

Covenant Self-Study Final Report

Fall 2018

This Self-Study Report is presented by Covenant Presbyterian Church. Principal responsibility for preparing this Report was exercised by two committees: (1) The Self-Study Committee, comprised of Judith Fischer, chair, Tim Doty, Sam Foncham, Ted Kingsbery, Tamara Mancini, Carol Schempp, and Fred Weber; and (2) the Pastoral Nominating Committee, comprised of Cecilia George, chair, Ann Adcock, Bryan Camp, Libby Janes, Noe Lopez-Benitez, and Fred Weber). Primary drafting of this Report was done by Bryan Camp and Fred Weber with all members of both committees giving review and comments. This Report was reviewed and approved for publication by the Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church on **October 11, 2018**.

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I. Our Past

Covenant Presbyterian was formed in 1971 by the merger of two Presbyterian churches, John Knox and St. Marks, using the physical facility of John Knox.

True to the Presbyterian ethos of being an always-reforming church, Covenant has a consistent history of engaging in extensive self-reflection. The reason for summarizing the resulting historical documents and actions here is because they are important both to our present witness and to our hopes for the future.

In 1993, after a year-long period of structured self-reflection, the Covenant congregation approved a document titled “Covenant People – A Statement of Faith.” The full document is available on the church website. The overarching metaphor is one of “a people.” In brief, the Statement of Faith defines the congregation in four dimensions: (1) a pilgrim people, seeking together to encounter the living God in a spiritual journey of mutual support and broad acceptance of all who seek to join the journey; (2) a caring and compassionate people, called to promote hope and healing both within the diverse church community and without into the world; (3) a diverse people, who seek to value the diverse nature of God’s gifts and talents to members of the congregation and who desire to nurture each member’s discernment of God’s call; and (4) a transformed people whose pilgrim journey includes both gathering together and going out into the world to carry the good news through each person’s service in the world.

In 2007, after a two-year period of structured self-reflection, the Covenant congregation approved a document titled “Missional Strategy.” That document is available on the church website. The overarching metaphor in the Missional Strategy is one of “a household.” In brief, the Mission Strategy responds to the question of “What is God calling this church to become?” The result is expressed in five sections: a Guiding Vision; Goals; Participant Groups; Core Beliefs and Commitments; and a Role and Mission Statement. The Guiding Vision explains how God is calling the church to be a “Covenant household” that values acceptance of diversity and is rooted in the desire to experience God’s all-inclusive love in both relationships within the household and with the outside world. The Goals are to become a witnessing household, a worshipping household, a relational household, and a Christ-forming household. The key Participant Groups are defined in various dimensions (those whose spiritual path is musical, or meditative, or something else) but have in common the desire for a “belonging to a family.” The Core Beliefs and Commitments are “to engage hearts, minds, hands, and feet” to discern and follow God’s will in all aspects of the church and to bring God’s peace and justice to the world. Finally, the complex document is, perhaps, best expressed in the Role and Mission Statement which states, in full: “As members of God’s inclusive household, we seek to follow Christ’s example as servant people building relationships, showing God’s love, and discovering God’s hope-filled plan for the future.”

As an outgrowth of the 2007 Missional Strategy, the congregation then engaged in a three-year period of structured self-reflection to discern whether to renovate and/or expand the church’s physical facilities. As a result of that process, the congregation approved in 2010 an ambitious remodeling plan with the instruction that the church incur no long-term debt. The total costs

were projected to be \$2.4 million and the desired renovations were divided into three phases of priority reflecting the idea of building for ministry.

During the resulting capital contribution campaign in 2011, titled “Practicing Generosity,” the congregation pledged over \$1.4 million, payable over three years. That was enough to fund Phase One, which included major overhaul of electrical and plumbing systems, major additions of a children’s wing and choir room, and updating bathrooms and interior spaces. The construction was completed in February 2013.

In 2014 the congregation pledged an additional \$800,000 for Phase Two, which was primarily kitchen remodeling. That work was completed in 2016 and all short-term loans have now been paid off. The money left over went into Covenant’s capital repair and improvements fund.

Notably, the construction choices in Phase One and Two reflect Covenant’s commitment to right stewardship of the earth. Among the many environmentally sensitive choices made were: (1) to maximize passive solar energy; (2) to emphasize recycling, using flooring concrete made with coal ash, and cabinets and countertops made from recycled materials; (3) to reduce carbon footprint as much as possible, such as using cool roof technology, specially insulated pre-fab outer walls, highly insulated glass and skylights, and motion detector lighting; and (4) to minimize water use with high efficiency appliances, toilets, showers, and sinks.

In 2016, Pastor Davis Price announced his intention to retire in May 2017. The congregation then began a new structured self-study effort to begin the transition to an interim pastor and then to a new pastor. The effort produced the May 2017 selection of Interim Pastor Terry Purvis-Smith. It then continued with his assistance in 2017. It concluded after his departure in May 2018 with the production of a comprehensive 118-page document titled Self-Study Notebook.

The findings in the 2018 Self-Study Notebook have significantly informed the Present and Future sections of this Report. The past self-study efforts, however, continue to play a vital role in the life of the congregation. They appear on a regular basis as the Declaration of Faith that the congregation recites during Sunday worship.

II. Our Present

A. Current Demographics

As part of the self-study process, the Self Study committee carefully reviewed the rolls of the Church in 2018. As of August 2018, the church has approximately 160 active members. Of those, about 50 are more recent members. The church does not keep precise ethnographic data on its membership but included in the membership are many traditional families and couples, as well as many nontraditional families and couples. The age of members skews older with about 75% of members being over 50. Also included are a number of members connected to the country of Cameroon as well as a number of second and third generations of families long associated with the church. The number of children younger than 12 attending worship in any given week varies from 2 to 12. The number of children older than 12 attending youth worship on Wednesdays varies from 2 to 6.

B. Governance

Covenant is governed by an 18-member Session of elders. Each year the congregation elects 6 elders to serve on Session for a three-year term. The work of the church is organized into five Households: Relational, Christ-Forming, Worshipping, Witnessing, and Foundational. The leadership of each Household organize the tasks associated with their Household. All church members and attendees are welcomed and invited to participate with Household tasks as their time and talents lead them. This organization allows more flexibility for reaching out to church members and attendees for help in discrete and limited tasks instead of asking for broad commitments of time and talent.

C. Financials

With no debt and consistent giving, the church is in sound financial condition.

Covenant operates on a calendar year, cash basis. Finances are overseen by the Stewardship and Finance Committee. The Committee oversees two budget accounts: the Operating Budget and the Restricted Funds Budget.

The church uses five broad categories to account for its Operating Budget spending: **(1)** Foundational (personnel, building) (68%); **(2)** Worshipping (worship and music) (17%); **(3)** Witnessing (outreach, office & communications) (11.5%); **(4)** Christ-Forming (Christian education)(2%); and **(5)** Relational (Fellowship & Hospitality)(1.5%). The total operating budget for 2018 was roughly \$346,000 and the proposed budget for 2019 is about \$352,000.

The church uses five categories of income sources to account for its Operating Budget income: **(1)** income from contributors to fulfil a pledge; **(2)** income from contributors who give regularly but who do not sign a formal pledge; **(3)** income from weekly plate collections; **(4)** income from earnings; and **(5)** miscellaneous “other” income. In late 2017 the church received 73 cards pledging a total of \$299,000 for 2018. Those pledges will fund about 86% of planned spending.

The Restricted Funds Budget consists of five modestly endowed restricted spending accounts that have been funded from legacy giving, from donations given for particular purposes, or from funds otherwise set aside for particular purposes that do not neatly link to yearly operating needs. Each fund has a specific document governing the use of the funds and the Committee protects each endowment so that only the interest is available for the specified use.

D. Physical Facility

The current physical facility sits on approximately 2 acres bounded by 47th and 48th streets and Salem and Toledo Avenues. The Lubbock Central Appraisal District values the land and improvements at about \$275,000.

The primary spaces within the Church are (1) the Sanctuary, used for Sunday services, for Taizé services, for special services such as memorials, and for community music recitals; (2) the

Kitchen, a state-of-the-art commercial facility; (3) the Fellowship Hall, a very large room off the kitchen containing movable walls to create multiple sized spaces for different needs; (4) the Courtyard, a second large room used for fellowship and various programming; (5) the Sunroom, a smaller room with south facing floor-to-ceiling windows that look out onto the outside labyrinth, used for small meetings and worship; (6) the Office Suite, consisting of the pastor's study, an administrative office, and a workroom; (7) the Library, holding over 3,000 items; (8) the Meeting Room, a smaller room used for committees and adult classes; (9) the Choir Room, a new space with risers and cloakroom for the choir; (10) the Youth rooms, two rooms for middle and high school students; (11) the Nursery; (12) the Children's rooms, built as part of the Phase One expansion in 2015 for classes and activities; and (13) new ADA accessible bathrooms and showers.

Outside, the Church grounds were renovated as part of the 2015 Building for Ministry. The renovations reflect God's call to protect the earth by implementing water-conserving landscaping and passive rainwater harvesting. The church grounds also reach out and welcome the surrounding community with walking paths that see community use, and a labyrinth for walking, praying, and focusing on God without worry of getting lost.

E. Worship Practices and Ministry

Covenant embraces a broad vision of worship and ministry. Christ did not confine his activities to one day a week. Christ also taught that worship encompasses many different forms. Accordingly, members of Covenant engage in various forms and practices of worship throughout the week, both in structured and unstructured environments and both at the church and outside the church building within the wider community.

1. Worship Practices within the Church Building

Our church building is a resource and a place of spiritual restoration. It is not a place of retreat but rather a place to gather the energy to carry God's love into the world.

On Sundays during the school year, members meet the hour before services in various classes, such as a great books class, a Bible study class, children's classes, a hymn study class, and others.

The Sunday worship service is central to most members' worship practice with between 60 and 100 attending per week. This is a traditional programmed service led by the Pastor and a weekly lay leader. The service has traditionally emphasized congregational participation through the sharing of joys and concerns, calls and responses, communal readings and singing and community praying. The Pastor's sermons traditionally follow the lectionary, sharing the Good News with the congregation and helping members go out into the week spiritually revived. Music is an integral part of service, with the congregation singing three to four hymns, and absorbing worship music from the choir, the organ, the piano, and additional instruments as needed. The music ministry, well known within the community, is led by a professional director with regular appearances by various guest musicians. In addition, the quality of the choir is enhanced by the many scholarship students that participate each semester.

Once each month Covenant holds communion. It is an open communion with all who are in the room being invited to trust God and share in God's feast.

On Sundays during the year that mark the change of the church calendar's seasons---Advent, Christmastide, Ordinary Time, Lent, Eastertide, Kingdomtide---Covenant hosts a special evening ecumenical worship service modeled on the Taizé Community's practice of contemplative instrumental music and chanting.

On Mondays, members meet to engage in the spiritual practice of yoga. Women of the church meet monthly in a night circle to worship through the practice of Bible study.

On Tuesdays, some members meet to study the Bible through the process of Lectio Divina. That practice is followed by Centering Prayer.

On Wednesdays, members meet to engage in a variety of worship practices throughout the day. Some meet to worship through the practice of singing. Women of the church meet in a monthly morning circle to worship in a practice of Bible study. Other members meet to worship through the practice of making prayer shawls. Others come to practice outreach by folding the weekly newsletter for mailing. Wednesdays are also a time for youth group dinners, prayer meetings and Bible study.

On one Thursday each month the Session meets to worship by practicing servant leadership.

On various Saturdays, different groups meet to worship by practicing fellowship and hospitality. Some meet in the kitchen to worship through the practice of hospitality by preparing food and freezing meals to use for home bound members and others. Others meet to maintain the church building and tend the grounds, issuing a call twice a year for broad membership support on special Work Days.

Advent is an important season for Covenant that brings the church family together in worship. Special events include: holiday music during worship; a children's pageant telling the Nativity story; an Angel Tree to help local children in need; weekly breakfasts before worship, hosted by different church groups; weekly Advent centers during breakfast that support the Advent message; special worship services reflecting the season's anticipation of Christ's coming; and an alternative gift market that helps artisans in developing countries bring their products and stories directly to U.S. markets.

Similarly, Easter is an important season. Special events include: extra worship services on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; an evening communion service on Maundy Thursday; a children-led sunrise service on Easter morning; and an egg hunt diligently prepared by many members.

2. Worship Practices Outside the Church Building

Covenant members practice their forms of worship beyond the church building. They are called to carry Christ's teaching into the world not just by word but also by concrete actions in association with various groups. Here are some highlights.

Many members are active in the West Texas Organizing Strategy (WTOS), an organization devoted to organizing and giving voice to communities that are overlooked in the normal political process.

Many members are active with Family Promise, an organization devoted to giving homeless families safe and secure housing and food for up to a year while they take the steps needed to become productive and self-sustaining. Every three months, Covenant members volunteer by providing home cooked meals, dinner hosts, and overnight chaperones at the Family Promise house.

Members are active with the Lubbock Interfaith Association, an ecumenical organization that sponsors interfaith activities and coordinates a biennial Interfaith Conference that features national speakers and attracts participation from across the region.

Many members are active in PCUSA activities, including both men's and women's conferences at Mo Ranch, and youth camps at Buffalo Gap.

Members are active in New Opportunities for Romanian Orphan Children (NOROC), an organization devoted to helping orphans in Romania. Covenant, along with other churches in the Palo Duro Presbytery, sponsors a mission co-worker in Tulcea, Romania.

Finally, Helping Hands is a group of church members that go out to other members' homes to provide small repairs and home maintenance help to those unable to do such chores.

F. Current Perceptions

1. Self-Perception

During the 2017-2018 self-study period, members of the Self-Study committee engaged members in seven structured small-group meetings held at the Church and at members' homes. These meetings obtained the input of 95 separate members, some of whom came to more than one meeting. Here are the main takeaways.

a. Embracing Diversity

Covenant members see themselves as following Christ by embracing all who seek spiritual enlightenment through Christ. Members see themselves as taking this approach in a variety of ways. First, members embrace an open approach to biblical teachings, an approach not grounded in the literal words of the Bible (through their many translations) but instead grounded in experiencing God's love through a variety of forms of worship and ministry.

Second, members embrace an open approach to who is part of the Covenant community, an approach grounded in a recognition that God is a God of all people regardless of status, political views, identity, or other superficial social barriers that are frequently used to create us/them

divisions. The idea of inclusion is based on face-to-face relationships that enable people to overcome their fears.

Third, it's an embrace, not a harangue; it's a recognition that acceptance must come from an understanding of Gospel teaching that not all share. We recognize that people are in different places in their spiritual journeys and we resist the idea that members must be in lockstep. Inclusion does not condemn anyone but says to all: "welcome." Covenant is the only Presbyterian church on the South Plains of Texas that is a member of More Light Presbyterians.

b. Seeking

Covenant members see themselves as seekers and not as a repository of answers. Members see Covenant as a place of spiritual refuge for those who are uncomfortable with dogmatic explanations of spirituality. Members long for a deeper and more personal spiritual journey that can be taken in step with those similarly motivated. Relatedly, members see themselves as intellectual seekers as well, seeking to know and understand God both through head, heart, and practice. They seek knowledge and wisdom and enlightenment. The congregation draws a large number of members from Texas Tech University including students, faculty, staff and alumni.

c. Doing

Covenant members see themselves as active in their communities and see their community engagement as an expression of God's love and desire for Shalom. As noted, we are involved in a number of local, national, and international activities that extend our reach beyond our building, reflecting a commitment to mission and outreach. Covenant members take the idea of being a relational household outside the church building, visiting the sick and home-bound members and holding family pot-lucks and events in members' homes.

2. Community Perception of Covenant

During the 2017-2018 self-study period, members of the Self-Study committee engaged groups and people outside the church community to see how Covenant was thought of by the wider Lubbock Community. Here are the main takeaways.

a. Unknown

A large part of Lubbock has no idea that Covenant Presbyterian church exists.

b. Socially Active

Many of those interviewed know of Covenant through the work of Covenant members in WTOS, in local political organizations, in Family Promise, and in other community outreach activities.

c. Welcoming

Various community groups that use Covenant's facilities know of the church and think of it as a welcoming place. These include the Lubbock Master Gardeners, the Barbershop Chorus, the Texas Tech School of Music.

d. One of the most open Churches

In a city with many places of worship, only a handful are considered to be as open and welcoming as Covenant is seen to be within the community. All are welcome. All means all.

III. Our Future

Over the past 18 months we have said good bye to our Minister of 40 years and his family and have lost our Executive Secretary of 13 years to relocation and our Treasurer of many years to retirement.

An Interim Pastor served for a year, and lay leaders filled the pulpit admirably for a few months, interspersed with visiting ministers. We now have a stated supply minister who is tending our pulpit and spiritual needs. These anxiety provoking changes led us to the task of finding our lost institutional memory and creating new procedures for the future. The Session and Committees have been very busy with this task, finding our way and strengthening our resolve. For example, Stewardship and Finance began annual audits, Worship has introduced new elements in the Sunday worship service, Christian Education has a structured program that provides both short and long-term Sunday school classes, as well as community presentations. We conducted a Self-Study with the Congregation, reviewed our committee and task management organization, and put a Pastoral Nomination Committee in place.

In spite of upheaval and change, there are many characteristics we desire to keep as we move forward. Attendance has been up and down but is more stable this autumn with our stated supply pastor, the Rev. Betsy Heavner. Dedicated members have tended the church's functioning. For example, offices are being repainted and freshened up, our building projects (kitchen and classrooms) are completed and paid for, and the Outreach ministries continue to function as they have in the past while adding new outreach such as a booth at the recent Lubbock Pride Day. Worship continues to be a safe and loving place for all, an attitude we cherish.

Of the challenges documented in the Self Study Notebook, expanding our outreach to grow the young adult and family segments of the congregation is important, but problematic. Like many denominational churches across the country, Covenant Presbyterian is greying. One suggestion has been cooperation with other Presbyterian Churches (perhaps to share expenses) for programs focusing on youth.

Growing the congregation asks us to grapple with size. CPC has been a pastoral church in the past, attracting a congregation that seeks a personal, hands-on ministry. To grow the church, we may need to grow the staff as well, becoming a more institutional church. One self-study comment suggests "to grow the church but be hesitant, because we don't want to mess up what we have."

We wish to maintain our long-time members, visitors, and non-member active participants, including the elderly, traditional and nontraditional families, gender nonspecific, international, and single people. We like our attitude of including all, rather than excluding anyone.

We are tasked to move the church into the 21st Century with modern communication technologies. Better use of social media might help build a younger congregation. The church website is being rebuilt right now. We are working to make our library of sermons available online for our shut-ins and seekers. We have established electronic methods of donating, including donating through online apps.

We need to continue developing new leaders from within the congregation. The experiences of the last 18 months have stressed our Session members with many long hours. A deeper pool of talent would be healthy and bring relief to regular Session members.

IV. Conclusion

Covenant has long been a congregation that emphasizes contemplation and other spiritual practices as a foundation for our life together and our mission in the world. We are an alternative in an area dominated by fundamentalist Christianity. We seek a pastor who will encourage our spiritual growth through sharing insights gained through personal spiritual practice, who will help us discern where we are called to minister in the community, who will continue to deepen their own knowledge of Scripture, and who will preach the Gospel in an inclusive, non-dogmatic, and encouraging way. We value our children and youth, and we seek someone who will commit to helping us nurture them with Christian education and mentoring. We hope for a pastor who will walk beside us into the future, sharing our lives, and affirming our strengths while lovingly challenging us to deepen our vision and respond to God's call.