Westview Presbyterian Church
Self-Study

WWWD?
What would Westview do?

FINAL REPORT

June 18, 2019
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WWWD Final Report

Introduction and History

In this time of change or transition in the life of Westview Presbyterian Church, congregation members find themselves simultaneously dealing with the past and trying to figure out the future. For some the future can’t come too quickly and for others, time for careful discernment is cherished. The outlook that spanned the self-study work was a dual sense of uncertainty and hope. These dichotomies exemplify the current perspectives within the Westview congregation.

It serves well to place this self-study and the What Would Westview Do? [WWW?] Team’s Final Report in historical context – in other words, answering the questions “where have we been / what has brought us to who we are now.”

Westview Presbyterian Church was organized in 1965 as a ‘church plant’ by Central Presbyterian Church. In 1969, the original buildings - designed in the style of African mission dwellings - were dedicated. The unique roofline and brown shingles reminded people of chocolate candies and Westview quickly become known as the “Chocolate Chip Church.” The current sanctuary building was dedicated in May 1981. And, a major remodel and classroom addition was accomplished in 1996.

Reverend Frank Kuo served as Westview’s first pastor. In August, 1967, Reverend Tom Brown became the pastor serving until December of 1982. Reverend George Cladis served as Westview’s pastor from September 1983 until August 1987. Reverend W. Bruce McQueen served as pastor for 20 years from August 1988 until his retirement in January 2009. Pastor Bruce deftly dealt with the spiritual, social and political diversity that still can be found in the membership of Westview. Current Westview members include Charter Members and others who served and worshipped with these various teaching elders.

In 1982, Westview began an ecumenical journey with Spirit of Peace Catholic Community. The two congregations shared facilities and held seasonal joint services. Facilities usage rental fees were used to assist financially with the cost of the facility remodel/upgrade. At the time, this arrangement was the only one known of its kind in the United States. Westview and Spirit of Peace continued this journey for 25 years. Current members of Westview maintain relationships with former members of Spirit of Peace and mission together at Round Pantry.

Coinciding with the anticipated dissolution of the arrangement with Spirit of Peace, a Congregational Discernment Process was undertaken in 2005. From this process of discussions, mission activities, prayer and discernment across the congregation, an abiding missional statement arose, “Joyfully seeking and sharing God’s Light.” This was further actualized in the
worship, caring and mission as the Westview congregation came to view the members of the church as the ministers of the church.

Following the retirement of Pastor McQueen, Reverend Vickie Kintzel served as Interim Pastor from 2009 to 2011. During Pastor Vickie’s term, a major mission effort established the Round Pantry. The Round Pantry is a distributing agency of Community Food Share / Feeding America that provides a two week supply of food to 800 – 1000 people twice each month. During each set-up and food distribution, as many as 75 volunteers are involved. Volunteers come from numerous area churches.

Reverend Scott Phillips served Westview from 2009 thru 2017. Pastor Scott is an energetic personality who had a passion for preaching and encouraged others in passion for mission and congregational care. In the spring of 2017, Reverend Bethany Benz Whittington was installed as Associate Pastor called to work in areas of youth and family ministries, congregational care and worship ministry. Pastor Scott’s departure was viewed by most as ‘sudden’ and left lingering questions and feelings of sadness and disappointment. Pastor Bethany stepped up to assume pastoral leadership with the assistance of Reverend Nancy D’Ippilito.

Interim Pastor, Reverend Lonnie Darnell was hired in May of 2018 and began transition activities that included sermons, newsletter articles and a congregational discussion intended to provided information, raise awareness, and encourage members to consider what Westview has been and where Westview is now.

**Westview’s Self-Study Process**

At the beginning of 2019, the Session of Westview Presbyterian Church commissioned a five member team to conduct a self-study in preparation for the work of a Pastor Nominating Committee. The team consisted of: RE Sheri Bidinger, Lia DeKesthler, Robin Hill, Nancy Hurianek, and Jim Reed. Pastor Lonnie Darnell worked with the team in an ex officio capacity. The team adopted an acronym to capture its stated purposes; the acronym grew out of conversation at an early meeting of congregation members. **WWWD?** was used to remind the team and the congregation of the important questions to be answered:

- Who are we?
- Where are we?
- What is God calling us to do?

Discussion meetings (called Journey Mapping meetings) were conducted by Pastor Lonnie through January and February. Significant amounts of information were provided to members on topics such as: phases of transition pastor to pastor; transition from existing church structure to varied structures; statistics regarding PCUSA churches and mainline churches; and, lessons learned from other churches and pastors. The WWWD Team collected comments and ideas from the Journey Mapping meetings. The Team then designed a survey instrument and varied forms of delivery. The survey was offered to the congregation at the end of a Sunday service and was also made available online. The survey was hand delivered / collected from
members who were not at church on survey Sunday or who did not wish to use the electronic version.

Following collection of survey data and comments, the WWWD? Team conducted an evening event that included supper, time to talk about Westview, presentation of the survey data and analysis, and opportunity for open discussion by members. Again, the WWWD? Team collected comments and ideas.

The WWWD? team undertook the compilation of all survey data, and survey and discussion comments. The purpose of the effort was to distill commonalities and themes that would inform answering the fundamental questions of who we are and where we are and lead to discerning what God is calling Westview to do. In preparing and presenting the data and comments, and the compilation and the discernment, an additional purpose was to listen to the congregation and convey that members had been heard. Along with conclusions drawn, this report aims to represent the breadth of thought as well as the frequency with which certain comments or themes appeared; in other words, to tell the whole story. Thus, inclusion of ideas does not indicate agreement or confirmation but simply that comments were made. A limited amount of the survey data was in the form of numerical rankings but the vast amount of all results was spoken or written comments. These form the bulk of this report; quotation marks are used to indicate when the exact wording of a comment is used.

**Overview of Dichotomy**

The analysis of data and comments from meetings, discussions, and the survey revealed the dichotomies mentioned in the introduction. As the team, reviewed the results what arose was a clear sense of dichotomy or “contrasting elements with seemingly contradictory qualities.” [Merriam-Webster.com]

**Notable Dichotomies in Survey Responses and Comments:**

- Westview is Welcoming (17)
- Westview does a Good Job of Caring (19)
- Increase Activities and Outreach (44)
- Westview Needs to be More Welcoming (7)
- Westview Needs to Do a Better Job of Caring (15)
- Who Will Do the Work? (34)
- Appreciate “Worship” v. Desire Change in Worship (More Contemporary OR More Traditional)
- Westview in Five Years: Hope and Uncertainty

The elements of these dichotomies are discussed further in this report. The team finds it significant to begin consideration with the fact that there are fairly widely held perceptions of what Westview is and should continue to be (i.e. welcoming, caring, active in mission, desirous of one specific ‘form’ of worship.) Yet, survey results and conversations reveal that there are deeply felt ideas that counter the common perceptions (i.e. new members and some longtime members do not feel welcome to be part of Westview subgroups; there are many layers and levels of care desired by a growing number of members; there is high interest in current and potential future mission efforts...
but many worry about who will do the work mission takes; and, there are calls for a wide spectrum of worship forms from traditional (music, language, focus on Scripture) to contemporary (music and instrumentation, broadly inclusive / progressive language, focus on application of Scripture.)

The overarching dichotomy sees Westview members as uncertain but hopeful. Though not as prevalent in number as in volume, there are members who are anxious and impatient because Westview has not called a (“real”) pastor. There are members who express the opinion that the fate and future of the church depends on the pastor. Notably, survey comments and suggestions for the future called on Westview members to resume the role of ministers. Positivity and hope arose in other comments. Woven through comments was the legacy and history of Westview that gives members a foundation for hope. One comment characterized Westview essentially as “the little church that could” because “we always get ‘er done.”

In the course of much analysis, discussion and discernment the WWWD? team realized that all of the feelings, perceptions, fears and impatience are understandable. All are consistent with our history and experience, that in our round buildings, diverse thoughts are expressed, worried over, considered and brought together by love, hope and expectation of “hope and a future.” The varied ideas, concerns, and struggles parallel the history of God’s people. Westview members are hopeful about what plans God is preparing for us. [Jeremiah 29:11]

Reports / synopses of the main topics that arose in the self-study process follow.
Caring & Membership

Westview self-study responses and comments regarding Caring were generally favorable while concern exists over caring for aging members whose relative numbers are increasing. A significant body of responses dealt with declining membership.

Westview views itself as a caring congregation, friendly, compassionate, helpful, open and accepting. (In the survey responses, 113 noted that Westview is friendly & welcoming and 51 labeled Westview as a “caring congregation.”) Members report being sensitive to and supportive of spiritual and physical needs of others. There is also a sense that we can improve by being “more welcoming & open” to new visitors and existing members and friends. Members refer to Westview as family. Comments such as “There is a sense of family” were stated in several responses. And, yet, newer members commented on the difficulty they had in connecting with the wider membership and smaller groups in particular.

Caring for aging members was a concern expressed in terms of need for more care, more connection and more ways to continue to include older members within the Westview family. Caring received the greatest number of comments as the most important attribute of Westview at 164 total responses. Concerns were expressed about providing check-ins, companionship, and help with physical needs. Members stated their worry that the people who could provide care are themselves becoming the people who need care. But, ideas for expanded ministry to aging members were given – notably a transportation ministry.

Retaining and increasing membership was identified as a critical issue by the congregation with a strong desire to attract younger members and families. Membership concerns were listed as Westview’s greatest challenge with the highest number of responses received at 101.

Survey and discussion comments most frequently linked membership and caring. The correlation between Congregational Care and Membership is interrelated. Strength is needed in each area to support the other.

Youth and Children

The large amount of comments from the survey, the Journey Mapping sessions and the Stories and Supper discussions all show that the church has concerns and would like there to be a focus on attracting new families with youth and children. This feeling was often coupled with interest in expanding the programs and opportunities for youth and children that are offered now. It was noted that we have the facility for the youth and children’s programs to grow. There were many generic suggestions to reinstitute activities and create new programs for the children and youth. Suggestions were made to look at what other churches do for youth ministry and/or to partner with other churches in youth activities. One of the specific suggestions was to create a family oriented bible study, as a way to involve parents, grandparents, and children in the study of the Bible in order to help “grow” family involvement. Additionally, some comments noted
that there could be more involvement by children and youth in the life of the church, specifically as a part of worship.

Basic to the concerns about lack of involvement of children, youth and families was the realization of the sheer numbers – or lack of – in the situation. Many survey respondents noted that there simply are not many children, youth, or young families in the church. This was attributed to the fact that children grow up, leave home and do not continue affiliation with Westview. Responses also recognized that current lifestyles / schedules and feelings among younger generations contribute to the lack of children, youth and young families attending church. And, yet, calls for recruitment of these groups were often repeated and linked to the belief that people and their leadership are needed for growth, vibrance and sustainability to be a reality and possibility.

**Worship and Music**

Westview’s perspective on the Worship and Music reflects the diversity of the congregation. Survey and other comments expressed the central importance of worship to the congregation and noted disparate directions desired for worship and music.

Sixty-seven percent of pertinent survey responses expressed approval of the current mix of traditional and contemporary music and worship style, while fifteen percent conveyed their feelings that the use of inclusive language and progressive topics were too partisan. Survey and discussion comments ranged from “sing more meaningful, contemporary songs” to “sing traditional hymns.” Several responses mentioned making worship relevant to life and “connecting the dots” between scripture, what Jesus modeled and life applications. There were frequent mentions of the desire for worship to be inspiring, lively, celebratory.

Appreciation of the music staff, choir and special music was stated, but thoughts of bringing in even more special music were voiced. Comments asked for more effective advertising of any music events occurring in the church - Westview’s and community based.

Congregation members expressed, through the survey and various discussions, that they would like to see some changes that included making more opportunities for children, youth and families to participate in worship-leading. Members also stated that they would love to partner with Central Presbyterian Church and other congregations/groups to offer additional shared worship and music experiences.

When asked to share their “Visions for Ministry,” survey respondents included the continuation of meaningful worship and music at Westview. A central theme was “trying new things” in worship. Topics that received both notable support and some level of discontent were: bulletin design, verbal worship responses, screen representation, communion distribution, music sung and presented, sermon styles / topics / “language” and use of sanctuary for outside groups from the community.
**Outreach and Pantry**

The Outreach and Pantry Missions at Westview were stated as the church’s most identifiable strengths.

Sixty-nine percent of survey and discussion responses said that the church was “good to excellent” in the Outreach and Mission category; but, that we should continue to find new opportunities to serve locally as well as globally.

Numerous suggestions for Westview to reach out to the local community’s needs included: starting a community garden, supporting Central Presbyterian’s Recovery Cafe, assisting those with issues such as homelessness and mental health, and connecting with other churches’ and their missions. There were expressions of concern that the dwindling, aging congregation provides fewer people to carry out mission; but there were numbers of suggestions (66) for mission efforts to be continued, reinstituted or initiated was one of the largest response categories.

Comments virtually declared The Round Pantry a top Westview attribute that helps those in the community in need of supplemental food. Comments also noted that the Pantry supports shoppers with recognition of their existence, friendly acceptance and a sense of respect. Many comments mentioned that The Round Pantry utilizes volunteers from both inside and outside of the church – an ecumenical fellowship. Though some noted that the Pantry might become difficult to sustain in terms of volunteers and that “the Pantry can’t be all there is,” there was a high degree of interest in seeing that The Round Pantry be continued as a primary mission of Westview.

The church’s passion around Outreach should be capitalized on by continuing the work of the Round Pantry, and also expanding mission endeavors on our own, and through ecumenical efforts, to expand care for those in need in our community and beyond.

**Leadership**

Our self-awareness study has shown Westview continues to be supportive of the priesthood of all believers model of church leadership and that members believe that this is the practice at Westview. All of us are called to minister for God. We recognize both pastoral leadership and member leadership as critical to strong functioning of the church body. Seventy percent of respondents in the online survey rated our pastoral and lay leadership as good or excellent. That said, a sense that we can do better was also expressed in comments.

Member leadership includes internal roles such as elder, deacon, teacher, liturgist, usher, and choir member, as well as a concurrent role of service out in the community doing God’s work. The congregation wants Westview to provide more robust training to fully take on all of these roles. Desire was expressed that we be “refueled” at Westview through specific spiritual growth
opportunities and covenant group fellowship to better prepare for our leadership and ministry roles. A view was expressed that a more powerful internal fellowship could strengthen an enhanced external ministry to the community. Undergirding this desire is faith that God provides each of us with talents and energy to do the work laid out before us.

The ideal pastoral leadership (as distilled from the totality of survey and discussion comments) that Westview desires could be generally characterized as a wise shepherd – someone who humbly instructs, encourages, comforts, listens, inspires, and engages. Going forward, Westview wants a pastor who is enthusiastic, dynamic, a great preacher, and a strong communicator who is savvy with technology. Several comments expressed interest in a pastor would be able to navigate ideologies within the congregation, promote diversity and inclusiveness and be a uniting presence.

The pastor should be wise about self-care and boundaries, while providing consistent pastoral care, and be able to bring a focus to empowering and training the members to serve in the various ministry roles. Finally, the incoming pastor should be able to interact successfully with multiple subsets of people, organizational structures, and varying and changing contexts both internal to the church and out there in the world, helping the congregation sort through ideas and perspectives and confirm the identity of Westview. Composite comments noted the need for a pastor who will intentionally celebrate Westview’s faith, accomplishments and perseverance in serving God’s people.

Some in the congregation are concerned about maintaining consistent and motivated leadership as worker bees diminish in number, while others simply “run out of steam.” Emphasis on member engagement and perhaps partnering with sister churches and like-minded organizations was suggested as a way ‘to do more with less’ going forward.

**Thoughts on Pastoral Positions**

As we have moved through this process in asking the congregation to consider where they think the church is and what the future holds for us as a whole, there have been several survey comments and thoughts shared in discussions that relate to pastoral positions. Specific questions were not asked; but response clustered in three pertinent areas.

**Current Pastors / Positions:** In the survey responses, there were seven comments that expressed direct interest in keeping the ordained staff that is currently in place. Additional comments highlighted connections that have been made, support that has been given and spiritual guidance and/or challenge that was much appreciated. Other survey responses included comments that directly requested the hiring of a new pastor – typically phrased “as soon as possible.”

**Congregation feelings on having two pastors:** The vacant position is Pastor / Head of Staff because the staffing structure of Westview Presbyterian Church includes an Associate Pastor.
position that is currently filled. The Session of Westview Presbyterian Church is discussing / discerning whether the AP position is sustainable / supportable given the current membership / finances. The direct question as to whether or not Westview should continue to call two pastors (i.e. Pastor and Associate Pastor) was not included in the survey or discussions.

Some survey comments and discussion comments and suggestions did address the current staffing structure. Fewer than 20 survey comments stated or suggested that Westview does not need two pastors. These comments spoke about the declining number of members and concluded that Westview is “currently a single pastor church.” A few other comments countered this and indicated that Westview’s aging congregation requires a level of care that may be too much to expect of a single pastor.

The area of finances and budgeting also included comments on the staffing structure. Seventeen comments literally asked if it is financially feasible to support two pastor positions and suggested that eliminating the Associate Pastor position would be a way to “solve” the budget situation. Notably, comments also suggested that if the AP position were eliminated, other part-time positions would be needed / could be funded (e.g. CE Director, Youth Leader.)

From the information gathered, it appears there is a need for more communication and clarity during this time of transition. There are many different thoughts, ideas and opinions about what the next step in staffing should look like. Considering the information gathered in many areas about what is needed to help Westview move forward, a different idea of what staffing looks like will likely need to be considered.

Other Feedback Received

Communication: Numerous survey and discussion comments indicate that first and foremost, Westview is called and will be well-served to recognize and honor that fact that “individuals want to be heard.” The self-study suggestions include:
- Increase communication
- Offer more technology and online options including ability to attend service remotely
- Utilize more advertising including newspaper and radio

Relevance: Westview members recognize that our church along with other mainline denominational churches are challenged to stay relevant in a changing world. Multiple comments expressed interest in how to address generational needs. There was overall concern for the decline of the church in society today and wonderings about how to best connect with younger generations.

Location: Comments received on the Westview location and buildings were positive. Some questioned whether the congregation could support maintenance of the large buildings and vast grounds. But, multiple suggestions addressed making use of property. These suggestions included but were not limited to possible use of building and grounds for onsite day care
center, community garden, literacy classes/tutoring and other church or non-church agency events or long term rental creating sources of revenue.

Thoughts on the Future

This interim period has brought forth a mix of both anxiety and hope about the future of Westview. Specific input captured through our self-study tended towards the hopeful. If we remain faithful to God’s call and continue to joyfully seek and share God’s light, we will work through the challenges we face and be able to harness our talents and energy to meet the needs of our neighbors as God intends. One said, “We have a great thing going, let’s make it better.” Another encouraged us to “keep on keepin’ on.” One vision was that of a larger, diverse congregation participating in a wide array of worship, fellowship and service opportunities.

Westview is coming to grips with the fact that change is a continual phenomenon as seen with recent pastoral staff changes. So, how do we adapt and grapple with changes in our membership composition, our financial security, as well as the quickly changing world around us? How do we balance, blend and accommodate intergenerational preferences and diverse opinions? How does an aging but faithful congregation continue to apply our passion for service to the needs of our community and the world?

Our church community offered a multitude of ideas to meet perceived needs, including:

- Think of ministry beyond the church walls,
- Partner with other churches and local ministries to serve those in need, while creating new fellowship and spiritual growth opportunities,
- Share our campus with like-minded organizations (this could help fund improvements such as an elevator),
- Provide an on-site day care, teach literacy classes, host a community garden, host yoga, share parking and hold a neighborhood fair,
- Create a transportation ministry for our members and others,
- Energize a new set of small groups for spiritual growth and fellowship, and
- Expand our outreach efforts beyond the Pantry to possibly include ministries to the homeless and mentally ill.

Our challenges are many, including slowly declining membership, lack of “worker bees,” budget worries, and not enough children, youth and young families. But hope and faith are the foundation of Westview’s view of what is next. And, our new pastor must be able to help the congregation look at different ideas, consider change and find its emerging new identity.

Our round sanctuary is a metaphor for Westview’s approach to being together in facing our shared future. We strive to be open, loving and gracious in accepting a diversity of views.
theologically, politically and culturally. Rather than retreating to our corners, we seek to gravitate to the middle of our circle and we seek peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the end, our view of the future is that our character as a caring, God-focused, faithful, service-oriented church will sustain us into the unknown. As stated in one comment, “Challenging times, but I know we will be able to follow God’s plan.”