

INTRODUCTION



The congregation of First Presbyterian Church, located in Horseheads, NY, is very mission-minded as symbolized by the grocery cart in their narthex. Throughout each month they bring donations of food and then on the first Sunday of each month they bring them into the sanctuary to be dedicated. The food goes to the Community Food Pantry which is housed in their building.

Although the congregation has been in existence since 1832, they built this building and moved in it in 1965 at what some consider the height of their ministry. The building continues to be an asset that the congregation freely shares with the Food Pantry, the Pre-school and other community groups. While the congregation is aging and declining in numbers, participants maintain financial support and continue to be actively involved in their life and ministry. The area of Upstate New York in which Horseheads is located has had its ups and downs, especially with manufacturing that peaked in the 1970s and then fell off. This area is situated on the southern edge of the Finger Lakes region celebrated for its beautiful scenery and the quality of the wines it produces.

This Assessment Report is designed to provide the congregation and its leadership with a wealth of information about the congregation's history, its current profile from various angles such as the participants, the building itself, their finances, the community around them and other aspects of their current status as a congregation. At the end several future stories will offer some reflections about possibilities for the future life and ministry of this congregation. The future stories are not intended to suggest any particular direction, rather to suggest that there are many possibilities for the future and to encourage the congregation to write its own future story.

WHY AN ASSESSMENT REPORT TO AID IN VISIONING?

The Presbyterian Church (USA) offered the program "New Beginnings" up until 2016. This program provided a comprehensive assessment of the church including a comparison of the church and its community in key areas as well as information about population centers within the church's geographic ministry area. It led to the formation of a Future Story by the congregation. **The question to be asked is, "What is God calling us to do and to be in this time and this place?"**

The program was created by the Disciples of Christ denomination specifically for congregations in decline because mainline Protestant churches everywhere are declining. The pews are emptier on Sunday morning. Neighborhoods have changed. Once-proud buildings show signs of wear and tear, and the cost to maintain them pulls money away from outreach and ministry.

The PC(USA) could not sustain delivery of this program. It had used full-time denominational

staff persons and contract employees to conduct assessments and work with congregations through a process of envisioning a New Beginning. This congregation's Transitional Pastor was one of the trained assessors and found aspects of the assessment to be very helpful for congregations in transition as well as congregations that had experienced decline. She used parts of the process with other congregations and those congregations were able to move forward in their ministry.

The covenant between the Transitional Pastor and the Session requires among other things that the Transitional Pastor: 1. Work with the Session and other church members on Strategy and Vision and help the Session set a direction on where the church should go in these changing times, and 2. Lead the congregation in a Mission Study process.

When the Transitional Pastor was interviewed by the Session in May 2016, she and the Session discussed at length, her passion for leading congregations in those two areas and she subsequently offered to conduct an assessment using the principles of this program to fulfill these requirements.

Quoting from the PC(USA), "While the message of God's love remains constant, ministry today doesn't look like first-century ministry. In fact, today's ministry doesn't look like ministry even a decade ago! **Often, once-thriving congregations find themselves in declining health or at least stuck in patterns that seem to be leading toward decline. They need help to discern God's unique call again; help to regain their vitality; or help to direct their remaining assets into the ministry channels they determine to be most appropriate to their mission.**"

WHERE DID THIS REPORT COME FROM?

Transitional Pastor Cheryl Ann Elfond was assisted by several church leaders and the church secretary in gathering the data used for this assessment. The assessment included a complete review of the facilities and property (Pastor Cheryl Ann was assisted by an outside volunteer resource for this section of the assessment), as well as review of 3 years financial data from the annual reports, review of the use of the building by church groups and outside groups, review of the 10 year statistics, analysis of congregational demographics, and a MissionInsite report that provides demographic information about the community. Early in her tenure Pastor Cheryl Ann did "windshield tour" of the community with a church member to get a sense of the surrounding community.

After worship on November 6, 2016, Pastor Cheryl Ann Elfond conducted a congregational gathering called "in Joy and In Hope" with about 39 participants. She will lead a brief exercise in looking at the Congregational Life Cycle of First Presbyterian Church of Horseheads and it will be inserted into this report.

This Assessment report includes the work done by the Transitional Task Group (TTG) established in preparation for the retirement of the Rev. Jonathan B. Knight. The work provided a solid foundation upon which to build including a Mission Statement (no small task) among other things.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Session will review this report and the goal is that a process for writing a future story for First Presbyterian Church Horseheads would ensue under the leadership of Pastor Cheryl Ann Elfond and other church leaders.