

**REPORT OF THE
MISSION DISCERNMENT ASSESSMENT TASK
FORCE
TO
PROVIDENCE PRESBYTERY
OCTOBER 16, 2011**

The Mission Discernment Assessment Task Force is pleased to present the following report to Providence Presbytery. We are grateful for the opportunity you afforded us to take part in this discernment process on behalf of the presbytery. We are of one mind in affirming that the Holy Spirit has been present and powerfully at work in our midst as we sought to fulfill the task that was assigned to us. We believe that Section III of this report is the future into which God is calling Providence Presbytery.

Dan Holloway, Committee on Ministry
Aaron White, Education and Equipping Ministry Team
Barry Lambert, Nurture of the People of God Ministry Team
Peter Loxterman, Administrative Ministry Team
Ann White, Mission and Outreach Ministry Team
Ken Bickett, Bethelwoods Ministry Team
Linda Kennedy, Racial Ethnic Concerns Committee
Mark Verdery, Staff

Mission Discernment Assessment Task Force Report

Part I: HISTORY

In the fall of 2004, two events called Providence Presbytery to seek intentionality to clearly articulate our purpose: First, a transition in presbytery leadership as a new Executive Presbyter and Stated Clerk was called, and second, the results of a capital campaign feasibility study which reported a lack of clarity among many as to the presbytery's mission. To hear more clearly who God was calling us to be and what God was calling us to do, the presbytery began an 18-month journey of discernment in early 2005. This time of discernment was named "A Time for Pitching Tent," in reference to the Israelites' practice of waiting for a clear sense of direction before taking the next steps in their wanderings through the desert.

Eight persons were invited to become a group to lead the discernment process, along with the Presbytery Executive and an outside consultant. The group used a process based on Appreciative Inquiry, which looks first at the positive aspects of the organization. The Task Force then gathered data from focus groups comprised of various groups of ministers, members and educators; from Sessions, who offered feedback on a "Time for Pitching Tent" devotional; and from 66 people representing 26 churches who attended a Mission Discernment Retreat.

The Task Force used the data to develop the foundational document "A Time for Folding Tent," a plan for Providence Presbytery to equip, support and connect our congregations. The plan, which contained a mission statement and three emphases growing out of that mission statement, was approved in August 2006. In May 2010, the Mission Discernment Assessment Task Force was created to evaluate the implementation of the plan and determine if any or all of the plan should be revised, changed or continued; if any structural or other changes should be made in this time of discontinuous change; and if any other recommendations are necessary and helpful as we seek to live out our mission.

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Part II: Recommendations Regarding Mission Statement and Emphases

1. It is the recommendation of the Mission Discernment Assessment Task Force that Providence Presbytery reaffirm the mission statement and emphases which the presbytery adopted three years ago.

Mission Statement

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the mission of Providence Presbytery is to equip, support, and connect our congregations as they faithfully serve Jesus Christ in a changing world.

Presbytery Emphases

- *Leadership Development*
- *Building Relationships and Creative Partnerships between Churches and People*
- *Evangelism*

We further recommend that the presbytery continue to live under the guidance of this mission statement and its three defined emphases for an additional three years.

As we do so, we also recognize the following ministries as some of the many examples by which Providence Presbytery has successfully made progress in its pursuit of its three defined emphases:

- E³ Training Event (Leadership Development)
- Second Harvest (Building Relationships and Creative Partnerships between Churches and People)
- Percept Faith-Based Demographic Studies Faith Presbyterian Church (Evangelism)

2. The Task Force does not recommend any structural changes at this time; however, we feel strongly that in this time of deep change more flexible structures that are responsive to our context will be needed in the years to come.

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Part III: Where Do We Go From Here?

The Presbyterian Church USA is in a time of transition and change. The evidence for this is seen in ever-increasing debates about the true calling and purpose of the church, in our growing awareness about shrinking numbers and budgetary restrictions, in ongoing efforts to define ourselves theologically, and in our attempts to remain both Biblically faithful and culturally relevant. These are difficult challenges and will require the best thinking of the Church and its leadership going forward.

Providence Presbytery deals with these same challenges. While our history is strong and our current practice effective in many ways, it seems likely that change will be required of us in the years to come. The time to prepare for these changes is now as we position ourselves for future ministry. We call the presbytery to a time of prayerful discernment and openness to the work of the Spirit in our midst.

We nevertheless remain hopeful about our future. We believe the presbytery has a unique ministry whose purpose remains vital to our future. In order to engage this future, we encourage the following actions by the leadership and ministry teams of the presbytery:

- (1) Help the presbytery move away from defining itself as a governing body and more towards seeing itself as a relational community called together for mutual support, encouragement, direction, and accountability. We will continue to abide by our polity and give thanks for the structure it provides but will not see governance as our primary purpose for gathering. As a relational community we will emphasize time spent together in worship, prayer, listening, and learning. We will regularly ask these questions: What is God doing in our midst? Where do we see God at work in the lives of our communities? We will then find ways to join ourselves to that work.
- (2) Teach us to use the language of mission and outreach whenever possible. We are here not for ourselves but for the sake of Jesus Christ and the world Christ so deeply loves. We must learn to think of ourselves as a mission agency working together in the name of Christ. In many ways we now live in a mission field and all of us are sent by God into it.
- (3) Encourage missional experimentation and the freedom to try new things. Risk should be understood as the required cost of reaching new people for the sake of the gospel. While informed and wise choices must always be made about resources, we should bless the efforts of those who wish to attempt creative ministries. Where possible, the presbytery should

encourage partnerships among Christians and churches in such experiments.

- (4) Lift up success stories wherever they occur. Be a hub for the communication of “best practice” ministries where we can learn from one another. Help us to look beyond our own circles to the practice of Christians in other traditions and cultures.
- (5) Remind us of the values of connectional relationship. In a time of fragmentation, call us to life shared together. Invite us regularly to live up to our Biblical calling as the Body of Christ.

We pray God’s blessings on our life together and give thanks for the gift of being a part of this presbytery at this time in history.