



Mission Study

January 16, 2017

Revision 1

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Our Purpose, Vision & Mission	4
Our Beliefs & Values	5
Who We Are.....	6
Our History.....	7
Our Community.....	10
Our Interests & Desires.....	11
Summary	12
Our Path Forward.....	13
Our Pastoral Preference.....	15
Appendix A: Select Church Ministries	16
Worship.....	17
Children’s Ministry	18
New Life Christian Preschool	20
Youth Ministry.....	21
Adult Education.....	23
Missions	24
Outreach	25
Appendix B: Church Goals.....	26
Appendix C: ECO Essential Tenets and Confessional Standards	27

Introduction

This Mission Study was developed by the Pastoral Transition Team of Maple Valley Presbyterian Church (MVPC) and approved by the Session. Its purpose is to clearly communicate the vision for MVPC, acknowledging and celebrating our past and present, while looking forward to what our focus should be as we seek out a new Senior Pastor.

The Pastoral Transition Team was appointed by the Session in March 2015 to develop the plan for the replacement of our retiring Senior Pastor in 2017. The plan was to include a framework for working through the entire transition process leading up to the selection and hiring of a Senior Pastor; this encompassed the development of a Mission Study, nomination of a Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC), subsequent oversight of the PNC effort, and effective communication with the congregation throughout the process.

The transition team has invested a significant amount of time together seeking and listening for God's plan and voice throughout the development of the Mission Study. We have sought wise godly counsel from our Senior Pastor, core staff, Session, the congregation and others. Pastor Tom Dabasinskas, currently on the pastoral staff at Highlands Community Church, was retained to provide counsel, training and process support to the transition team for the activity.

An all-church survey was conducted in June 2016 to obtain congregational input. This input was reviewed and follow up discussions were held with staff, Session and, in some cases, focus groups to ensure an understanding of the information and allow us to better discern the congregation's interests and desires.

We believe God has spoken through these processes. We pray that God uses this work to further His kingdom in our community and around the world.

The team: Natasha Valach – Chair, Amy Thompson, Dick Quinn, and Joel Wright.

Our Purpose, Vision & Mission

Our mission statement for the last 10 years has been and continues to be: “Maple Valley Presbyterian is a community of small groups seeking to restore people into the life of God as disciples of Jesus Christ.”

A mission statement is very helpful in clearly identifying what we are about and where we believe God is leading us as a church. While we continue to value community through small groups, we recognize that a more inclusive and larger purpose, vision and mission statement would be helpful. Thus, Session and staff have engaged in some very preliminary discussions to consider adopting something similar to the following:

Our Purpose (why we are here)

Because of God’s deep love for us, Maple Valley Presbyterian Church exists to restore people into full life through Jesus Christ.

Our Vision (how we will achieve our purpose)

Live missional lives that communicate the transformative and unconditional love of God, through authentic relationships and acts of compassion.

Our Mission (what we do to achieve our purpose)

To help all people know God more deeply, love others more completely, and live life more fully.

At the core of our mission, both as currently stated and with the change being considered, is a consistent call for all of us as individuals and as a church to have passion for God. To do that, we must grow closer to God, rely on God for our identity, allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, become more like Jesus, really care for what God cares for, and declare to our friends, community and world the saving knowledge of Jesus. As we become more passionate, we'll become even better than we are now at all kinds of relationships. We'll develop ourselves as people who rely on the Holy Spirit to live daily as being totally sold out to living the Great Commission of making disciples as we go about life. Being more passionate, more relational, and more missional will result in experiencing more of God, expressing more love, and living life more fully.

As we seek to further our mission, God is calling us to:

- Become more missional - Intentional
- Become more relational - Authentic
- Become more passionate - Reaching
- Prepare for growth – Depth and Breadth

The practical implications of what this means and how it affects our future is further described in the section entitled “Our Path Forward”.

Our Beliefs & Values

In January 2014, after a long process of discernment, MVPC moved from being a member church of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) to A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO), whose mission is to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ. We fully agree with and are guided by our denominational values (<http://www.eco-pres.org/who-we-are/>) and theological essentials (<http://www.eco-pres.org/essential-tenets/>). Appendix C includes the ECO *Essential Tenets & Confessional Standards*.

We believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word, entirely trustworthy and authoritative for our faith and practice. We believe that Jesus Christ is God's only Son, fully God and fully human. We believe that Jesus Christ is the only savior of the world from our sin and that we receive salvation from God through Christ by grace through faith. We are a church that takes our sin, and God's grace, seriously.

As a local expression of the Church, our core values, which are consistent with those of ECO, include:

Biblical Integrity

We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, which teaches through the mediation of the Holy Spirit all that is necessary for faith and life.

Intentional Community

We believe spiritual growth is a corporate experience developed through worship, prayer, study, service and accountable community; and that it is our sacred privilege to participate in nurturing the faith of the next generation. We believe Jesus calls each of us to act as peacemakers in all of our relationships.

Outward Focus

We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission. This includes personal and corporate communication of the gospel and the application of redemptive justice and service locally and internationally.

Who We Are

MVPC is located in the growing community of Maple Valley, Washington. The church is a thriving witness to the community and a blessing to all who attend. Our ministries, described more fully in Appendix A, serve seekers and followers of Jesus of all ages. Our ministry and office staff provide the necessary leadership and management of all aspects of the church activity. The church is financially healthy, able to meet its financial commitments, and expand ministries as Session approves.

As we move forward, ***a significant change of direction for MVPC is not recommended***. It is more about building, developing and growing out of what we already are by renewing our focus and attention in a more deliberate manner.

Our Session recognized in 2014 that we were embarking on a series of significant changes over the upcoming years. Thusly, in May 2015, we launched a capital campaign we called Generation to Generation (<http://www.mvpc.net/give/gen-to-gen/index.html>) recognizing it was much more than merely fund raising. We adopted Psalm 145:4 as our theme; “One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.” We sought to honor our past (our involvement in the PCUSA, our founders, our kingdom impacts, etc.) and connect it to our future (our entry into ECO, positioning ourselves to minister in new ways, reaching the lost, etc.).

We launched Generation to Generation because there are people in the greater Maple Valley area who do not know Jesus and we believe God has called us to reach them through effective contextual ministry. There are also people around the world who need to hear the gospel and we want to more significantly support mission work that brings the gospel to these people groups. This means we need to have a facility that enables effective ministry within our context of southeast King County for years to come. It also means freeing up financial resources for both local and international ministry and mission work.

We desire to take the opportunity to pass on to the next generation (of attenders, leaders, staff, etc.) a vibrant church prepared to continue to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. The campaign objectives included the following:

- Raise \$2M that balances facility improvements and debt reduction (for every \$1 invested in improving our facility, \$1 will be spent to pay down our debt).
- Impact our church mission by providing
 - a time of reflection on how God has used MVPC to further his kingdom and mission
 - a time of anticipation to what God has in store for MVPC in terms of spiritual impact for the kingdom
 - opportunity to be challenged as a church and as individuals to further grow in our spiritual discipline of tithing/giving of our finances and further developing a spirit of generosity
 - improvement in our financial condition will free up resources (\$\$) to increase funding of existing or enter into new ministries, increase missions funding, etc.
 - improvement in our facility demonstrates good stewardship of the facility God has blessed us with by taking care of it, making it more welcoming and appealing to visitors with an emphasis on people not currently connected to the Church providing facilities that allow for expanded/new ministry

In response to the campaign, we received pledged commitments of nearly \$1.1M to be contributed over a 3-year period. As of this writing, the campaign is at the approximate mid-point and achieving the objectives outlined above. A number of improvements to our facility have been completed and we have reduced our debt. We are currently planning for the next phases of facility improvement and further debt reduction.

Our History

Maple Valley Presbyterian Church (MVPC) began in the fall of 1981. The church was the dream of six families who wanted to see a reformed church in the Maple Valley area. Our church was planted by Seattle Presbytery of the PCUSA, under the part-time leadership of organizing pastor, Pastor Bell. For the first year, MVPC met at the home of Roger and Reba Morris and then moved to the library at Shadow Lake Elementary School. Our first and only full time senior pastor, David Diehl, arrived in January 1983 and we chartered with just over 100 members on December 4, 1983. Pastor Diehl continues to be our senior pastor and is planning to retire in 2017.

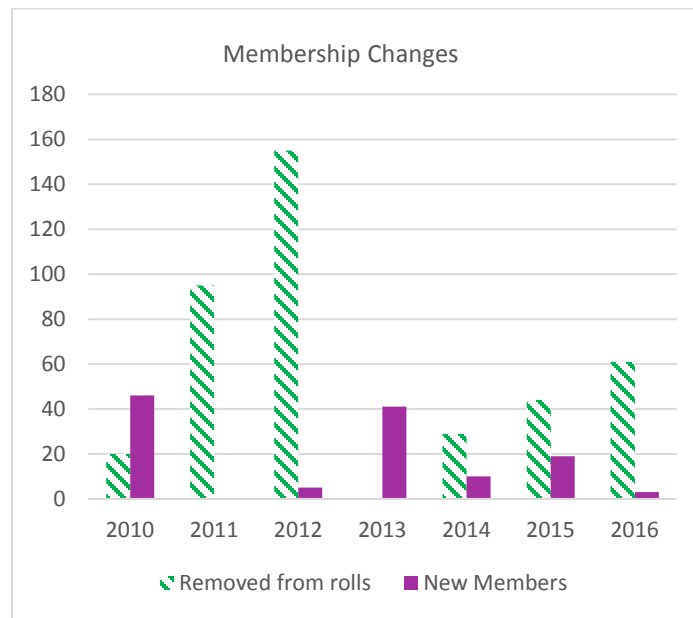
For the first several years, the church continued to meet at Shadow Lake Elementary School in Maple Valley. In 1986, property was purchased for a church building and a groundbreaking ceremony was held in December 1987. The first building was completed in 1988. As the church grew, additional space was needed and a generous, committed member paid for and built a separate youth building. That same member led an all-volunteer effort to build an addition to the facility which encompassed a nursery, additional classrooms and offices with a new entry area. As the church flourished, four worship services were needed to accommodate the growth. This led to the decision to build a larger worship space. In 1996 a building campaign was initiated and the new facility expansion was completed in October of 1998.

As with many churches, a variety of significant ministry initiatives emerged over the years. For five years, MVPC had a large youth club of grade school students meeting each Wednesday night that included 150+ participants. Following that, a Tuesday Night Training program for all ages was developed and maintained for 6 years. The youth program of the church at its high point reached over 100 6th-12th graders weekly and continues to reach approximately 60 youth weekly.

In the early 1990s, a ministry of small groups for adults developed and continues to this day involving over 400 adults. Short term mission trips have always been a big part of MVPC and in most years, we have had over 40 adults participate. The church has also always had a robust worship ministry involving many volunteers. For a number of years, we produced a large Christmas musical involving drama, choir, orchestra, bell choir and children's choir. Many of those elements are continuing in modified form.

Under the leadership of Nancy Diehl, our Senior Pastor's wife, a preschool was established in 1990 that has grown to 140 students a year. A significant women's weekly Bible Study ministry developed in the mid-1990s and continues with 160 women participating. The church is volunteer focused and engages over 270 adults in volunteer roles on a routine basis. MVPC takes caring for its members seriously by responding to Jesus' command to love one another. We extend care through our small group system first and then through our Deacons, Stephen ministers and Grief Share leaders. An extension of the care ministry is the ministry of reconciliation through Peacemakers, in which all the staff and Elders and many others have been trained.

Church membership in 2010 reached 625. During 2010-2012, as we entered into our discernment process of whether to change denominations, we purged stale membership files and removed 270 members who had not attended for many years or were members elsewhere. In 2014, we adopted the practice of annually reviewing our membership files to better maintain church records. At the conclusion of our discernment process and decision to move from PCUSA to ECO, there was very low attrition due to that change. In fact, only a few families left as a direct result of that change. We have seen only a modest growth in new members, primarily due to a lack of emphasis on membership. These changes are reflected in the graph below. Currently, our membership is 525.



Church attendance reached its high point in 2004 with average weekly attendance of 620 adults. This was coincident with a sermon series and all church study on the 40 Days of Purpose. Through the rest of that decade we maintained an average of 544 which was slightly lower than the average from 2001-2005 which was 563. Attendance since 2011 has remained relatively flat and consistent approximating 500. Weekly attendance in 2016 has averaged 491. We have also noted that the average attendee only attends Sunday service twice each month. So, while average attendance figures remain fairly constant, we are ministering to more people than the average attendance values would indicate.

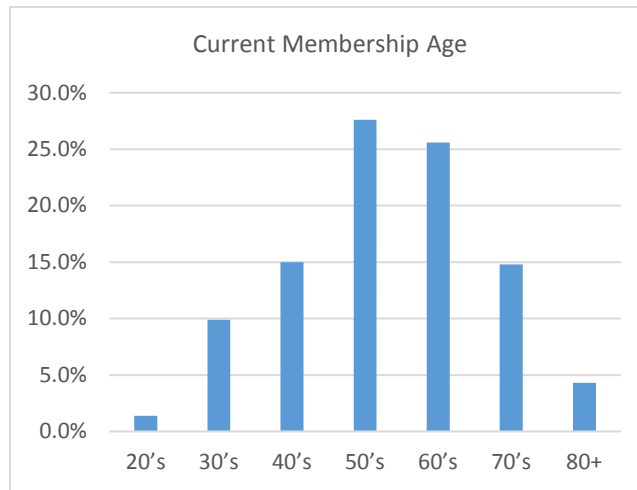
Our relatively flat membership and attendance has been a topic of much discussion with the Session and Staff over the past several years. Intentional actions have been taken to adapt to changes in the surrounding community and culture, including how to more effectively engage the next generation. We've taken some good initial steps after several years of declining attendance by younger aged people. Therefore, the results of those changes (younger boards, congregational focus on engaging a new demographic, worship style) are not yet being seen in the membership and attendance levels.

Other factors we think contribute to relatively flat membership and attendance are:

- A de-emphasis on membership by MVPC due to the cultural propensity to participate but not commit to formal membership.

- Public confusion and perceptions caused by the denominational disarray within the PCUSA. It is unclear whether the inclusion of the term “Presbyterian” in our church name is viewed as a distinctive or a cause for confusion by potential attendees (e.g. “which Presbyterian?”).
- A rise in the number of other churches in the community coupled with a consumer mentality in our culture.
- Greater affluence—more money gives people more options.
- Higher focus on kids’ activities and affluent parents choosing sports over church.
- More travel—when people are out of town, they tend to not be in church.
- Blended and single parent families. Shared custody and financial struggles reduce attendance frequency.
- Self-directed spirituality—the post-modern mind instinctively moves away from institutions.

An assessment of the age of our current adult active members indicates that our strategy as a church to become more attractive to young families is essential for future growth.



We are also mostly white with little recognizable racial diversity and economically mirror the median to upper end of the surrounding community. In recent years, the residents of the city of Maple Valley, as well as the communities MVPC serves, have become much more ethnically diverse and appear to be underserved in our city’s churches. Although more needs to be done to serve all, MVPC is beginning to see a subtle shift as some of our new attendees do represent other ethnicities.

The church has a very solid financial position raising more funds each year than the year before. Giving is up 20% in 2015 and 2016 over the prior two years. This is consistent with the feedback from the church survey regarding the congregation’s financial generosity.

Throughout its history, the church has maintained a focused emphasis on Christian community as a foundation for discipleship, a keen interest in conversion growth facilitated by an emphasis on building relationships with those lost to God at any moment in time, and an emphasis on practical service in the church, community and larger world. We have a demonstrated commitment to the value of youth and children’s ministry with a major emphasis on preparing parents to be the teachers of Christ to their children. Worship is important to the church to help serve its larger mission. We continue to strongly support world and local missions. **The authority of scripture in a reformed tradition undergirds all the**

ministries and practices of the church. At the same time, the church is a part of the wider evangelical community, which is reflected not only in its covenant partners but in the staff of the church as well.

Our Community

Maple Valley is one of the fastest growing areas in Washington State. From 2000–2010 Maple Valley grew nearly 63%; the 17th fastest growing city in the State during that period. The population (as of 2016) is 24,790, with an estimated ministry area population of 65,000-94,000. The City currently ranks #43 out of 281 municipalities in the State for population. The build-out population for the City is projected to be 29,500 in 2020.

According to the 2000 US Census, 62% of the Maple Valley's population is between the ages of 18-64, 34% is 17 or younger, and 5% is over 65.

A high percentage of residents are college educated; approximately 75% of adults have post-secondary education. In addition, Maple Valley has one of the highest median incomes in King County, \$92,900 per household. High household earnings and a median home price of \$359,955 provide Maple Valley residents, on average, with more disposable income.

The Tahoma School District serves approximately 7,900 students in grades pre-K through 12. The district is recognized as innovative in its development and use of curriculum. Test scores indicate that Tahoma students are among the state's top 10 percent, on average. The district provides a quality learning environment for all students, including those with special needs and those who are qualified to participate in gifted education programs. Music, athletics and other extracurricular activities are available, too.

Tahoma High School is a Class AAAA school and is a member of the North Puget Sound League for sports and other activities.

The school district will experience tremendous change in the 2017-2018 school year when the new Tahoma High School opens to grades 9th-12th at a site near the center of Maple Valley. When the new school opens, the current high school and junior high buildings will convert to middle schools for grades 6th-8th. The current two-year middle schools will be converted to elementary schools. The changes will help relieve severe overcrowding in the district.

There is every option available when it comes to housing in Maple Valley including apartments, senior housing, townhomes, and single family residences. Many of the developments in Maple Valley take advantage of the beautiful natural environment that the city has to offer. In the greater Maple Valley area, it is not unusual for homes to be on multi-acre sites and some have pastoral environments with horses, cows, sheep, alpacas, llamas and emu.

In the center of the city there are multiple neighborhoods with tree-lined streets, community parks and access to much of the nature that makes Maple Valley special. Many neighborhoods have access to extensive trail systems that lead to the Black Diamond Mountain Biking trail system, Lake Wilderness Park and Arboretum, the Maple Valley Library, and that link up to the Green to Cedar Rivers Trail which leads all the way into Renton. The trail system has the potential of leading someone all the way into downtown Seattle and it also has multiple connections to the business community. The City of Maple

Valley sits along the eastern edge of King County's urban growth boundary, which discourages growth outside those boundaries leaving Maple Valley on the edge of nature's beauty. It is truly a wonderful and unique natural setting.

Our Interests & Desires

A survey to obtain insights into congregational opinions, values, interests and desires was conducted in June 2016. We invited responses from all adult members and regular attenders. A very high response rate of 81% was received, clearly indicating that they deeply care about the success and future of MVPC.

As a church body, we can be thankful for the past, which has led us to the present and our strong ministries that impact MVPC and our community. The survey indicates that our covenant partners/regular attendees can imagine a church with a higher level of vitality than they are currently experiencing and are searching for a pathway that will lead us there.

The survey results provided very affirming feedback on who we are as a church:

- We have a very high sense of walking with Christ on a daily basis in our personal lives.
- We are a very generous church in our financial giving.
- We have clarity around what we believe.
- We have a strong desire to reach out to people who do not yet consider themselves believers in Jesus.

The survey responses related to our church culture indicated potential weaknesses due to a tendency to become tradition-bound and conflict-prone. While this is not viewed as a significant issue, it is a consideration as implemented changes are managed. The survey also revealed that people desire some change and expressed a willingness to change. This is very encouraging as we are headed toward major change with the hiring of a new senior pastor. Areas of highest interest include:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
- Enhance children and youth ministries to better serve families in our community.
- Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.
- Deepen our connection to God through worship services that inspire and reach our congregation and community.
- Strengthen the process by which members are called and equipped for ministry and leadership.

An analysis of the survey results led the transition team to dig deeper into 5 key areas – Worship, Youth, Children, Adult Education and Outreach/Missions – to better understand the kinds of changes desired. This included meeting with core staff members and, in some cases, focus groups to discuss specific interests. Appendix A provides more specifics on each of these ministry areas.

Summary

The heritage of MVPC is one of strong community, both internally and externally. Small groups have formed the foundation for expressing love and care to one another. It is clear that the desired changes in focus, as expressed in the church survey results, and provision of new opportunities for living out our faith will result in deeper relationships with our Savior, with one another, and with those who have yet to enter into a relationship with Jesus.

We believe that our path forward, as described in this study, will lead all of us to desire more of God, express more love, and live life more fully.

Our Path Forward

As described earlier in this study, the core of our mission is a call for all of us as individuals and as a church to have passion for God. To do that, we must grow closer to God, rely on Him for our identity, allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, become more like Jesus, to really care for what God cares for, and to declare to our friends, community and world the saving knowledge of Jesus. As we become more passionate, we'll become even better than we are now at all kinds of relationships, and we'll develop ourselves as people who rely on the Holy Spirit to live daily as those totally sold out to living the Great Commission of making disciples as we go about life. Being more passionate, more relational, and more missional will result in experiencing more of God, expressing more love, and living life more fully.

The survey results validated the ongoing discussion within Session, that as we seek to further our purpose, vision and mission at MVPC, God is calling us to:

- Become more missional – Intentional

The active practice of living an **intentional** life that aims to bring Jesus Christ into the places where we live, work, play and worship. It permeates all of who we are, all of what we do, and all that we value. It removes the focus from self to Jesus and others.

- Become more relational – Authentic

The active practice of entering into **authentic** relationships motivated by the Great Commandment to love God and one another. As we become more relational we will become better at relating with and caring for one another at MVPC and those who do not yet know Jesus. Authenticity will enable us to be intentional in our walk with Jesus in every aspect of life.

- Become more passionate – Reaching

The active practice of being followers of Jesus who are motivated by our love of God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This entails **reaching** beyond who we are to become more like He is in all that we think, say and do.

- Prepare for growth – Deep and Wide

The active practice of preparing our church for the growth that will occur both **deep** and **wide**; deeper in terms of not only our individual but corporate walk with Jesus and wider in terms of growth that will occur by widening the ministries and impact that we have in our community.

In evaluating recent goals (included in Appendix B) for the church, it should be recognized that the focus areas being recommended below **do not constitute a significant change of direction for MVPC**. It is more about building, developing and growing out of what we already are. They are also consistent with the **feedback from the church survey** where 63% of respondents agreed that some to moderate change is required to realize their vision for the church.

Central to the path forward is the Great Commission that “as we go, we make disciples”. This should permeate every ministry and program of the church. We are disciples of Jesus becoming better equipped to make disciples both within our families, church body, and with those who are still outside the faith.

We believe that our path forward, as validated by the church survey responses, should include a renewed focus in the following key areas:

1. Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
2. Enhance children and youth ministries to better serve families in our community.
3. Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.
4. Deepen our connection to God through stronger worship services that inspire and reach our congregation and community.
5. Strengthen the process by which members are called and equipped for ministry and leadership.

In addition, we need to embark on a more deliberate and sustained effort to equip all members and attenders to be both disciples and disciplers of Jesus Christ. This will start in the home where parents are both equipped for and doing the work of discipleship of their children.

Church leadership (Session and staff) are encouraged to develop specific goals and objectives for achieving our path forward, as described by these six key areas of focus and renewal. In so doing, it will also further our call to become more missional, relational, passionate and prepared for growth.

Our Pastoral Preference

As we tried to discern how God is leading MVPC, we also discovered a few things about what our congregation might prefer in its next pastor.

Our church survey specifically solicited input on eight critical abilities the congregation desired in the next senior pastor; for example, 68% of survey respondents desire a pastor who will connect our church to God's Word as the most important ability followed by 37% desiring strategic leadership as the second most important ability.

Taking the congregational preferences into consideration, along with the abilities needed to fulfill our path forward, we have discerned that our next senior pastor should have the following demonstrated abilities. We believe the first 5 items are of equal importance and the last item less so given that we currently have a care pastor on staff.

- A preacher capable of inspiring and connecting people to God's Word.
- A strategic leader who has the capacity to cast a vision and lead the church toward the realization of the vision and lead the resulting growth of the church.
- A leader with a passion to reach those lost to Christ and able to equip and motivate others to act on that passion.
- An effective teacher who can deepen understanding, form character and equip members with new skills.
- A leader with the capability to lead and manage the church through a time of change.
- A pastor who can engage people empathetically and care for persons in time of need.

We need to call a pastor that can lead MVPC in the direction of the path forward described in this Mission Study. A pastor who can equip us to grow, lead and drive growth, and focus us all on reaching the lost throughout our community; that is, **we will need to seek a missional, relational, passionate, growth supporting pastor.**

Appendix A: Select Church Ministries

Worship

Our rich history includes a full choir, orchestra and hand bells, but there has been a shift away from those traditions in the past few years, with declining participation and enthusiasm for those expressions. In 2016, Session decided to depart from the use of part-time and volunteer leadership for worship and merge them into a full-time worship director. We are seeking to blend the preferences of the wide range of age, tradition and music styles into our new worship expression.

Worship at MVPC is in transition. There are many teams being put in place or already in place with empowered leaders to build a foundation. We incorporate traditional elements such as call and responsive readings and liturgy, but use them in a way that complements the more modern style of music. Some of the teams are Sunday worship teams (band and vocal), Hand Bell Choir, Brass/Strings Trio(s), Worship Choir, Creative Kids (choir/drama/video K-5th grade), Youth Worship (worship team/video/drama 6th–12th grade), and Tech Team (lighting/audio/visual). Others may be added as interest arises and as fit with our evolving worship style.

Our new director started in August 2016 and has been working towards helping the church understand the underlying reasons for worship, addressing technical and sound needs, and building and rebuilding teams to balance our different styles and traditions. While hymns are still used occasionally, there is an effort to bring in more modern worship music and to help our worship space reflect that blend.

We see worship as more than just music. Worship is a time to come together to fellowship, focus on God's Word, glorify Him, be recharged and then sent out to live out His will through our ongoing worship during the week. Musical and artistic worship prepares hearts to hear the Word, attracts people through the joy of the arts, and communicates the Word in a different format.

Our vision is to lead people into genuine worship with the Father, not only at the service, but throughout the week. As worship leaders, we want to be *excellent* with the gifts and talents we have been given so we can avoid being *distracting* while leading. We believe it is vital to take our gifts out into the community. Prayer is a vital part of worship, and we have corporate prayer during the service and have prayer teams available at the altar after the service for private prayer for those who desire it.

We want to see this ministry grow and be a place that artists and musicians thrive using their gifts and talents for the glory of God, edification of the body and to spread the Gospel. We want to encourage the congregation to depart from the building after worship and continue to worship throughout the week in personal worship times with the Lord including prayer, reading, interaction and service.

Children's Ministry

The Children's Ministry represents children from birth through 5th grade and includes oversight of our preschool, New Life Christian Preschool. An overview of the preschool is provided in the next section.

Since its formation, MVPC has invested in our children's programs, including paid staff positions to lead the ministry area. The Children's Ministry has encompassed a variety of programs, all with the intent of providing opportunities for our children to have a personal relationship with Jesus. For example, early in the history of the church, a large youth club of grade school students met each Wednesday night that included 150+ participants. Following that, a Tuesday Night Training program for all ages was developed and maintained for 6 years before being cancelled due to lack of interest. Traditional Sunday School has also been a key focus area.

There are also several summer programs that provide opportunities for children of church members/attenders, as well as an outreach to the broader community. These include Vacation Bible School, Performing Arts Camp and Best Days of Summer. These typically are filled to capacity due to high interest with attendance typically 150, 60 and 40 respectively.

Average weekly attendance by children ages birth through 5th grade to Sunday School was consistently at around 105 during the 2011-2014 timeframe. In 2015, the weekly average was 84 and in 2016 it has declined to 68; with a recent trend over the past 6 weeks of higher attendance near 80. Some of the reduction can be attributed to several large families (12 children) leaving in 2015 and changes to the church demographics. Additionally, since it is parents that bring their children to church, the factors identified earlier in this study which describe our relatively flat overall church attendance also apply to this ministry area.

In January 2016, we had a change in Children's Ministry staff with the retirement of our long-time Director of Children's Ministry. With the hiring of a new Director, the Children's Ministry team completed a ministry inventory, assessed the inputs from the church survey and developed a vision for the ministry area that is seeker sensitive, builds community and relationships within our church and the community at large, and supports parents and grandparents in their Biblically mandated role as primary nurturers of their children's faith.

As a ministry team, they are working to ensure that volunteer leaders continue to be used and become more effective in their roles. Programs include educational opportunities for the children and parents and encompass fun, community, and outreach events.

Going forward, Children's Ministry programs are being designed to intentionally come alongside parents and grandparents to support them in their role as primary spiritual nurturers. It is hoped that this focus will instill a fervent desire for all to spiritually nurture their children. This will be incorporated into the ministry area through a variety of ways.

Training events, coincident with the Sunday School hour, will provide spiritual parenting classes across all age levels: How to bless our children (2s/3s), How to pray and do family devotions (4s/K), serving as a family (1st/2nd), Communion class (3rd), How to read my Bible (4th/5th).

As the transition team followed up with parents in this age group, it is clear that families are interested in learning opportunities and support for being spiritual leaders at home. Many would like age

appropriate devotionals provided to complete at home, others would be interested in a week night program for kids and families.

It should be noted that age appropriate devotional materials have been provided to parents for some time. "Homefront Weekly" is provided to parents each week at the end of Sunday School. *Homefront Monthly* magazine is also provided and includes devotional materials, articles, and activities to support families in nurturing their children.

Several week night programs have been developed in response to parental input. For example, a monthly "Family Night" event was conducted, but with very limited attendance was discontinued. Currently, there is a week night program called Creative Kids (13 children currently participating). The change to offering classes on Sunday mornings for the parents and grandparents was then implemented to try and reach a higher participation level.

New Life Christian Preschool

Under the leadership of Nancy Diehl, our Senior Pastor's wife, a preschool was established in 1990 that has grown to 140 students a year.

New Life Christian Preschool is a modified co-op preschool. Parents work in the classrooms as a teacher's assistant the equivalent of one week per quarter and also participate in class jobs, field trips, celebrations and other special events. Classrooms are staffed with one teacher and one parent helper. Currently we offer the following classes:

- 2 – two-year old classes (max of 8 students)
- 5 - three-year old classes (max of 12 students),
- 5 – four-year old classes (max of 12 students),
- 1 - Junior Kindergarten class (max of 14 students).

We currently have 140 students enrolled. Sixty-five percent of the student families do not attend church at all, several attend the Mormon Church, and the balance are from MVPC or other surrounding churches. While the preschool is intent on providing quality education for its students, it is also recognized as an outreach opportunity and service to the community at large.

We believe that our world and each person in it is a unique creation of our loving God. All staff members have an intense faith in Jesus Christ, a devotion to God's work and a reverence for His world. These beliefs are reflected not only in what we teach, but also how we teach. Teachers strive to help each child develop their abilities through a well-balanced variety of age appropriate activities. They encourage social, physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth and development. Our curricula include thematic units in math, reading, writing, science and social studies. A monthly Bible verse is taught, children attend a Chapel each month, and prayer and devotions are a part of the daily routine.

In the two-year old program, parents participate in a workshop every six weeks. A guest speaker comes in to meet with and provide education to the families. While we currently do not have parent education workshops for upper classes, parent education is a natural part of the classroom experience. Our teachers are highly qualified and experienced professionals with a love for children and God. Parents turn to their teacher for advice and guidance. Our teachers are partners in prayer with families as well.

We are currently in the process of building a half day kindergarten program to begin in September 2017.

Looking to the future, we are working to design in opportunities to more deliberately use the relationships we have with the children's parents to bring them into the church

Youth Ministry

The Youth Ministry represents youth from 6th–12th grade.

MVPC has since its formation invested in our youth programs, including paid staff positions to lead the ministry area. The youth ministry has encompassed a variety of programs, all with the intent of providing opportunities for our youth to have a personal relationship with Jesus. During our church history, we have had only two youth directors: Steve Bodwell from 1986–2012 and Nick Longmire, our current youth director who has been on staff since 2001.

In 2015, we hired a consulting firm (Ministry Architects) to evaluate our youth program and recommend changes in direction. This 18-month process engaged youth, parents, staff and volunteers to review our current program and what we want the future program to look like. Based on the initial assessment, our youth ministry was described by students and parents as a “fun,” “crazy,” and “energetic” place, while others say it is a “transitioning”, “declining” ministry.

According to Ministry Architects, a healthy attendance, based on national averages, for youth “active in the life of the church” would be 10% of our worshipping congregation (roughly 50 based on our average weekly church attendance). Students “active in the life of the church” is defined by any student who has participated in a youth ministry event 5 different times, no names counted twice in one ministry year, September - May. This includes Sunday school, worship, 628 (middle school ministry), senior high youth group (9th-12th graders), or one of the other annual trips or special events.

During the 2013-14 school year, 88 youth were active in youth ministry and 121 in the 2014-15 school year. At the conclusion of the 2015-16 school year, we had 137 students who were active in youth ministry which is significantly better than the national average. The average weekly attendance on youth group nights is 60 (6th–12th grades) which has held steady for the past 5 years. Based on the numbers, our 628 program is a strong and connected group of kids. Our senior high numbers have fluctuated over the past several years but in the end still average out the same at the conclusion of each year. According to Len Kageler, author of *How to Expand Your Youth Ministry*, “growth and decline in youth ministry is closely linked to the ups and downs of Sunday morning adult worship attendance.”

At the start of the 2016–2017 school year, a number of recommendations from the Ministry Architects were implemented, such as, consistent communications to youth and parents, 12-month calendar, moving our youth group nights to the same night and establishing discipleship groups, in addition to the power groups.

The foundation of our youth ministry programs is driven by the following mission and values statements.

Mission Statement: We intentionally engage and disciple students in God’s Word.

Values:

CHRIST-CENTERED - We focus on Christ. (Colossians 1:17)

RELATIONAL - We invest in each other through authentic connections. (1 Thess. 2:8)

INTEGRITY - We model Christ in our actions and words. (John 13:15)

COMPASSIONATE - We live the love of Christ. (1 John 3:11)

ENCOURAGING - We build each other up. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Current Youth Programs:

Sunday School for 6th–8th graders on Sunday morning

Youth Groups:

- 628 for 6th–8th graders on Wednesday evening (every other week)
- Senior High for 9th–12th graders on Wednesday evening (every other week)

Power Groups: (small group discussion, adult volunteer lead)

- 628 for 6th–8th graders on Wednesday evening (every other week)
- Senior High for 9th–12th graders on Wednesday evening (every other week)

Mission Trips

- YouthWorks: 6th–7th graders during the summer for a week
- Vashon Island: 6th–8th graders - community service in the fall over a weekend
- Mexico mission: 9th–12th graders during spring break
- Cashmere: 9th–12th graders – community service in late spring for 3-4 days

Based on feedback from parents and students, the one area that they would like to see our youth staff focus on is bringing back Sunday School for 9th-12th graders, which is under review.

The Future:

Our youth staff consists of one full-time youth director and two part-time individuals. At the present time, instead of adding more programs, they are looking at ways to partner with the families; providing training and equipping them to spiritually nurture their youth at home.

Adult Education

We have a rich history of providing opportunities for adult education. From the church's earliest days, providing classes for our members and attenders has been an important aspect of our ministry to disciple and equip.

Over the years, a variety of approaches have been taken including traditional Sunday School hour, classes offered during the week, women's Bible study, men's Bible study, and seminars. Small groups have been a central part to all of this as they provide not only an opportunity to develop relationships and build community, but also an opportunity to study the Word and grow together.

More recently, we have relied on small groups, women's Bible study, and men's Bible study as primary education methods. There are currently 30 small groups that actively meet with average attendance of 14-16. A majority of our small groups are engaged in sermon-based studies where the sermon topic is discussed and applied through the use of study notes provided by the pastor.

The church staff and Session have struggled with the best approach given that traditional classes, seminars and the like are poorly attended when they are offered. Seminars have been tried on specific topics such as spiritual gifts, evangelism and family life with mixed results.

Responses to the recent church survey indicate a very strong desire that more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life be provided. Follow up questionnaires were used to obtain additional feedback on specific interests and preferred class times. The feedback received continues to reinforce that many want these educational opportunities on a variety of topics (e.g. parenting, evangelism, theology, deep Bible study, and many others) and responses related to schedule preference indicate a need to support a variety of schedule needs.

As we look forward, it is clear that we need to dig deeper and invest more into developing an Adult Christian education philosophy and approach that considers how to integrate this aspect of our growth into the overall ministry of the church and develops new, innovative methods for providing opportunities for all and continue to allow us to spur one another on.

Missions

From its beginning, MVPC has had a passion for missions and for reaching the lost with the good news of Jesus both in our local community and around the world.

The Mission Fund is used exclusively for funding local, national and international missionary ventures. This fund is not a part of the church's general budget but is a designated account where congregants designate their giving specifically to missions.

The Mission Council has the responsibility to prepare the budget for the Missions Fund, to make spending recommendations, and to track financial results. They manage these funds and determine who or what mission endeavors we will support and at what monetary level. They also oversee and communicate with the supported missionaries and communicate missions' efforts to the congregation on a regular basis. Historically, our missions fund has been approximately 10% of our general fund.

Additionally, the Missions Council encourages and plans mission trips for the congregation to experience a mission endeavor and see how God works in and through each one of us. A variety of mission trips have now become central to the ministry of the church, which includes annual youth mission trips as well as a variety of opportunities for adults to participate in specific events or trips both locally and internationally.

In recent years, at the Session's request, the Missions Council has developed more documented processes, procedures and guidelines for analyzing what and whom to support. For example, given our rich history of sending missionaries from within the membership in our church, there is a preference given to those individuals. Additional guidelines for support to foreign missions, USA missions, and local missions are also now available.

Going forward, we want to continue and enhance the opportunities available for direct involvement in local and global missions' activities. On-going support for existing opportunities will be provided. New opportunities for local events (e.g. work with Union Gospel Mission) should be pursued.

In partnership with the Deacon's Council, MVPC participates in supporting a local mission endeavor called Grace Road Church (formerly High Road Church). This ministry serves the homeless and poor through provision of community meals, service and church services. Our small groups are given an opportunity to also participate in these acts of service.

Although not directly tied to our Missions ministry, it should be noted that the Deacon's Council also manages a designated fund which provides benevolence and financial support to those in need in both our church and in the community. MVPC is one of only a few churches in the local community that have a benevolence ministry that extends beyond their congregation.

Outreach

We have chosen to specifically separate Outreach from Missions for purpose of this mission study. The focus of outreach is about each of us being called to reach out to our neighbors, coworkers, family and friends with the good news of Jesus Christ through words and deeds.

Our mission as a church has always been about restoring people into life through Jesus Christ. Consequently, we have encouraged, preached and taught the importance of living and sharing our faith with all those we come in contact with. This has been integral to all the ministries of the church and permeates adult, youth and children's ministries.

Beyond focusing on equipping, we have also developed opportunities for us to practice outreach. These traditionally have been event driven and, depending upon the event, have had varying degrees of participation. Events have included participation in community event (e.g. Maple Valley Days or sponsoring the community Easter egg hunt). More recently, we have an annual Serve Sunday where community service projects are planned and all done on a given Sunday, in place of our regular services. All of these different events have generated varying degrees of excitement and involvement. However, it is unclear whether they are achieving the end objective of equipping and restoring.

Going forward, we believe that Outreach needs to be a natural act for every believer and move beyond the view that is an "event". As a church, we need to equip, empower and encourage all in their daily walk to reach out to those that don't know Jesus. This includes enabling people to share their faith, to lead someone to Christ, to serve others, to invite their friends to events at the church or other "Christian" events and so on.

Enhancing our communications and providing opportunities to tell the story of how we are reaching out is an important reinforcement mechanism. Beyond the events or the missions' efforts, we need to provide more opportunities to let people know outreach is being done. This will encourage and spur others on. Storytelling is a powerful tool to communicate and could be integrated with the ministry philosophy and plan of the church to show that living out our lives includes education, worship, missions, outreach events and personal engagement. Thematic and regular communications of "outreach" could be structured into 4 key categories that would touch on this more holistically: 1) personal, 2) congregational, 3) community, and 4) global.

Appendix B: Church Goals

The intent of this section is to show that the goals the church has been working towards over the past several years have been consistent with the path forward described in this study. This reinforces that there is not a significant change in direction needed but a renewed focus and building on what is already being done.

Prior to 2016, the church goals consisted of primary and secondary goals as follows:

Primary Goals

1. Be a church that shares the gospel with lost people through building relationships
2. Create a culture of excellent Sunday worship and fellowship
3. Value all ages (Generation to Generation) to include achieving 33% of church boards under age 39 by 2016

Secondary Goals

- Teach the basics
- Build spiritual friendship with Christian community
- Actively practice spiritual disciplines
- Service to the least of these
- Imbed peacemaking into MVPC culture

For 2016-2017, consistent with where we are as a church, the following goals were adopted:

1. Shepherd a smooth transition
2. Reach people lost to Christ/encourage Gospel fluency
3. Continue the Gen2Gen focus throughout the transition

Appendix C: ECO Essential Tenets and Confessional Standards



ECO

A Covenant Order
of Evangelical
Presbyterians

Essential Tenets & Confessional Standards

Essential Tenets

Presbyterians have been of two minds about essential tenets. We recognize that just as there are some central and foundational truths of the gospel affirmed by Christians everywhere, so too there are particular understandings of the gospel that define the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. All Christians must affirm the central mysteries of the faith, and all those who are called to ordered ministries in a Presbyterian church must also affirm the essential tenets of the Reformed tradition. Recognizing the danger in reducing the truth of the gospel to propositions that demand assent, we also recognize that when the essentials become a matter primarily of individual discernment and local affirmation, they lose all power to unite us in common mission and ministry.

Essential tenets are tied to the teaching of the confessions as reliable expositions of Scripture. The essential tenets call out for explication, not as another confession, but as indispensable indicators of confessional convictions about what Scripture leads us to believe and do. Essential tenets do not replace the confessions, but rather witness to the confessions' common core. This document is thus intended not as a new confession but as a guide to the corporate exploration of and commitment to the great themes of Scripture and to the historic Reformed confessions that set forth those themes.

The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Each member of the church glorifies God by recognizing and naming His glory, which is the manifestation and revelation of His own nature. Each member of the church enjoys God by being so united with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit as to become a participant in that divine nature, transformed from one degree of glory to another and escorted by Christ into the loving communion of the Trinity. So we confess our faith not as a matter of dispassionate intellectual assent, but rather as an act by which we give God glory and announce our membership in the body of Christ. We trust that when God's glory is so lifted up and when His nature is thus made manifest in the life of the body, the church will be a light that draws people from every tribe and tongue and nation to be reconciled to God.

I. God's Word: The Authority for Our Confession

The clearest declaration of God's glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written. The Son eternally proceeds from the Father as His Word, the full expression of the Father's nature, and since in the incarnation the Word became flesh all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are offered to His disciples. The written Word grants us those treasures, proclaims the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and graciously teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. **We glorify God**

by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son. We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God's Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.

We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God's Word. The Spirit will never prompt our conscience to conclusions that are at odds with the Scriptures that He has inspired. The revelation of the incarnate Word does not minimize, qualify, or set aside the authority of the written Word. We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the *Book of Confessions* as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.

II. Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries

A. Trinity

The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. **With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who is both one essence and three persons.** God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth and all beauty, of all love and all life, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, nor are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.

God has no need of anyone or anything beyond Himself. Yet in grace this Triune God is the one Creator of all things. The ongoing act of creation is further manifested in God's gracious sovereignty and providence, maintaining the existence of the world and all living creatures for the sake of His own glory. He is the Holy One, the ground of all being, whose glory is so great that for us to see Him is to die. Yet He has made the creation to reflect His glory, and He has made human beings in His own image, with a unique desire to know Him and a

capacity for relationship with Him. Since our God is a consuming fire whom we in our sin cannot safely approach, He has approached us by entering into our humanity in Jesus Christ.

B. Incarnation

This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that **Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human**. As to His divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in every way but sin, of one substance with us, like us in having both a human soul and a human body. As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. As to His divinity, His glory fills heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross in our place.

We confess the mystery of His two natures, divine and human, in one person. We reject any understanding of the communication of attributes that must result in a blending of the two natures such that Jesus Christ is neither truly God nor truly human. We insist upon sufficient distinction between the two natures to preserve the truth of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, nor one who has merely been sent from God. Rather, in His coming we have seen God's glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God's very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. **The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.** This is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence.

This mystery of the incarnation is ongoing, for **the risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human**. He is bodily present at the right hand of the Father. When we are promised that one day we will see Him face to face, we acknowledge that it is the face of Jesus of Nazareth we will someday see. The one who, for us and for our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless when He ascended into heaven, but would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit as a comforter and advocate. **We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.** He comes to us as He came to the gathered disciples at Pentecost: to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to accompany us in mission.

III. Essentials of the Reformed Tradition

A. God's grace in Christ

God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good. **The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God's doing, but is rather a result of humanity's free, sinful rebellion against God's will.** God created human beings from the dust of the earth and His own breath, to be His images and representatives, conduits of God's grace to the creation. Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness. God also created human beings to speak His grace and truth to one another, to be helpers who are fit for one another, so that our social relationships would strengthen our ability to serve and obey Him. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to engage in relationships of tyranny and injustice with one another, in which power is used not to protect and serve but to demean. God further created human beings with the capacity for relationship with Him, with His law written on our hearts so that we had the ability to worship Him in love and obey Him by living holy lives. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to hate God and our neighbor, to worship idols of our own devising rather than the one true God.

As a result of sin, human life is poisoned by everlasting death. **No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God's design.** We are not merely wounded in our sin; we are dead, unable to save ourselves. Apart from God's initiative, salvation is not possible for us. Our only hope is God's grace. We discover in Scripture that this is a great hope, for our God is the One whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

This grace does not end when we turn to sin. Although we are each deserving of God's eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin. Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give. All humanity participates in the fall into sin. Those who are united through faith with Jesus Christ are fully forgiven from all our sin, so that there is indeed a new creation. We are declared justified, not because of any good that we have done, but only because of God's grace extended to us in Jesus Christ. **In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children.**

Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for He is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with Him that a believer is able to know God as Father. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth about the Triune God, fully and perfectly revealed, for only He *is* the Truth, only He has seen the Father, and only He can make the Father known. Only Jesus Christ is the new Life

that is offered, for He is the bread from heaven and the fountain of living water, the one by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together. The exclusivity of these claims establishes that God's love is not impersonal, but a particular and intimate love in which each individual child of God is called by name and known as precious; that God's love is not only acceptance, but a transforming and effective love in which His image within us is restored so that we are capable of holy living.

B. Election for salvation and service

The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. **Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.** Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

We are all sinners who fall short of God's glory, and we all deserve God's eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God's presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God's consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others.

We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. **Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God's gracious presence to those who are lost.** The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world. Christ sends us into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Christ has commanded us. We are now in service to God's plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God's kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

C. Covenant life in the church

We are elect in Christ to become members of the community of the new covenant. This covenant, which God Himself guarantees, unites us to God and to one another. Already in the creation, we discover that we are made to live in relationships to others, male and female, created together in God's image. **In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.** Our faith requires our active participation in that covenant community.

Jesus prays that His followers will all be one, and so we both pray and work for the union of the church throughout the world. Even where institutional unity does not seem possible, we are bound to other Christians as our brothers and sisters. In Christ the dividing wall of hostility created by nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and language differences is brought down. God created people so that the rich variety of His wisdom might be reflected in the rich variety of human beings, and the church must already now begin to reflect the eschatological reality of people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation bringing the treasures of their kingdoms into the new city of God.

Within the covenant community of the church, God's grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. First, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the word proclaimed may indeed become God's address to us. The Spirit's illuminating work is necessary both for the one who preaches and for those who listen. Second, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs that are linked to the things signified, sealing to us the promises of Jesus. In the Baptism of infants, we confess our confidence in God's gracious initiative, that a baby who cannot turn to God is nonetheless claimed as a member of the covenant community, a child of God, cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit; in the Baptism of adults, we confess our confidence that God's grace can make us new creations at any stage of our lives. In the Lord's Supper, we confess that as we eat the bread and share one cup the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ, so that His resurrection life may nourish, strengthen, and transform us. Third, the community of the Church practices discipline in order to help one another along the path to new life, speaking the truth in love to one another, bearing one another's burdens, and offering to one another the grace of Christ.

D. Faithful stewardship of all of life

The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king – reflected in the church's ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders. We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ's offices within the world beyond the church. Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news. Every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world. And every Christian is called to participate in Christ's priestly, mediatorial

work, sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God's blessing and offering intercession to God on behalf of the world. We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ's life.

Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God. We reject the claim that love of any sort is self-justifying; we affirm that all our affections and desires must be brought under God's authority. We reject the claim that human souls are unaffected by the fall and remain naturally inclined to God; we affirm that soul and body alike must be cleansed and purified in order to love God properly. We reject the claim that the life of the mind is independent from faith; we affirm that unless we believe we cannot properly understand either God or the world around us. Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the ongoing project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.

E. Living in obedience to the Word of God
Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer – both individually and together – should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world. **As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments.** We therefore hold one another accountable to:

1. worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;
2. worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments;
3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;
4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;
5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church;
6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being

from conception to natural death.

7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;
8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;
9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;
10. resist the pull of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God's holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God's will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.

Confessional Standards

The appropriate confessional standards for ECO are the creeds, confessions, and catechisms in the *Book of Confessions* – The Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith. This collection is theologically faithful, ecclesially appropriate, and organizationally suitable. The *Book of Confessions* contains the confessions that we have taken vows to receive. It also embodies the Reformed understanding of the way confessions function in the life of the church, an understanding that differs from two common approaches:

Doctrinal Progressives understand the church's confessional and theological tradition as an evolutionary development of doctrine in which the church's expression of the gospel becomes richer in each succeeding age. In this view, contemporary theology and new confessions of faith are more developed, better expressed, fuller apprehensions of truth than the faith of previous centuries. *Our way is the way.*

Doctrinal Restorationists understand the church's theological and confessional tradition as a series of missteps leading to imperfect understanding and inadequate articulation of the gospel. In this view, a particular moment in the church's confessional and theological tradition, such as the sixteenth century Augsburg Confession or the seventeenth century Westminster standards, is the pure faith of a theological golden age. *Their way is the way.*

The Reformed understanding of the church's confessional and theological tradition sees contemporary Christians as participants in an enduring theological and doctrinal conversation that shapes the patterns of the church's faith and life. Communities of believers from every time and place engage in a continuous discussion about the shape of Christian faith and life, an exchange that is maintained through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Today's church brings its insights into an ongoing dialogue with those who have lived and died the Faith before us. Voices from throughout the church's life contribute to the interchange - ancient voices that articulate the enduring rule of faith, sixteenth and seventeenth century voices that shape the Reformed tradition, and twentieth century voices that proclaim the church's faith in challenging contexts. The confessions in the *Book of Confessions* were not arbitrarily included, but were selected to give faithful voice to the whole communion of saints.

The *Book of Confessions* is an appropriate expression of the Reformed commitment to honor our fathers and mothers in the Faith. It begins with two foundational creeds, shared throughout the whole Church. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is the decisive dogmatic articulation of Trinitarian faith. It establishes the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of Christian theology. The Apostles' Creed is the Baptismal creed that expresses the shared belief of the faithful as persons are incorporated into the body of Christ. Two Reformation confessions, Scots and Second Helvetic, and one Reformation catechism, Heidelberg, give voice to the dawning of the Reformed tradition. The seventeenth century Westminster standards powerfully express God's sovereignty over all of life. The Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith articulate the church's fidelity to the gospel in the midst of uncongenial and sometimes hazardous cultures. These confessions, from widely different contexts, are complementary. They do not sing in unison, but in a rich harmony that glorifies God and deepens our enjoyment of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Are these the only voices that could be included in the church's theological conversation? No, but they are faithful witnesses to the gospel and appropriate expressions of the Reformed perspective on Christian faith and life. Participating in their colloquy frees us from the narrow prison cell of our own time and place by listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters who struggled to be faithful in diverse circumstances. Through their confessions of faith we are privileged to hear their wisdom in the midst of our own struggle to be faithful. We overhear conversations among our forebears that expand and enrich our apprehension of the gospel. Sometimes we simply listen in on their discussion, at other times we pay particular attention to one of their voices, and many times we find ourselves participating actively in lively instruction.

The questions of our parents in the faith may not be identical to ours, but their different approaches enable us to understand our own questions better. Their answers may not be identical to ours, yet their answers startle us into new apprehensions of the truth. We may sometimes be puzzled by their particular questions or answers, but even that perplexity serves to clarify our own thinking and the shape of our faithfulness. Throughout the conversation we are aware that all councils may err, yet because we are not doctrinal progressives we acknowledge the confessions have a particular authority over us: we are answerable to them before they are answerable to us.

The confessions call the church to account. Because we are not traditionalists, we can be utterly honest about the church's past failings - crusades and inquisitions, easy acceptance of Christendom and easy dismissal of the leadership of women, neglect of evangelistic mission and excess of missionary zeal. Because we are not idealists we can be utterly honest about the church's current failings – marginalization of the Sacraments, indifference to theological labor, easy acceptance of cultural morality, neglect of evangelism, and inadequate mission. If we listen to our forebears in the Faith we will hear their hard questions addressed to us. Perhaps then we can be utterly honest about our own accommodations to the culture, our indifference to the proclamation of the gospel, and our abandonment of shared conviction and committed community in easy acquiescence to the individualism and localism of our time.

The confessions are not final authorities; Scripture is the authority that measures all doctrinal, confessional, and theological expression. The Reformed tradition has always understood that while confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. Being questioned by the confessions is not an exercise in servitude, but liberation from the tyranny of the present that enables us to live freely and faithfully within God's will.

As subordinate standards, the confessions are not free-standing authorities. They are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is known through Scripture, the word of God. Subordination to the Lord and to Scripture's witness serves to locate confessional authority, however, not diminish it. The confessions provide reliable guidance to our reading and reception of Scripture, protecting us from self-absorbed interpretation, and opening us to Christ's way, Christ's truth, and Christ's life.

The *Book of Confessions* itself is not problematic. The problem with the *Book of Confessions* is the church's – the *whole* church's – neglect and misuse of its theological treasure. Too often, we have treated the confessions of the church as museum pieces, historical artifacts of what people used to believe long ago and far away. Too many of us have imagined that our own thoughts are sufficient for faithful proclamation of the gospel. We have been guilty of what C.S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited." We have also been guilty of reducing the confessions to theological and moral law books, selecting disembodied affirmations as elements in a logical proof. Our task is to put misuse of the confessions behind us, engaging in bold, faithful appropriations of the doctrinal and theological wisdom of the *Book of Confessions*, allowing them to enrich our faith and faithfulness.

The church's confessions are not marginal details in the church's life. The ordination vows made by most deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders commit us to receive and

adopt their essential tenets, and to be instructed, led, and guided by them. Our task is to be faithful to our vows, reading and studying the confessions, learning from them, teaching them, and living out their wisdom. Shared confession of faith shapes any serious community of faith, and the community's ordered ministries bear a particular obligation to order their confession around the church's creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Because confessional seriousness includes mutual responsibility and accountability, the church must be prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even discipline one ordained who rejects the faith expressed in the confessions.

ECO cannot imagine that it should or could disavow the Reformed confessional heritage. Whatever the church's confessional and theological failings may be, they are the failings of all of us. The task now is to embody faithful ways of being Presbyterian. The most appropriate footing for a new venture is the faithful doctrinal and theological foundation provided by the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the *Book of Confessions*.

Appendix: A Proposal for Ongoing Theological Conversations

Truth leads to duty, faith to practice. A church that wants to be a servant found faithful to its commission must be a steward of the Faith entrusted to its care. To be an effective witness to the gospel we must know the gospel. An apostolic church must not only live a life like that of the apostles, it must teach what the apostles taught.

Some generations of believers have tried to live faithfully without a shared Faith; all have failed. Our generation may be particularly tempted to try. Forging theological consensus is hard work in any generation, but ours seems to have concluded that it is impossible work. Private and partisan interpretations are now considered inflexible and intractable. We have forgotten the humble recognition that ambiguities exist and must be respected, and now dwell in a land where ambiguities are preferred and certainties are suspect. We are coached to celebrate diversity of theological conviction, rather than seeing this as a sign of important work yet to be done.

Theological debates in the church have not always been filled with grace, or even understanding, and many have been unnecessarily divisive. The formative ecclesial debates of earlier history are viewed as arcane. Doctrinal work is unfavorably compared to relationship building as if the two were mutually exclusive. Teaching elders attempt to teach how to live lives faithful to the truth without doing the required work of laying foundations of the truth in the hearts and minds of the congregation. Ruling elders are equipped to be managers of church life rather than able to teach the Faith.

Although these realities are manifest somewhat differently in churches and among leaders who identify themselves as progressive or evangelical, neglect of the substance of the Faith is wide and deep. As a result, all other matters suffer – the strength of disciples, the health of congregations, the effectiveness of councils. Disciplined attention to the Word gives gifts to the Church that it cannot receive elsewhere or by any other means.

Renewal of theological work at the core of our common life is not only an acknowledged need but, in the providence of God, may be a blessed provision. Throughout history, the reformation of the Church has followed theological work – work that grew from recommitment to the Faith. In turn, the reformation of the Church has fostered a recommitment to theological work.

Now is the time to reengage the theological work, for this moment, and for the next generations.

Renewed commitment to sustained conversation is needed. At its best, sustained conversation is characterized by prayerful and rigorous study of the Scripture with attention to clarifying the Reformed theological lens through which we read the Scriptures, by grateful listening to the voice of the church around the world and through the ages, and application of the theological wisdom to every part of life before God and for the world.

Toward these ends, we now commit ourselves to the formation of theological friendships in communities that include all teaching and ruling elders – gatherings of elders which covenant to study and learn together, providing mutual encouragement and accountability for the sake of sustaining and advancing the theological and missional work of the church.

Necessary to this commitment are:

1. Identifying the best practices of current theological projects and relationships within the Church that will help guide the shape of these theological friendships.
2. Building the structures that connect elders with each other locally, regionally, and nationally in environments that establish and sustain theological friendships.

These theological friendships should strive to:

- transform life and ministry,
- be sustained over the years,
- include a breadth of participants
 - gender, age, ethnic and global communities
 - other Reformed churches
 - other orthodox and evangelical theological traditions,
- engage other theological friendships, thus forming broadening communities, worship and witness together.

An invitation is now offered in an excellent resource, “A Pastoral Rule,” developed by the Re-forming Ministry Program of the PC(USA)’s Office of Theology and Worship. This resource invites us to commit to personal disciplines, conduct in ministry that is holy, and mutual encouragement and accountability. It is offered to the whole church as a tool for the formation of theological friendships that sustain us and are sustained over time. We propose that ECO congregations accept that invitation to adapt and then adopt “The Pastoral Rule.”

These three theological projects are offered for broad immediate consideration:

- Recommitment to a particular confessional heritage as an immediate core constituent of our renewed common life, however that common life is re-formed.
- Identification and affirmation of the essential tenets of the Reformed Faith.
- Commitment to re-engaging the theological enterprise broadly and deeply.

Further advance on these three projects will be made as we put our theology on the table for public discussion, deliberation, and decision; share best practices; form theological-missional relationships; build the structures; and covenant together.

Questions for immediate consideration:

Do we consider the proposal to reaffirm the *Book of Confessions* as we work to build and test theological consensus among us, to be the right judgment to make at this time? Is this an adequate and helpful articulation of the essentials of the Faith as expressed in Reformed ways, and will we sincerely adopt it? What theological friendships will we form, what practices will we commit to, and what structures will we build for mutual encouragement and accountability?

The theological project is required of the Church, and now is being re-engaged within the Church. The invitation is now offered. How will you respond?

ADDENDUM

Suggested questions for the covenanting gatherings of theological friends:

What has the Spirit gathered the Church to be? What has the Spirit sent the Church to do?
Always and everywhere; here and now.

What is the authority of Scripture in the actual life of the church? How will we teach and obey the Scripture?

What does it mean to be saved? What is the gospel we are to preach? What is the shape of our corporate and individual lives that are formed by that gospel?

Elders, ruling as well as teaching, are to be equipped to teach. Teach what, to whom, how? Ruling elders are to measure out the patterns of faithfulness for the congregation. What are those patterns, and how are they measured?

In a time of both ecclesial division and realignment, how can schism among parts of the church be diminished and how can reconnection with the whole church be increased?

The Church has a Faith without which she cannot live faithfully. What is that Faith? What is faithful living?



The mission of ECO
is to build *flourishing churches*
that make *disciples of Jesus Christ*.

OUR VALUES

Jesus-shaped Identity:

We believe Jesus Christ must be at the center of our lives and making disciples of Jesus at the core of our ministry.

Biblical Integrity:

We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, which teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. The prominence of God's Word over our lives shapes our priorities, and the unrivaled authority of the Bible directs our actions to be in concert with Christ's very best for our lives.

Thoughtful Theology:

We believe in theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind, and celebrate this as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.

Accountable Community:

We believe guidance is a corporate spiritual experience. We want to connect leaders to one another in healthy relationships of accountability, synergy, and care.

Egalitarian Ministry:

We believe in unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, and every ethnic group.

Missional Centrality:

We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission – including evangelism, spiritual formation, compassion, and redemptive justice – in our communities and around the world.

Center-focused Spirituality:

We believe in calling people to the core of what it means to be followers of Jesus – what “mere Christianity” is and does – and not fixate on the boundaries.

Leadership Velocity:

We believe identifying and developing gospel-centered leaders is critical for the church, and a great leadership culture is risk-taking, innovative, and organic.

Kingdom Vitality:

We believe congregations should vigorously reproduce new missional communities to expand the Kingdom of God.