

MISSION STUDY FOR BRENHAM PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

I. Who We Are

As a Christian congregation and a member church of the PCUSA, we are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ and strive to live our Mission Statement: **GATHER**—To worship God and know his Word; **GROW**—In our relationship with God; **GO!**— Into the world to serve. We are a caring and a compassionate Church, committed to Christian fellowship; we enjoy the company of each other, are friends to one another, and care for one another's welfare. We are an open and welcoming congregation. Our congregation cares about divine worship, hearing/reading God's Word in scripture, preaching, and study. Our Church is aware of and concerned with current national/world issues, and we value social justice. Mission is important to us and we support a number of missions locally, denominationally, and beyond.

II. Brief History

Brenham Presbyterian Church dates its beginning to 1877, although as early as 1860 a congregation existed in Brenham. The effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction challenged church growth in the South, but in 1877 a new organization was established by members from the Presbytery of Austin, and by 1880 a sanctuary was constructed and in use at 300 West Main Street.

Early growth was sporadic; in fact, between 1912 and 1920 the church closed its doors as supply ministers were few and far between. Restored and rededicated in 1923, the building supported a gradually growing congregation through the middle years of the century. In 1951 the congregation voted to purchase the Fourth Street Methodist Church, which forms the center of today's campus. During the late 80's, additional adjacent property was acquired.

Membership peaked at 380 by the year 2000, with average Sunday attendance of 168. In 2001, following the recommendations of a Master Plan formulated three years earlier, the church broke ground on the construction of a new Fellowship Hall. Although the debt was paid off in less than 10 years, the membership experienced dissension over the use of the building, and plans to construct a new

sanctuary were tabled. Healing was largely accomplished over the next four years, although the church experienced tragedy with the untimely death of the incumbent minister in late 2007.

Membership has declined since the turn of the century, standing at just over 100 on the rolls today. While the congregation has embraced new technologies to bring worship experience to a wider community, COVID restrictions during 2020-21 reduced attendance, which has only partially recovered since re-opening. Recognizing the need to renew our vitality, we are challenged but determined to find new ways to appeal to those seeking a caring, worshipful church home.

III. What are some things that we currently do?

- We have two worship services each week – both are traditional. We are open to considering new and different worship experiences consistent with essential elements of Presbyterian worship. In 2022, we have begun broadcasting the second service live on Facebook and YouTube.
- We have a rich music program with a small choir and special music led by a talented Music Director.
- We support a number of local missions, and we support the missions of the PCUSA. Our Galilee Garden is an important outreach for our community, providing fresh, healthy produce for the surrounding community through the efforts of a small group of dedicated volunteers. Much of this produce is distributed through local food pantry, Bread Partners. Other examples include supporting a mission in Zambia and providing resources to Communities United for Health (CUPS) with the Back-to-School Drive for school supplies.
- We host blood drives four times a year in our Fellowship Hall.
- Our campus is in the middle of Blinn College. We have supported a college campus-based student ministry and working at renewing now that Covid has somewhat subsided.
- We have a weekly adult Bible Study meeting regularly on Sundays and a weekly study of faith-related topics on Wednesday evenings.

- Our church has an active Presbyterian Women organization committed to mission, Bible Study, and fellowship
- We have an active Congregational Care Committee. Throughout the year we offer the Flower Power Ministry (flower bouquets given for joys and concerns), Needlework Ministry (prayer shawls made and given for joys and concerns), prayer chain, communion to homebound, and birthday cards. In the past we have offered transportation for those in need of rides (set aside due to Covid) and are about to start this up again.

IV. What do we see as we look to the future?

- We accept the fact that the Christian Church is no longer that which we experienced for most of our lives. We prefer to spend our time and energy discerning what Christ is calling us to be in 2023 and beyond and then working at being that. We are hopeful that if we keep the focus there, the church will prosper with God's guidance.
- As is true for many churches, our membership has been decreasing due to both aging and lack of new members. There are several consequences of this trend.
 - (1) Recently our pledge and other revenue has not been sufficient to support the annual budget. Fortunately, so far, we have been able to cover the deficit by withdrawals from Church savings/investments and reducing budgetary items.
 - (2) As a result of the smaller and aging membership, people are feeling burned out with increasing work falling on fewer individuals. We therefore are looking at the current work load and evaluating what is essential work and letting go of what may not be essential.
 - (3) As our members age, they require more care, such as rides to church, visitation, etc., and there are fewer members able to provide these services.
- We intend to review our commitment to mission and to community and evaluate where and how to expand on our commitment. Possibilities for the future include sponsoring community-wide events and inviting/promoting attendance by the community. We are looking at ways to open

our facility more to community use and purpose. We need to ways to make our ministry more relevant to young families and to other groups in our community, and evaluate the benefit of outreach/evangelism to such groups.

- We believe there is a need to re-commit ourselves to Christian Education with an increased focus.
- We believe we would benefit from spiritual renewal.
- We currently have over 100 members, offers two Sunday worship services with attendance of 40-50. Like many churches in our denomination, our numbers have gotten smaller and aged in recent years. The Church's congregation is 98% White and 2% Asian and Hispanic. Most of its members are over 50 years of age, with many over the age of 70. Brenham has seen population growth steadily over recent years. The trends are showing median age in the mid-30s, and becoming more multicultural. As we look to the future, the Church realizes the need for more direct involvement with neighbor and community as a priority, not merely as a strategy for growth, but as an imperative of Christian discipleship.

V. What are some specific areas of concern that we want to work on?

- We need to evaluate and make a decision on the ongoing need/value, or lack thereof, of two worship services given the current congregational size and mix.
- In numerous ways, we've identified that communication is a challenge for us. We have some catch-up to do engaging social media. We need an organized and reliable communication program with leadership that consistently informs and promotes our church and its events well in advance within the congregation and the larger community. We are currently working on updating to a new state-of-the-art website. We need to look at our signage, and our communication with the community more broadly, including advertising/marketing in local news.
- Community Outreach. For the future, we've identified a need to focus on community outreach, not necessarily or specifically to promote church

growth, but more importantly to be good neighbors. We intend to expand the availability of our church facility to various community purposes/events and be willing to participate in such events.

- We might want to consider sponsoring fundraisers each year to support our operating budget. These events serve as community events as well as fellowship opportunities for the congregation.
- We need to enhance our stewardship program through education and communication, identifying and emphasizing additional options for stewardship, including wills, estates, and trusts, that might be more attractive and effective given the demographics of our congregation.
- We need more people in the congregation willing to step up and assume leadership responsibility as elders for a term or two. We need succession planning and leadership development in the church. We are also mindful of the need for workers in the church who are willing to serve in supporting roles on committee(s) and do other project work and tasks essential to the ministry of the church.
- We are a smaller congregation with just over 100 members and even fewer in Sunday worship. As noted previously, this has implications and consequences for the Church that need to be addressed.
- We own property encompassing most of a city block. Improvements include an historic sanctuary and education wing, a modern and attractive fellowship hall, a detached church office, and a small guest house. However, as a result of several years of operating deficits, our liquid assets are limited. As such, we are relatively asset-rich but cash-poor. We are aware that operating deficits must be eliminated in future, preferably through growth of church membership, otherwise asset sales may be necessary to underpin the church's continuing viability.
- During this year, we mounted a vigorous campaign to increase awareness among the congregation of the critical need for infrastructure repair. Owing to some generous giving, we have succeeded in raising almost half of the anticipated need (approx. \$100K). We are currently looking for ways to further expand the campaign to the local community.

- We have had no debt for a number of years, although this year we have assumed a small zero to low-interest loan from Presbytery to support the mentioned repairs.

VI. What do we seek in a Pastor?

- We would like to seek a full-time, installed pastoral position. We recognize that funding a full-time position will require an increase in our financial resources. This may be achievable through rental or sale of the church office/guest house. With the right installed individual, we are convinced that membership growth will follow, accompanied by increasing commitment towards funding the financial needs of the church.
- We seek a caring individual with passion and energy for Christ's work in the church. We need someone with administrative, visionary, and strategic leadership abilities to guide, motivate, encourage, and shepherd us through the important work in this time of change for the Christian Church. This will involve a respect for our heritage while at the same time being able to see and adapt to the big picture future of the Christian Church. The pastor also should have strong communication skills and the ability to collaborate with others and encourage leadership in others.
- Importantly, our vision for a new pastor will be someone committed and excited by worship and preaching, pastoral care, outreach, and Christian education, with the understanding that the session and congregation will need to share in this responsibility.

VII. Conclusion

Our congregation has suffered a decline in membership over several years, as a result of situations mentioned in this mission study. Even so, our 100+ members strong are a dedicated group, putting our blood, sweat, and tears into all areas in the life of Brenham Presbyterian Church. We will maintain this dedication as we eagerly await all God has in store for us, and the pastor called to lead us into the future to continue to do God's will in the world.

*Approved by the Session of Brenham Presbyterian Church on Tuesday, October 25, 2022.