

MISSION STUDY December 2005

The Session has authorized a Mission Study and elected members of the Mission Study Committee to prepare a written report that will answer the following questions:

1. Who are we, based both on our past and on our present our strengths and weaknesses?
2. Whom do we serve and to whom do we minister in our Church, in our community and beyond?
3. As a congregation, what are our expectations, hopes and dreams for the future?

The purpose of the Mission Study is to provide an up-to-date assessment of West Side Church's mission as we begin to seek a new Senior Pastor (Head of Staff). Input from the congregation has been incorporated. The Committee estimates it received responses from 20-25% of the congregation, including both individuals and committees. The committee has prayerfully sought to bring together statements that reflect the character of West Side in the present as well as the path upon which God is leading us in the future.

WEST SIDE CHURCH MISSION STATEMENT

West Side Church was incorporated more than 50 years ago but its ministry has retained a consistent focus over all these years. The following mission statement that has appeared in the church bulletin for over 20 years best describes this focus:

“West Side Church seeks to be a caring fellowship where people are called to respond to the love of Jesus Christ and are challenged to grow toward Christian maturity, to worship God, to proclaim the Gospel, to make disciples and to minister to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Holy Scriptures.”

WHO ARE WE, BASED BOTH ON OUR PAST AND ON OUR PRESENT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

West Side is a very strong, stable, conservative, evangelical and mission-oriented church. Church attendance has been consistent with an average of 250-300 weekly over the last several years. West Side is part of a local United Protestant tradition. When Richland was founded during development of the Hanford Nuclear project, the city established neighborhood churches each affiliated with a sponsoring denomination allowing members to maintain ties with their own denomination. Our congregation has a good balance of men and women in church and community leadership roles. We are primarily a professional and technically oriented congregation, with a large number of men and

women holding advanced degrees. There is an emphasis upon family life, with a growing recognition for the need to minister to the increasing numbers of singles and retirees in our church and community.

God has molded West Side into an active community of believers with a commitment to biblical teaching and preaching and the application of God's word to our daily lives. West Side has a strong tradition of calling pastors who are Bible-based, scholarly, and gifted preachers. Our pastors have challenged us to seek God and His will for us both as a congregation and individually as we hear His word.

West Side desires to be a church family, made up of those who have experienced God's grace through Jesus Christ and who pass that grace on to others. We are committed to seeking out relationships with one another and are looking for better ways to include those who come to West Side looking for a church home. There has been a renewed emphasis on the formation of small groups that meet regularly for prayer, study, support and encouragement in living out our faith in today's world.

Christian Education and fellowship activities for children and youth have been a ministry focus since West Side Church was founded. Currently there are more than 300 adult volunteer positions for teaching, leading and caring for infants and children through fifth grade. Activities for this age group include Sunday School; childcare for infants through kindergarteners during both worship services; Pathfinders, a midweek Logos Program for school aged-children which offers opportunities for Bible study, worship, music, family mealtime and fellowship; and Vacation Bible School, which has long been a highlight of the summer for neighborhood children as well as those from our congregation. Summer Christian camping is available for children in grade school through senior high, as are weekly activities under the direction of the Summer Trainee Program. Mid-year retreats are available as well to mid-high and senior high students.

Opportunities for youth fellowship and growth are offered on Sunday mornings and evenings, as well as midweek. Youth leaders working with this group are reaching out to young people who are not associated with the church. These are young people who know little about the Christian faith and who often have a difficult family situation or social problems. While enfolding newcomers is important, it is imperative that we provide solid, Bible-based teaching and opportunities for spiritual growth, discipleship and nurture for the youth of our congregation. The creative, prayerful and dedicated encouragement, help, and support of laity is critical to the successful efforts of our youth staff.

Cross Currents is a college and career-age singles group that meets weekly for Bible Study, Sunday morning for Sunday School and Sunday evening for fellowship. West Side believes that ongoing Christian education is important for all age groups. Adult education offerings include 3-4 classes each Sunday morning as well as a variety of Bible studies classes throughout the week, both lay and staff led. In support of this commitment and belief in Christian education, the period of time between the two worship services is dedicated year-round to this purpose.

Currently, our Christian Education program is geared primarily toward traditional families. At this time, single parent families and single adults both younger and older have few opportunities for fellowship and growth geared toward their particular needs. We need to enfold all people who come seeking to worship and grow within our congregation. Since there is a growing number of singles in our community and since we desire to reach out to our community, this is an important area for our congregation to address.

An outgrowth of our concern for the protection of our young people and for those in ministry to them has resulted in a Child Security Policy. This policy provides training and background checks through the Washington State Patrol for all individuals working with children and youth.

Another priority at West Side is the Summer Trainee Program. Not only does it enable our summer youth ministries to flourish; it gives Christian college students and other young adults an opportunity to experience full-time ministry. These young people are challenged through Bible study and in ministry under the direction of extensive lay leadership and staff members. They become role models and have tremendous influence on our youth and the congregation as a whole.

West Side also gives strong support to global and local missions. Youth mission trips are yearly events, as are other short-term mission opportunities for all ages. Recently, a mission mobilization office has been established, is staffed by a volunteer couple, to encourage mission involvement and participation.

West Side has a tradition of empowering and enabling laity to use their creativity in developing ministries from within the congregation. West Side believes in equipping people to do God's work (Ephesians 4:12 is on West Side Church's letterhead) with the support and encouragement of the Session. Ongoing ministries developed by the laity include: Folks Over Fifty, which provides fellowship for senior adults; Cherub Choir, a music group for preschoolers; West Side Cooperative Preschool, which opens its doors to approximately 250 children each year; English as a Second Language classes; and the coffee bar in West Side North, to name just a few. While there has been freedom to follow individual visions and to develop ministries and programs, there is concern that more prayer, intentionality, integration and coordination must occur in order to ensure that God's purposes for West Side Church are being fulfilled.

Visitors are drawn to our church by the reputation of our strong pastoral Bible-based preaching and teaching; the Alpha program, which is an important outreach where people have the opportunity to explore the Christian faith in a relaxed atmosphere; innovative Sunday School for children and adults; Vacation Bible School, midweek children and youth programs, a variety of worship opportunities, West Side Cooperative Preschool, and the Christian love of our members for one another.

West Side is blessed with a multi-generational congregation; however, we are challenged by a diversity of preferences regarding styles of worship and types of music. This diversity has resulted in having two worship services on Sunday mornings with distinctly different flavors, one more traditional and one more contemporary. Despite our differences, we desire to be integrated as a congregation and appreciative of one another's gifts and contributions.

Growth to some extent is imperative if we are going to survive as a vital evangelical congregation.

West Siders worship, learn, and play in three aging buildings that require constant upkeep. Funding routine facility maintenance is a challenge, as unexpected major expenses often crop up. The long-range plan to build a new sanctuary is in progress with the purchase of houses surrounding the West Side parking lot. Currently these houses are used by missionaries on furlough or rented to refugee families. There is no timeline for completion of a new sanctuary but the end goal hasn't changed: to have a facility that would meet the numerous and varied needs of our congregation. Though West Side's atmosphere is warm the grounds are well kept and facilities kept clean, the physical appearance of our structures is somewhat lacking. Basically a hodgepodge of rooms and buildings constructed at different times for different purposes, our facilities are not well suited to our current use. Confusingly arranged and well worn in appearance, they are not particularly inviting to visitors, nor are they easy for our older members to navigate. Accessibility of many areas is severely limited for the elderly and those with disabilities, making some activities and classes impossible for them to attend. Weather is also a factor in moving from building to building during some times of the year. At some point, these concerns need to be addressed and resolved.

West Side has a strong history of generous financial giving. Mission giving is exceptional for a congregation our size, but we are currently dipping into our funding reserves in order to meet our operational budget. Both the congregation and Session need to grapple with this dichotomy. Membership growth will be necessary to carry out our current financial responsibilities and staffing obligations and to execute West Side's long-range plans.

Prayer is important in the individual lives of West Side members, but we currently have few regularly scheduled prayer meetings for the whole church. We have initiated a revitalized call to prayer with the recent offering of "Dunamis" classes and a weekly open prayer meeting. Regular corporate prayer is essential to a vital and alive faith that will enrich our worship and sensitize our congregation to the leading of God's spirit. This is an area in which we would like to grow.

West Side has an incredibly full calendar for the size of our congregation, offering wonderful activities for every age. However, these activities require many volunteers, and some of our volunteers are growing weary. In some cases, the amount of time given to serving others eliminates opportunities for personal growth and fellowship, especially

for young parents. As a result, West Side has found it necessary to hire a childcare coordinator to ease one of the demands upon the time of volunteers.

WHOM DO WE SERVE AND TO WHOM DO WE MINISTER IN OUR CHURCH, IN OUR COMMUNITY, AND BEYOND?

First and foremost, we seek to serve God and his son Jesus Christ. That service takes many different forms. Ministry to children and youth is a high priority. In addition, deacons minister to our congregation and the community through hospital visits and holiday baskets, among many other things; Parish Nurses provide wellness information for the congregation; and there is an emphasis on providing fellowship lunches and activities for senior citizens. Local ministries such as the Manna Project in Pasco and the Alpha Program are supported by West Side both financially and with volunteer efforts.

The West Side Center is a place where our church family can gather for larger functions such as the Harvest Festival, Thanksgiving Dinner, sports events and our Logos program. This facility is in regular use by the community as well, including having been used by two congregations of Eastern European Christians and a Chinese congregation, as well as by the Association of Retarded Citizens and Narcotics Anonymous. The Boy Scouts are also regular users of this facility. There is a question as to how its use can be more of a witness for Christ.

Worldwide missions continue to receive strong support by the members of West Side. While this is positive, it may sometimes come at the expense of needs closer to home. A concern that needs to be addressed is how we can continue to support God's broader community while meeting the expenses and needs of our own buildings and congregation, as well as reaching out to the unchurched in the neighborhood around us. There is also a growing desire within the church to address local social issues and human welfare outside of our own church members. We have a hunger and a longing to discern God's call for us and to serve others through works of compassion.

AS A CONGREGATION, WHAT ARE OUR EXPECTATIONS, HOPES AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE?

We desire a strong senior pastor who will focus energies on being a "shepherd to the flock", a person of God who preaches and teaches Bible-based sermons that challenge us to apply God's word to our daily lives, grow towards maturity in Christ, and earnestly seek God's will, both individually and as a congregation. We desire a senior pastor who has a God-given vision for West Side Church, who will understand its uniqueness and strengths, and who will lead the congregation and staff in doing the work God has for us.

We also desire the fulfillment of the West Side 2000 vision, in which West Side would become a unified campus that would meet the needs of our congregation, with space to accommodate growing ministries for children, youth and adults, as well as outreach into

the neighborhood. Fundamental to this vision is the commitment made by the congregation to remain in our present location. The commitment and vision remain the same, though specific plans remain unclarified.

We expect that West Side Cooperative Preschool will continue to hold a place in the community as it has for 40 years of providing a positive, well-executed, low-key outreach to families from every part of the Tri-Cities. With the close proximity of Marcus Whitman Elementary School, consideration has been given to developing an after-school program, incorporating Pathfinders as an outreach ministry to children and their parents.

We need a hospitality ministry, one that will provide a warm and sincere welcome to visitors and to help them to become integrated into the West Side family. The hospitality ministry should be ready to call on visitors more than once, to answer questions, and to enable newcomers to find uses for their gifts and talents. Consistent and intentional planning will go a long way toward greeting and enfolding new visitors.

As we move forward toward becoming a more caring, welcoming congregation, a narthex that is more conducive to conversation and more comfortable as a gathering place will be an important element to include. As members of the congregation, we should be encouraged to accept the responsibility of reaching out to those in need and greeting those we don't know, motivated and empowered by the love of Christ to treat others, as we would want to be treated.

Our Sunday services should be ones in which all ages can participate and worship. We aim to create an atmosphere in which all worshipers feel comfortable and as though their tastes have been considered. We desire to foster an atmosphere in which we "do not merely look out for [our] own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).

In summary, our hope and expectation for the future is that West Side Church's mission statement will become even more of a reality than it ever has been--that Christ's love will be manifested within the life of the congregation and demonstrated to all we serve and interact with in the neighborhood, community and the world.