going to get different results. If we want to minister to the community and not just to those who walk through our doors, we have to go out to the community. That is just not in the current job descriptions of pastor or DCF. Determining which segments of our community and how we minister to them have yet to be fully developed. We believe we are seeing indications of God leading us to minister to the recovering community, at-risk children, the hungry and LGBTQ. We also see increasing pastoral care needs as our congregation ages.

And to be clear, Joe and Beth are doing more than their current job descriptions, but there is a lot the Mission Study suggests that they just can't do under current conditions.

In some ways, two pastors may look the same, especially on Sunday mornings. In many ways, a partnership with compatible skills frees each person to work into their strongest gifts, which may benefit the congregation in ways we cannot yet imagine.

**14. If we go forward with the co-pastor, do we automatically go out and get a resident?**

Yes, under the current proposal. The co-pastor would take on pastoral, missional, and evangelism duties. Our vision is that it would serve the church well to have new energy with our ministry to youth. Both co-pastors would also be expected to nurture our youth just like they are expected to nurture adults. We have a remarkable ministry to youth and teaching others how that works is a good thing.

A resident is an economically sound option and our congregation would benefit from seeing and hearing and learning from a newly educated seminary graduate. There may be money for this from foundations that support creative ministry options.

The current proposal from Session for staffing recommends co-pastors to meet the future mission of the church and recommends the RESIDENCY program. However, they could be considered separately. In fact, we could undertake the residency program as an experiment and not change the pastoral staff. We would need to trim some of our outreach, but this is an option. Hiring a person for the residency program would be a Session action as it is not an ordained call.

**15. Could we pay co-pastors different salaries based on experience?**

The short answer is no. Because they are co-pastors, the duties and the salary are equally shared. The current proposal is for full equity. Alternatives could be growing into equity incrementally. Technically, the terms of call must be approved by the Session and the Congregation (true for any ordained staff). Session could propose any terms they consider to the Congregation.

**16. Why do we need co-pastors and an intern when we are operating now with just a pastor and a DCE?**

We think we need a new model of ministry because we feel a call from God to address the needs of this congregation and our community in new ways. The mission study came first. Congregation members articulated needs, we discovered other needs as we looked at demographic information about our community and talked to community leaders. For our congregation to move

forward in new kinds of ministry, we feel like co-pastors are our most efficient, most effective option.

**17. Would hiring a resident be a Session matter or would it come to a congregational vote?**

It would be a Session decision because this is not an ordained position.

**18. Could the congregational vote be done by ballots?**

Yes.

Again we thank you all for your prayer and discernment of this very important task. You can find the Think Notes and other information on the Mission Study Table located in the rear narthex.