

St. John's Presbyterian Church



Mission Study 2017

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Life in the Church



The Sanctuary



Martin Hall Social



Fall Clean-up



Feeding The Homeless



Hymn Sing Sunday



Bible Study Groups

Our Vision

To become a more faithful community of disciples,
committed to following Jesus Christ.

Our Mission

As a faithful Christian community of disciples we shall:

- **Worship God Joyfully** in forms traditional yet informal, with emphasis on hearing the Word, music, and prayer.
- **Care For Each Other** through prayer, words of comfort, and practical assistance.
- **Improve The Planning, Coordination and Support** of the work of our congregation by identifying, training, and electing committed lay leaders according to Presbyterian polity.
- **Reach Out and Welcome** the Samaritans in our community, after equipping ourselves through biblically grounded study and contemplation of poverty, homelessness, immigration, homosexuality, racism, and economic injustice.
- **Care For Our Neighbors Lovingly** by:
 1. Assessing our talents and resources as a congregation.
 2. Determining the critical needs of our local community as well as the nation and world around us, and
 3. Exercising good stewardship as we initiate ministries that will employ our capabilities appropriately and effectively in serving those communities.

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Appendices printed separately and available upon request
or can be found on our website www.stjohnschurch.org

The Appendices

Congregational Profile: Statistic

- A. The Community Around St. John's

- B. What Have We Gleaned From Our History?
Congregational Event, Wednesday Evening, February 24, 2016

- C. Appreciative Inquiry:
What Attracted You to St. John's? What Is Most Valuable?
How Are We When We Are At Our Best?
What Is the Most Life-Giving Characteristic of St. John's?
Congregational Event, Wednesday Evening, April 27, 2016

- D. Applying the Call of Christ to Us
Congregational Event, after worship, Sunday, September 11, 2016

- E. Applying the Great Commission (Mt. 28:16-20) to Us
Congregational Event, after worship, Sunday, September 25, 2016

- F. Reactions to presentation by Rev. Dr. Paul Borden (video)
on the Life Cycle of Churches
Congregational Event, after worship, October 9, 2016

The Vision Committee

We began as a group of individuals who dedicated ourselves to creating a vision, led by God, for the future of St. John's. We came from varied backgrounds, not all Presbyterian by birth, of different ages from millennials to seventy plus. As we worked together, sharing opinions and ideas, we developed a sense of trust and a respect for each other. The committee members were Doris Bennett, Aaron Karr, Rick McElreath, Ed Pullen, Ken Meyer, David Bohnhoff and Martha Galloway, chair, with Jim Young, our interim pastor as advisor.

One of our first tasks was to review and study data regarding the socio-economic make up of Reno as well as ethnicity and religious preferences of our area. We also took time to organize the comments from the congregation in response to meetings held with them on what they saw as our strengths and weaknesses. The meetings were held at different times of the year addressing the history of St. John's and the healing required from that discussion, our church at its best and what was hoped for the future of the congregation. Those comments gave us the direction for our continued deliberations. Through long and often tedious periods of time we were able to finally write a Vision Statement and to complete our Mission Study.

It is hoped that what we have done will be a stimulus to the congregation, most particularly to the Session and the Board of Deacons, that through our work they become even more aware of the marvelous strengths, abilities and talents of this extraordinary church. Our hope and prayer is that from this realization they would then engage our suggested challenges, using them to stimulate their thinking and working together to move forward in faith, looking always to Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We also hope and pray that what we have written will be a good and faithful guide for the future Pastor Nominating Committee, helping them to indicate to candidates our strengths, our challenges, our hopes, our dreams

The Community Around St. John's

The community, or neighborhood, that surrounds our church is predominantly white with six out of ten people white and nearly three out of ten Hispanic with the addition of almost one out of ten people Asian. The interesting thing we discovered is that although this area around the church is projected to grow a bit, this growth will not be through increasing numbers of Anglos moving in, but just the opposite: the white population is projected to decrease slightly while the non- white is projected to increase. (This includes Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans and African-Americans) An interesting fact is that over half of our neighborhood is younger than we tended to think, half being under 55 years of age (and older than 15), with a large number being millennials, that is between 15 and 34 years of age.

It was very thought-provoking when we realized that in our own neighborhood little over one and a half households in ten are below the United States poverty level, and that almost three out of ten households with children are headed by single mothers. This data gave the committee a good sense of the type of mission field that currently surrounds St. John.

Realizing that there are definitely mission opportunities available, we were all struck by the data we encountered dealing with potential faith involvement along with what faith issues stand out in our immediate neighborhood. We discovered that nearly half (47%) of our neighborhood is not involved in any faith community at all, but more importantly, not interested in getting involved. (and this, by the way, is far lower than the US Average). We were reminded that we definitely live in the western part of the US.

Nevertheless, there is good news here, namely that within those who may be interested in getting involved in a faith community, a bit over half prefer "Historic Christian" Groups, with less than two in ten preferring "Non-Historic Christian" Groups. However, this does not mean that these prospects prefer what traditional churches ordinarily offer. We say this because we also discovered that among those in our neighborhood that may be interested in getting involved with a church, a clear majority prefer a contemporary style, both in worship and in music. (See appendix, *The Community Around St. John's*, "Do these Household prefer Traditional or Contemporary?") This data is probably linked to the fact that half of our neighborhood is under fifty-five.

But perhaps the most interesting thing we discovered in this mountain of statistical data is that the church programs/services such interested people in our neighborhood tended to prefer are those dealing with Recreation (sports/camping/ Arts & Music, Fun & Fellowship, Adult Discussion Groups, Marriage Enrichment, etc.). This preference is head and shoulders above all the others. It is followed by Spiritual Development, and then Community/Social Services.

Our History

During the past 70 years, St. John's Presbyterian Church grew to a peak of about 900 members and attendees, experienced two periods of severe conflict resulting in loss of members, went through an extended period of healing, and are now, with a diminished membership of fewer than 300, ready to define a new vision and move forward.

St. John's was born in 1948, during the postwar boom. Rev. Rafe Martin, the organizing pastor, served for 12 years. During that time the congregation grew rapidly, moving from temporary quarters to a building constructed by the members themselves at the present site on Plumb Lane. Our tradition of music as an important part of worship began early, with the pastor leading the choir, the purchase of an organ, and relationships begun with the music department at the University of Nevada. Likewise, strong fellowship groups were formed during this period.

Rev. William Clawson came next, serving for 11 years, 1961-1972. As the congregation continued to grow in numbers, the present sanctuary was built (dedicated in 1969), and the previous one became our fellowship hall.

Rev. William Barrett served the longest, from 1973 to 1992, and was named Pastor Emeritus on his retirement. One notable event during this time was a late-night fire that destroyed the Christian Education wing in 1976. That building was quickly replaced and expanded, providing space to establish a pre-school as a mission of the church. Other additions included a balcony in the sanctuary and a new organ. Membership reached its peak at this time. However, complaints against Rev. Barrett by a vocal minority resulted in a hiatus in his pastorate, 1985-86, and a significant loss of members, who left to form another Presbyterian congregation.

Rev. Ned Benson served for 11 years, 1993-2006. Membership grew again, many improvements were made in the facilities, and endowment funds were established. However, Rev. Benson's strengths were offset by his authoritarian leadership style. Intense conflict between his detractors and his supporters came to a head in 2005, resulting in another major loss of members, and unresolved feelings among those remaining.

From 2006 to the present we have had a time of recovery and healing, led by interim pastors Rev. Richard Hutchison, Rev. Richard Wiggers, and Rev. Nancy Vincent Martin, followed by the five-year pastorate of Rev. Thomas Baughman, and now the interim pastorate of Rev. James Young. During this time we have had many funerals, our youth have grown and gone, and most of our new members are older, rather than young families. With aging comes more empathy and compassion, and that is one of our strengths, as we care for each other and reach out in mission. We are seeking a pastor who shares that compassion and will guide and support us as we seek to serve God faithfully and well.

Worship and Music

Worship and music are a major part of what frames our identity as a congregation. We are very proud of our beautiful sanctuary, in which we enjoy a traditional form of Presbyterian worship. In our worship services we are comforted and strengthened by sermons grounded in scripture and pertinent to the everyday circumstances of life, along with the sacraments, prayer, and powerful music. We have a mature congregation that came to St. John's because of those traditions and we have a responsibility to continue to provide that form of worship experience. St. John's has one worship service on Sunday mornings at 10:30 AM. Church School and Nursery Care is provided at this time as well. The Lord's Supper is celebrated in the pews the first Sunday of every month and by intinction on Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve.

Throughout our history, the music, both vocal and instrumental, has played a critical role in the life of the congregation. Our Music Director leads our choir of 25 members in beautiful songs that enhance our worship service. Our Organist/Pianist is outstanding and performs a well-chosen piece of music following the service that many in the congregation remain seated to hear. Both have outstanding backgrounds in music with connections to the University of Nevada, Reno. Worship music is generally of classical selections and hymns from the Presbyterian Hymnal accompanied with our magnificent pipe organ or the baby grand piano. Once a month, prior to the worship service, we gather to sing requested older and favorite hymns that many enjoyed in their younger days. Two special worship services are held that have unique music – The Kirkin' o' the Tartan Sunday where Scottish traditional music is played by the Sierra Highlander Bagpipe Band and the Christmas Cantata that includes the church choir and guest performers accompanied by an orchestra. Both attract a large number of non-members from throughout our community. We feel the music played throughout the service helps all who worship experience that God is in this place.

We understand that our traditional worship service is not for everyone and has certainly stifled our ability to attract younger adults, younger families and children. We believe some simple changes to our music and liturgy would make our worship services more inviting. We need to be willing to try new methods of worship, without losing our primary focus. We live in a 24 hour, 7 day a week, work community and not everyone can be available to worship with us on a Sunday morning.

Programs and Activities

Sunday morning worship is the vital core that brings us together as a community of faith. Beyond that, the life and work of our congregation is found in a varied array of organizations, both formal and informal – from the Session, its committees, and the Deacons, to Presbyterian Women and their circles, Mariners groups, a weekly Men’s Breakfast Bible Study, a knitting/crocheting group, a monthly book club, and the group that provides food for the homeless every week, as well as gatherings that don’t get listed on our calendar, such as those that meet for lunch after worship every Sunday.

Our Deacons are the designated leaders in the ministry of compassion, but other groups share in this, as they demonstrate caring friendship for their own members, especially in time of need, and have mission projects to help others. Deacons take home communion to shut-ins, and distribute holiday baskets to them at Easter and Christmas. They send cards and call or visit when members are ill or grieving, and provide meals as appropriate. They also are responsible for receptions after funerals. In conjunction with the Older Adult Ministry, they provide transportation to church and medical appointments for those who need it, and make regular friendly visits to those who cannot get out to church activities.

The Fellowship and Nurture Committee is active all year long, organizing meals or receptions for gatherings such as our congregational meetings, Ash Wednesday services, and the Hanging of the Greens before Christmas. They also provide a chili cook-off, an all-church summer picnic, a Thanksgiving potluck, and other opportunities for fellowship. One special annual event is the mother-daughter lunch the day before Mother’s Day, with the men as servers. This committee also schedules the Mariners groups that provide coffee and cookies for the fellowship time after Sunday worship.

The Christian Education Committee provides nursery and child care during worship services as well as a weekly Together Time for students from St. John’s Children’s Center. Graduating high school seniors are presented with a study Bible at a breakfast held in their honor. College scholarships are also given to qualified graduates. Although the number of our children and youth is greatly diminished, we have Sunday School, Youth Connection activities, summer camp, and an evening of crafts projects for families in November. Neighborhood children are invited to our Easter Egg Hunt, Vacation Bible School, and Trunk or Treat at Halloween. Adult education includes women’s circle studies, the Men’s Breakfast Bible Study, and occasional programs through the Older Adult Ministry and Mariners groups, as well as Sunday morning classes.

Our church is a congregation of overlapping communities, including a variety of groups and activities that embody differing blends of fellowship, spiritual growth, and mission. Our congregation and these communities are open to anyone who wishes to participate.

Mission Outreach

One of the greatest strengths of St. John's Presbyterian Church is our dedication to mission, both within and beyond the walls of our church. We pledge to display a servant's heart as we encounter the helpless and oppressed within our midst and on our daily travels.

Locally, our biggest mission effort is in feeding the homeless. Every Monday night, a group of our members take food to Record Street in downtown Reno and, along with members of another congregation, serve 180 to 340 hungry people. Clothing, hats, gloves, blankets, and tarps are also provided for the homeless. Contributions of food and funds from our members support this project.

Another local project is the provision of about a hundred fully loaded backpacks for disadvantaged school children, delivered before school begins in August. We also contribute new and used clothing for distribution by Good Shepherd's Clothes Closet and food for the local food bank. Through mission offerings and contributions from our Mariners groups and Presbyterian Women we give financial support to several of the charitable organizations in the Reno-Sparks area. Our aim now is to better understand the urgent needs of our community and expand our mission accordingly.

Reaching beyond our local community, we give significant financial support to our denominational mission programs as well as selected others. In addition to our per capita obligation, we budget increasing amounts for the Presbyterian Mission Agency. Also from our general funds, we support Presbyterian missionaries in Thailand, Costa Rica, and Cuba, as well as a missionary in Pakistan from another organization. We promote One Great Hour of Sharing, the Pentecost Offering, and the Christmas Joy Offering each year, and our Presbyterian Women give through their own offerings. We contribute to Church World Service with an offering in the spring and the CROP Walk in the fall. Our youth collect a Souper Bowl offering, and a Mariners group enlists our members in filling boxes for Operation Christmas Child. And when a special need arises in our community or the wider world, our congregation can be counted on to respond generously.

Our building is an asset that we share with the community around us. The St. John's Children's Center is a highly rated pre-school that was established forty years ago in a wing added after a disastrous fire. Other parts of our building are used throughout the week by many groups, from Alcoholics Anonymous and AI-Anon to Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts, adult and children's choirs, bagpipers, and a Lion's club collecting eyeglasses and giving computers to families that can't afford them.

St. John's Presbyterian Church is blessed with a generous and caring congregation, blessed by a loving God. When responding to the needs around us, we are led by the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:40, "Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Therefore, we strive to spread the love of Jesus Christ to all because He has so freely lavished it upon us.

Communication

St. John's has various ways of communicating to its congregation and community. As technology evolves, the church is adapting to using newer means of communication.

St. John's excels at using written media to inform the congregation and the community about the life of the church. The Sunday bulletin includes the order of the service, upcoming events, announcements, contact information for Elders and Deacons, and the church email address. Sometimes there are flyers with other important information. Members and visitors are encouraged to fill out communication cards that allow the church to send out information to those visiting, and keep tabs on member's that might have special needs. This also allows the church office to reach out to first and second time visitors.

The Church also has a newsletter called *The Carillion* which contains articles submitted by members and organizations within the church. Each Carillion publication includes a summation of the Session meeting, mission committee reports on various projects our church supports, what they do and sometimes who is involved from our church; as well as highlighting a missionary and their involvement in serving God around the world. There is a printed and electronic version to match the needs of the congregation. The church also utilizes bulletin boards and flyers around the church displaying information.

Like most churches, St. John's has numerous ways of communicating using oral communication. Every Sunday, the pastor (occasionally an associate pastor or guest pastor) reads scriptures, leads prayers, and delivers a sermon that lasts between 15 to 25 minutes. The church also offers Bible studies done by pastors and volunteers. The church has volunteers who also read Bible stories to the children attending church on Sunday and also to the St. John's Children Center.

More recently, the church has been moving into the 21st century. We have recently updated our website that includes our newsletter, recorded sermons, the church calendar, and much more. St. John's also has a Facebook page that members and visitors can follow to see church events and pictures. The office also emails the Carillion upon request. There is a slideshow in the Narthex that displays information as well as pictures of the life of the church.

The church has attempted to broaden its influence in social media by having a Twitter account and YouTube channel.

The Way Forward: Continuity and Change

Our aim is to build on our strengths in worship and in caring for each other, while becoming better coordinated in our efforts and more inclusive in our outreach. We will need to recognize the leaders among us and support them as they learn to provide more effective structure for our ministry and mission. And we will need to open our minds and hearts to welcome a more diverse community outside our doors.

As an aging congregation we have acquired a goodly store of experience and a certain amount of wisdom, individually and collectively. On the other hand, aging brings waning energy, increasing health problems, and a tendency to be settled in our opinions. As a mostly white, mostly middle to upper middle class congregation, we have the financial resources to be a blessing to our neighbors. Our challenge is to be good stewards of the gifts we have been given – to use our money, our talents, and our limited energy wisely, and to be open to the leading of the spirit.

To assist us on our way, we need a pastor who will confirm us in our strength as a caring people, lead us in faithful worship, guide us in developing effective leadership, encourage us as we open ourselves to new mission opportunities, and support us as we seek renewed vitality in loving outreach to our neighbors.

However, as a faithful community of disciples we cannot wait to move forward until we have called a new pastor. The Vision Committee, in the course of its work, became aware of many aspects of our congregational life to be improved and many initiatives that can be taken. We recommend that the Session consider the suggestions listed below, and take action as appropriate.

Organization and Leadership

- Educate our members in Presbyterian polity and principles.
- Identify and elect Elders and Deacons who are committed Christians and have abilities or potential for leadership (Session) and compassion (Deacons).
- Provide training and coaching in effective leadership for our officers, especially those newly elected.
- Engage all ordained Elders and Deacons in the work of the church, sharing the workload of those currently on those boards.
- Diversify the membership of committees, involving more members of the congregation and avoiding service on more than one committee.
- Review and update our mission study at least annually, beginning with the Session and extending to committees and organizations.

Worship

- Maintain our established form of Sunday worship, which is the foundation of our unity as a congregation.
- Attract mature individuals and families by making our style of worship known to the community around us.
- Provide opportunities for alternative styles of worship and music, trying out different forms, venues, and schedules as a supplement to our regular services.

Member Care

- Appreciate and encourage the caring attitude and activities of our members.
- Invite inactive members to participate in the life and work of our congregation, welcoming them into our organizations and activities.
- Recognize obstacles to participation (such as driving at night) and develop means of overcoming them.

Education and Spiritual Growth

- Provide biblical and theologically grounded study of current issues, including racism, immigration, homosexuality and gender identity, poverty and economic injustice, violence and war, and freedom and responsibility in our democratic society.
- Enable us to discuss political/economic/theological issues with mutual forbearance, respecting differences in perspective.

Mission

- Establish priorities and focus for our mission efforts through dialog within and among the various groups in our congregation who seek to serve.
- Expand our service to our local community, recognizing the racial and ethnic diversity around us and matching the interests and capabilities of our members to urgent needs.
- Support local teachers and schools through gestures of appreciation as well as practical assistance.
- Expand our support for needy families and children.
- Promote increased financial support for PCUSA mission programs.

Outreach and Hospitality

- Actively offer our sanctuary to the community as a venue for musical and artistic events.
- Reach out to University of Nevada students, faculty, and staff, inviting them to participate in our worship and other activities.
- Create a consistent theme and identity for St. John's as we present ourselves to the community.
- Expand and enhance our use of social media.

Building and Grounds

- Establish a long-range plan for major repairs and improvements to our facilities.

Finances

- Report our budget and financial figures understandably, so that the Session and the congregation can be good stewards of our resources.
- Engage all of our members in financial support of the work of the church.
- Increase the usefulness of our endowment funds.
- Plan and implement a capital funds campaign for major repairs to our facility (new roof, parking lot, other).