

A Congregational Vision for Mission Executive Summary:  
North Presbyterian Church

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Williamsville, NY 14221



Prepared by the Vision for Mission Committee

Submitted to the Session at North Presbyterian Church

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## **EXHIBITS**

### **TO ACCOMPANY THE VISION FOR MISSION REPORT**

- **Exhibit A:** Letter from the Vision for Mission Committee to Rev. Pearman, Presbytery of Western New York (dated August 19, 2005)
- **Exhibit B:** Letter from Mr. Grimm to the Vision for Mission Committee (dated September 14, 2005)
- **Exhibit C:** Sample Commissioning Letter from the VFM Committee to Committees and the Deacons at North Presbyterian Church
- **Exhibit D:** “Biblical/Historical Calling” Survey Instrument
- **Exhibit E:** Survey Results from the Biblical/Historical Calling Instrument
- **Exhibit F:** U.S. Congregational Life Survey Instrument (Research Services Office, Presbyterian Church USA)
- **Exhibit G:** Survey Responses to the U.S. Congregational Life Survey Instrument
- **Exhibit H:** The PCUSA’s “Neighborhood Demographic Reports”
- **Exhibit I:** “Strengths Report” from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey
- **Exhibit J:** “Building Connections” Report
- **Exhibit K:** Priority Tasks for and Characteristics of the Next Pastor
- **Exhibit L:** Floor Plan of North Presbyterian Church
- **Exhibit M:** Issues, Concerns, Priorities, Challenges and Growth Opportunities

## Executive Summary

In July 2005, the Reverend Dr. Thomas Evans, Pastor and Head of Staff of North Presbyterian Church (NPC), accepted a call for a position in Alabama. Soon thereafter NPC Session established a Vision for Mission (VFM) Committee to conduct a VFM study and prepare a VFM document to be submitted to the Presbytery of Western New York (WNY) for review. The VFM Committee conducted the study and prepared this document in compliance with Presbytery of WNY guidelines set forth in the document entitled “A Congregational Vision for Mission.”

Section 1 presents the objectives of the study and a chronology of events from the announced departure of the Rev. Dr. Evans to the submission of this document to the Presbytery of WNY. Objectives included:

- Finding out what we believe about ourselves, our church, and our God.
- Determine how to best serve God, the community, and our church in the future.
- Review our current programs and evaluate their effectiveness.
- Address the issues, needs, and concerns that seem important to us.
- Provide a document that will inform prospective pastors as to who we are, what we believe, what we need, and what we see as important for the future of NPC.

In the preparation of Section 2, we sought to find our Biblical/historical calling. What do we believe? We prepared a survey to which 53 members responded. The key findings included:

- Responders indicated that the most important reasons that God has called our church together are to love, serve, honor, and glorify God. This response prevailed for men, women, young and old.
- The second most important reasons that God has called our church together are to assure God’s children that, by Christ’s death and resurrection, their sins are forgiven and they will have eternal life with God.
- It was clear that the responders believe that the two most important demands of our church’s calling are to “increase our emphasis on ministry and education of our children and youth”, and “modify our building so that disabled persons have access to all three floors”. These responses prevailed for men, women, young and old.
- The next two important demands of our church’s calling were mission oriented. The responders believe that we at North Church “must devote more energy and money to mission projects”, and “must provide more responsive pastoral care for our elderly and disabled members and other members in time of need or grief”.

In the preparation of Section 3, we examined our identity. Who are we? We reviewed and documented the history, rituals, demographics, and physical facilities of our church. We conducted two additional surveys. One was a set of locally prepared queries to our committees and Deacons. Another was the Presbyterian Church (USA) Congregational Life Survey to which 196 members responded. A very significant finding from survey responses included the following:

- It is clear that, with respect to theological and political viewpoints and our approaches to faith, there is great diversity among the membership. About 16% are conservative/evangelical, about 16% liberal, and the remaining 68% are traditional/moderate in their views.

In Section 4 we reflected on our context for ministry: Where are we? We looked at the history of our community (Buffalo and Amherst, NY) and NPC involvement with this community. We identified several community related needs that we could address, including:

- Child day-care facilities, after-school counseling, and education programming for youth
- Transportation for the elderly and others unable to drive
- Many of the church's spaces are not wheel-chair accessible. Recent architectural estimates indicate that about \$600,000 is needed to make the physical plant accessible.
- Many area Presbyterian churches are having difficulty maintaining their programs due to lack of funds. NPC will consider shared programs and staffing for selected ministries.
- Develop music-related programs using NPC's physical facility for the performances.

For Section 5 we reviewed our programs. What do we do? We evaluated the effectiveness of each program, and identified possible changes in existing ones or need for new ones. We analyzed the related responses from the surveys. Significant findings included:

- The three things most highly valued by the respondents to the Congregational Life Survey were sermons, traditional worship/music, and holy communion.
- The five areas with the lowest levels of member satisfaction were:
  - 1) Accommodations for the mobility impaired
  - 2) Elders' visitation
  - 3) Pastor's visitation
  - 4) Integration of new members
  - 5) Prayer life

For Section 6 we explored our processes. How effective are we in carrying out our ministries? We looked at our patterns of communication, conflict management, leadership selection, decision-making, planning functions, interaction with the presbytery, and alternative staffing patterns.

We described three major conflicts in the church in the past decade or so. The areas of conflict included our approach to homosexuality, our experience with the tenure of co-pastors, and changing the Sunday schedule to accommodate a Christian education hour between the two worship services. Presently, we are addressing the way we manage conflict. The current interim pastor and the adult discipleship committee prepared and presented an eight-week series on "Unity in Diversity". The attendees produced a fifteen point covenant designed to promote healthy, civil communication on contentious issues.

We recorded, from the surveys, the membership's five highest priorities for the next pastor. They are:

- Preaching the Word of God with urgency and conviction
- Planning/leading worship sensitive to the needs of the worshipping community
- Attending to the spiritual development of members
- Developing a strong sense of community among members
- Involving the laity in planning, and the participation in and leading of church events

The Session reviewed a draft of Sections 1 through 6 of this document. After much discussion and questioning, the assembled agreed on a summary and conclusions. They are recorded in Section 7.

Session identified four activities that the church does well consistently. They are:

- Worship services, memorial services and music programs
- Local and world-wide mission activities and support thereof
- Public recognition of members' achievements and service to the church
- Programs for children and youth.

Session members arrived at several other significant findings. They included:

- NPC is a congregation concerned about issues of social justice.
- We, as a congregation, are generally open to new ideas.
- Members have diverse theological views on the authority of the Bible.
- Although NPC members are above average in education level, including many with advanced degrees, only a small percentage (8 percent) of the survey respondents identified "adult education" as a "valued" aspect of NPC activities.
- NPC scored very low in the survey (5<sup>th</sup> percentile) when it comes to "growing spiritually".

Finally, Session members identified what they believe to be the major challenges for the church. Ten are identified as requiring immediate attention by the Session and the membership. They are:

- The need for a long term planning effort.
- Making each of the three floors of the building accessible to persons in wheelchairs.
- Improvement in communication among members. This is especially urgent due to our very diverse views on theological and political issues.
- Empowerment of our members with improved leadership skills, more experience, and more opportunities to serve and lead.
- Continued review and evaluation of our staffing needs.
- Seeking opportunities to reach out to other churches, to develop cooperative programs, and to share staff and resources.
- We have a challenging requirement to improve spiritual maturity and biblical literacy among members of the congregation.
- Session members agreed that we should be more responsive to our members' need for personal and communal prayer.
- More effective integration of new members and the inclusion of non-members into our programs, committees and other activities.
- Improvement of the effectiveness of our pastoral care to members including the reestablishment of the Stephen Ministry.

The following revised mission statement was approved by Session on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

**North Presbyterian Church Mission Statement**

**Brought together by our shared faith in Jesus Christ,  
Called by God to live as faithful disciples,  
Blessed by our diverse gifts and experiences,**

**We commit ourselves to:**

**Worship together,**

**Teach and learn from one another,**

**Nurture each other with care and love, and**

**Reach out in ministry and mission to the world.**