

Westview Presbyterian Church

Mission Study Task Force Report

Our Mission Statement: Joyfully Seeking and Sharing God's Light

Submitted by the
Westview Mission Study Task Force

August 31, 2010

**Westview Presbyterian Church
Mission Study Task Force Report
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1. Foreword

On March 14, 2010, in accordance with the procedures of the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks, the congregation of Westview Presbyterian Church elected five members to the Mission Study Task Force (MSTF) to report back to session regarding the current mission of the church, after the retirement of our long-serving pastor, W. Bruce McQueen. It is our understanding that this report will be reviewed by the Congregational Vitality Workgroup and submitted to Westview's session. After approval by the session, and acceptance by the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery, the session of Westview will form a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC).

The report of the MSTF will be used by the PNC to develop a Church Information Form (CIF). This CIF will be the document that communicates to prospective pastors the background, characteristics and desired direction that Westview would like to pursue.

Accordingly, the MSTF set out to discover what was important to Westview's congregation and to attempt to discern God's vision for our church. The MSTF team, with guidance from a representative of the Congregational Vitality Workgroup, has prayerfully considered the following three questions:

- Who are we as a church?
- Who is our neighbor?
- What is God calling us to do and to be?

In this regard, the MSTF conducted a survey and held focus groups. About 45 percent of the surveys that went out to the congregation and to youth were returned. The response was an excellent representation of the congregation. During June, several focus groups involving about 60 church members were held in which Westview's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges were discussed. This analysis approach is called SWOT from the book *Holy Conversations* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann. It is a structured description of the congregation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. We chose to change the word threat to challenges. This involved an honest and complete description of the congregation's setting in each of these four areas. Generally, strengths and weaknesses were considered to be internal to the congregation while opportunities and challenges were more focused on external factors.

In prayerful consideration, the MSTF presents this report on our findings and discernment.

Sandy Moler - Chair

Carol Micco

Ginny Morris

John Mulay

Jim Reed

Steve Hagberg--Congregational Vitality Workgroup Liaison

2. History of Westview Presbyterian Church

Westview Presbyterian Church was organized at the Seventh Day Adventist Church building in April 1965 with 104 members. The church was an offshoot of Central Presbyterian Church in Downtown Longmont. In October 1969, the original buildings were dedicated. The buildings were designed after African mission huts and their brown rooftops reminded people of chocolate chips. Westview quickly became known around town as the “Chocolate Chip Church.” The current sanctuary building was dedicated in May 1981.

The Reverend Frank Kuo served as Westview’s first pastor. In August 1967, the Reverend Tom Brown became the pastor and served until December 1982. The Reverend George Cladis served as Westview’s pastor from September 1983 until August 1987. Most recently, the Reverend W. Bruce McQueen served as pastor from August 1988 until his retirement in January 2009. Following Rev. McQueen’s retirement, the Reverend Vickie Kintzel was named as interim.

In 1982, Westview began an ecumenical journey of faith with Spirit of Peace Catholic Community. The two congregations shared facilities and held seasonal joint services. This arrangement was the only one known of its kind in the United States. Westview enjoyed over 25 years on this journey with Spirit of Peace before parting ways in July 2007.

In 1996, Westview undertook a major remodel and upgrade of its sanctuary building including re-carpeting and re-upholstering the pews. In addition, we upgraded and added classrooms. A funding campaign was initiated and completed over 3 years to raise approximately \$350,000. At the same time, a five-year debt reduction plan and ongoing facilities plan was created.

Recent Mission Studies

A major “Mission Renewal” effort took place during 2000-2002 in partial response to activity by the “Dream Team” to design a multi-purpose building. Session actions out of this effort included creating six new ministry areas to better serve the congregation’s needs. As well, a top-five priority list was developed by session that included understanding the area’s demographics, developing a welcoming environment, redevelopment of the church website, more advertising of Westview’s offerings and creating a campus master plan.

A café feasibility study was completed in 2004 as a way of increasing outreach to younger generations, but was rejected due to cost concerns.

A "Discernment" process was undertaken in 2005 to revisit Mission Renewal goals, address the anticipated exit of the Spirit of Peace Catholic Community, and to create a new mission statement. Out of that came another facilities plan and a new statement, "Joyfully Seeking and Sharing God's Light." A key facility improvement out of this process was the completion in 2009 of the Gathering Place in the old Spirit of Peace office space, along with a \$50,000 capital campaign to partly pay for the upgrade. Budget reductions occurred in the wake of Spirit of Peace's exit as Westview adjusted to the loss of about \$60,000 annually.

Our Most Recent Initiatives

Our most recent initiatives include the multi-use space called The Gathering Place, a monthly Community Supper, and a twice-a-month community pantry entitled The Round Pantry. This is in keeping with our identity as an outreach church and what God is calling us to do as a missional church. "The missional church is one where people are exploring and rediscovering what it means to be Jesus' sent people as their identity and vocation. They are willing and ready to be Christ's people in their own situation and place." (Borrowed from friendofmissional.org)

The Gathering Place, a space formerly used as office space by Spirit of Peace has been renovated into a multi-use space currently used for meetings, movies, choir practice, and as a small chapel for weddings and funerals. In addition, youth, session meetings, and others have had the use of the state of the art multi media system.

A monthly community supper was begun in July 2009, by volunteers from our congregation who prepare a meal for everyone in the community. The mission is to provide a nutritious, family meal for everyone who attends so that we may minister to all in body, mind and spirit.

The Round Pantry began in April 2010. In this short time, the pantry has grown from 18 visitors to over 100 visitors each time the pantry is open. Over fifty volunteers have been involved in distributing up to 5,000 lbs. of food per opening. Volunteers have commented on this joyful opportunity to undertake this direct service in the name of Jesus. The food is provided from donations from Westview's congregation and Community Food Share (a Boulder County food bank). As well as helping others with basic needs, we are learning the ways of the Lord, the needs in our community and joyful, respectful ways to serve others. A number of pantry guests have joined the Westview worship service and participated in Vacation Bible School.

3. Demographics

The 2008 US Congregational Life Survey indicated 32 percent of the survey sample (128) Westview Presbyterian Church congregants have been attending worship over 20 years, 31 percent in attendance for 11-20 years and 10 percent of the sample have been attending 3-5 years. On average, they attend 3 times per month according to the 2010 Mission Study Survey. Most of the congregation respondents are married and their average age is in the 50-69 year range. Most have held an elected position (elder or deacon) and they currently spend 1-10 hours per month in church activities in addition to worship.

Longmont is a rapidly growing city with a small town feel, one-half hour from the Rocky Mountains and 45 minutes from Denver. It is the second largest city in Boulder County. The following table is information gleaned from the PCUSA website's link to Census data.

	Census tracks in 1mile radius - 3.3 miles across	Census tracks in 4 mile radius - 9 miles across
2000 Population	12,608	55,366
2008 Population Estimate	12,533	60,513
Hispanic Ethnicity	11.5%	17.8%
Non-Hispanic White Ethnicity (2013 Population Projection)	85.1%	78.6%
	12,502	63,719
Percent in age Groups		
0 -17	23.7%	25.0%
18 -24	8.9%	8.5%
25 -49	31.3%	35.0%
50 -64	21.8%	20.0%
65 and up	14.3%	11.5%
Percent in Education Groups		
Did not graduate from High School	8.2%	13.1%
High School Graduate:	54.9%	50.1%
Bachelor or Associate Degree:	24.6%	26.7%
Graduate Program or Degree:	12.2%	10.2%
Percent of households in each income category:		
Less than \$24,999:	18.1%	17.9%
\$25,000 to \$49,999	22.0%	26.2%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	35.3%	35.7%
\$100,000 or more:	24.6%	20.1%

Current data from 2008 to 2010 is not readily available. However, school demographic information is an indicator of neighborhood changes. The table below includes the elementary and middle school to the east and the elementary and middle school to the west of Westview Presbyterian Church. This data is an indicator of recent population changes.

School Name	2006 % FREE AND REDUCED Lunch	2009 % FREE AND REDUCED Lunch
LONGMONT ESTATES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	17%	28%
LONGS PEAK MIDDLE SCHOOL	46%	65%
MOUNTAIN VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	60%	72%
WESTVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL	19%	28%

We believe in the call to love our neighbor and we see our neighbor as those who hunger both physically and spiritually, so we have created the pantry and community supper, as previously noted, and many nearby residents take part of these Westview offerings. Westview Presbyterian Church is located in a diverse neighborhood with a mix of above average education and income levels, as well as struggling families. The current economics of our neighborhood have declined during the past three years and there is great need for food. A particular opportunity would be reaching out to the large number of families with children in the school lunch program at nearby elementary schools. In addition, there are many young families available in the vicinity to attract to our ministry. The immediate neighborhood to the southeast is somewhat underrepresented in the Westview congregation, though other nearby areas are home to many Westview members.

4. Summary of Findings: Strengths (Internal to Westview)

People

According to the survey results and focus groups consisting of members of the congregation, the people of Westview are rated as an overwhelming strength. We believe that we are supportive, loving and friendly, which gives a feeling of family. We have the ability to work together and we are open-minded and adaptable. With the average length of membership being 20 years, the congregation has a considerable amount of knowledge and experience from which to draw. Caring for each other in sickness and in health is a strength.

Facilities/Location

The unique design of our facility, the size of the property, including room to expand, is a tremendous strength toward fostering growth. The church has a recognizable identity within the greater community (the chocolate chip church), good parking and an easily accessible location. The recent addition of The Gathering Place provides us flexibility within our campus. The circular configuration contributes to a more intimate feeling during Worship and other fellowship activities.

Programs

The middle/senior high youth groups are very strong. This is mostly attributed to a strong leader who has had a long tenure. The youth group is very active and does mission trips, as well as mission within the community. The strength of the youth ministry can be seen and felt with the attraction of youth not only within the Westview Presbyterian Church community, but also by attracting youth from outside of Westview.

With the recent addition of new staff, the music program has gained in strength. We have many talented individuals that are willing to volunteer for many of the different music programs, whether it is vocal choir, bell choir or to supplement music at worship.

The annual spiritual Women's Retreat is well attended not only by women of Westview, but also by the greater ecumenical community.

There are several Bible study groups that meet either weekly or monthly and some that are on a seasonal basis.

In addition, the congregation comes together for many other social activities including church dinners, Women's Revolving Restaurant Tour, family outings, senior Young At Heart, Prime Timers and group activities to local theaters and baseball games.

Outreach/Mission

Westview has a strong and long history of outreach and mission as a demonstration of the love of Jesus that we feel and Christ's call for us to serve others. Many members volunteer their time and knowledge. The following programs have been ongoing for many years:

- Highlands Camp
- The Inn Between
- The Boulder Homeless Shelter
- Community Food Share
- Many mission trips both at home and abroad
- Sponsoring a Boy Scout Troop
- Care and Prayer
- Funeral teams

Westview has recently initiated a monthly Community Supper and twice a month Food Pantry. The recently revised church website also provides a means of outreach to the community.

Church Heritage

As part of PCUSA, we value a strong reformed tradition. The congregation has shown a willingness to incorporate a blending of traditional and contemporary worship in services. Much of the Westview Presbyterian Church heritage has been ecumenical, as we shared Westview's facility with Spirit of Peace Catholic Community for 25 years. We also conduct seasonal and joint interdenominational services with other community churches and welcome people of various backgrounds. An underlying core value is a tolerance of others' ideas and beliefs. We are theologically deep and rich in the reformed tradition and do not like to be told what to think, however we seek to be challenged to wrestle with Scripture and practice discipleship in our daily lives.

Leadership

Westview Presbyterian Church has strong leadership in music, youth and office staff as well as its Congregational leaders, such as the Worship Planning Team. As we are a mature congregation, many of us are able to share a wealth of knowledge, guidance and spiritual support to the younger members. However, as our population ages, some find that they do not have the energy and strength to volunteer as they once did. We need to learn from the experience of the older members to assist and encourage the energy of the younger members.

Weaknesses (Internal to Westview)

While many people listed numerous strengths of the Westview congregation, we are aware that as humans we have weaknesses, also.

Membership

We need to increase membership. Our membership has decreased over the past 25 years from 425 to a present membership of 275. This appears to be due to an aging population and a need to attract young families. As our congregation ages, it becomes more difficult to find volunteers for some of the more time consuming jobs such as serving on session. We feel that we need to “repackage” to be more attractive, but keep our roots.

Sunday School Participation

We need to increase Sunday school participation for elementary and preschool children. One idea was to provide infant care during Sunday school. Also, a junior church service for elementary age children could be explored. In addition, it was suggested that The Kid's Club (a weekly after-school program) resume.

Finances

We are still adjusting to a loss of income from rent from the Spirit of Peace Catholic Community. In addition, the current recession has seriously impacted many in our congregation who are on fixed incomes.

Facilities

Due to an aging facility we need to do some deferred maintenance including new roofs for all four buildings (latest bid – approximately \$200,000) and there is a need for ADA compliant restrooms. These issues are presently being investigated by session.

Traditional Worship

A few members mentioned that the worship service lacks energy and vibrant music. (However, since the focus groups occurred, a new accompanist has been hired.) Some said they would prefer an alternative service with more contemporary music and a variety of worship styles and possibly on different days and at different times. Westview has long wrestled with ideas about implementing a sustainable alternative service.

Opportunities (External to Westview)

Alternative Services

Survey respondents and focus group participants felt that an opportunity exists for Westview to offer an alternative worship at a different time or on a different day than the current service. Suggestions for this service included, among other things, vibrant and upbeat music.

Outreach

While Westview currently does a good job with outreach, respondents felt that we need to do more. Ideas for outreach opportunities consisted of looking for less traditional ways to do outreach and particularly supported the development of a neighborhood ministry. Suggestions were:

- Doing repair work, shoveling, etc. for our neighbors
- Use volleyball court for community outreach
- Send invitations to the neighborhood – come join us
- Use our proximity to Longmont United Hospital to our advantage – investigate prospect of establishing a ministry there
- Round Pantry – continue to expand volunteer base to non-members and other churches
- Community Supper – continue to expand outreach to the community

Facilities

Some respondents felt that there is an opportunity for Westview to consider bringing in another congregation with an arrangement similar to what we had with Spirit of Peace. This would help Westview defray some of the expenses related to maintaining our facilities.

Nursery School/After School Program

Members of the congregation felt that an opportunity exists to bring back an after school and/or nursery school program. Westview is centrally located and has a facility that could serve that purpose well.

Youth

Respondents felt that while Westview has a wonderful older youth program, there is an opportunity to involve parents of the youth. There are quite a few youth that attend Westview's youth activities, but attend church elsewhere. We feel the need to get the parents of youth group participants involved. One idea proposed is a possible dinner for youth and their parents.

Wills/Endowments

An area that presents an opportunity for Westview is that of estate planning. We need to encourage people to think of Westview when deciding where their estate should go after they pass into life eternal. One suggestion would be to bring in a person who specializes in estate planning that would be able to help members designate some of their estate funds to Westview.

Challenges (External to Westview)

Focus groups with Westview members and friends revealed a number of challenges facing us as a congregation. Challenges identified during the study fell into four categories:

- Demographic shifts and declining birth rates.
- A rising number of people who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious, coupled with a general decline of the place of church in society.
- Conflicts with other activities in the traditional slot of worship time on Sunday morning.
- Competition with and from mega-churches and “outside church” initiatives.

Each of these is discussed briefly.

Demographics

Demographic shifts are complex, but generally younger generations are not drawn to traditional church settings for a variety of reasons. As well, the U.S. is experiencing a declining birth rate that simply means fewer young people and fewer young families are available in general to join churches. Westview’s average age is around 63 years, thus, we are not a peer group to the younger generations, even if they were interested in church. Without a critical mass of young families and the associated programs, Westview will have difficulty attracting that demographic group.

Societal Trends

There is the documented and strong societal trend for people of the younger generations to identify themselves as spiritual, but not religious and who do not see the value of the church. Though their parents may have been devoted church-goers, and they were brought up in the church, as young adults they have not come back to church as prior generations typically have. The social and community value of the church is now undervalued, as “social media” such as e-mail, Facebook, My Space, Twitter (and who knows what else) have increasingly taken the place of face-to-face interaction. A related trend is that ministry is now more and more taking place outside of the church building in the midst of where people are in both spiritual and physical need, as documented by the book *Revolution* by George Barna (among others) that identifies a trend of Christian work and social justice activity that takes place in a variety of settings outside the traditional church.

Sunday Service Conflicts

A long-standing issue is the loss of Sunday morning as time for church worship services. Children of the younger generations now have baseball, soccer, basketball, swimming, etc., taking place on Sunday morning. Parents are torn by the conflict, but generally don’t want to take their children out of these sporting competitions to go to church. As well, being situated adjacent to the Rocky Mountains, church competes with outdoor

recreation opportunities that abound in our area including skiing, snowboarding, hiking, camping, fishing, mountain biking, cycling, backpacking, rock-climbing, bird-watching, boating, and sightseeing.

Mega-Church Competition

Finally, a trend in Christianity for decades is the growth and dominance of mega-churches. In our midst, we have Life Bridge and Rocky Mountain Christian churches. Westview has lost members to the area mega-churches which offer more programs, an entertainment-type of worship service, and connection through small groups. Westview's niche is not the mega-church model, so we need to offer an attractive alternative. The anonymity sought by some in a mega-church may be harder to find at Westview.

5. Recommendations

This section addresses the question, “What is God calling us to be and do?” Westview’s current mission statement is “Joyfully Seeking and Sharing God’s Light.” Our analysis and discernment during the mission study effort leads us to conclude that this is indeed an accurate statement of our mission. This report has documented how we focus on this goal through our strengths and opportunities. As well, we fall short in a few areas of weakness. The following brief and fairly general recommendations relate to where we are going and emerged from our mission study process.

The congregation has always had a high percentage of volunteerism in the community in such activities as hospital clown ministry, Community Food Share, hospital volunteers, Habitat for Humanity, Homeless Shelter, etc. We need to continue that attitude of serving God inside and outside our church. Specifically:

1. We recommend continuing to support and expand the neighborhood Community Supper that strives to nourish the larger community as well as Westview members in body, mind and spirit.
2. Increase the hours and number of volunteers from other churches to expand The Round Pantry.
3. We recommend additional resources be put toward the Evangelism Ministry, especially the recruiting of new volunteers, commitment of a higher percent of the budget, and more energy and time of leadership. In addition, systems need to be set up to integrate evangelism into all ministry areas of the church.
4. We recommend continuing to support and expand the percentage of the total budget committed to support local, national and international missions.
5. We recommend creating an after-school program for children. It would be a significant outreach to the community should adequate volunteers be available.
6. We support continuing a blended approach to worship, recognizing that our congregation responds to a variety of different music and format styles from traditional to contemporary, while not straying from our Presbyterian heritage. Alternative worship service times and styles should be considered by session, in light of conflicts with other activities in the traditional slot of worship time on Sunday morning.
7. The need for increased opportunities for spiritual growth was identified. Adult Sunday school could be strengthened with at least one class offering an in-depth Bible study. Different times for adult, youth and children education should be explored, as well as the possibility of an intergenerational offering.

8. Facilities recommendations include: Giving immediate attention to the roof on all four buildings before other problems arise. Estimated cost is approximately \$200,000. As well, a priority is making all restrooms ADA compliant. Finally, Westview needs to explore options to make the main entry more inviting and recognizable.

6. Pastoral Qualities

The congregation showed a strong feeling toward the importance of preaching. When asked why they attended church, more than half said it was because of the preaching while most strongly agreed with the statement that the purpose of worship is to receive spiritual nourishment. In addition, the congregation feels it is important that sermons be scripturally based and then translated into current life applications and making the reformed faith relevant.

We look for a pastor to lead a blended worship service that unites all aspects of the service into an engaging worship experience and to pursue alternative forms of worship to better attract a younger generation.

We have a strong active leadership within the congregation and desire a pastor who can work collaboratively with members in realizing opportunities that Westview may want to pursue, especially mission. The pastor should be willing to be involved in the budget planning process and be adept at administrative and staff leadership.

Lastly, members feel a need for a dynamic pastor with a strong faith in Jesus Christ whose leadership could energize Westview.

7. The Way Forward

Westview is being affected by the larger trends that are having an impact on the traditional exercise of faith across the spectrum of the mainline Christian Church. Our path forward will be a balance of holding to those traditions that are meaningful, while being open to and embracing new ways of doing ministry and walking in the path of Jesus Christ. With our emphasis on mission and meeting the needs of people, along with robust pastoral leadership, we will continue to listen and respond to God's calling for us.

8. Appendices

The tabulated survey is available separately.