



Mission Study Report

June 30, 2010

A committee of the congregation¹, chaired by Danny Moates, undertook the creation of a Mission Study survey instrument with resources supplied by and the guidance of Executive Presbyter Dana Knapp and Interim Pastor Robert Salmon. The final version of the survey was administered to the congregation during the worship service May 16, 2010, and was made available to congregational members again after worship May 23rd. The survey was also taken to members no longer able to attend worship services and to other identified church groups such as College Lunch participants.

The Mission Study Report reflects the opinions of 109 individuals (38% of the congregation) who completed surveys as of June 7, 2010. An additional 12 surveys arrived after the results were compiled. Thus, the total response rate for the Mission Study Survey was 121 individuals, representing 43% of the congregation (284).

Also of assistance was a 2009 church survey and two reports provided by Dana Knapp which were prepared by the Presbytery of Scioto Valley:

- *PerceptGroup* report of features of the area within a five-mile radius of the church.
- Ten-year Trends for Athens First Presbyterian Church

The following report focuses on four topics: Who We Are; What We Do; Vision and Goals -- Obstacles; and Leadership Qualities in a New Minister.

Who We Are

Athens First Presbyterian Church (AFPC) has occupied a site in the center of Athens, Ohio, since the organization of the First Presbyterian Society of Athens in 1809 by Ohio University's first president, Jacob Lindley. The present building was completed in 1903 and renovated in 1985.

AFPC is highly influenced by its history and its congregation expresses a strong Presbyterian identity. Similarly, most agree that the congregation reflects a local identity that represents the Athens community well. The congregation approaches individual salvation as an evolving process, emphasizing education and gradual growth of faith. Similarly, the AFPC adopts an educational rather than activist stance regarding social issues and empowers individual members to determine their beliefs in this regard.

AFPC is designated a "More Light" Presbyterian congregation.²

¹ Joseph Bianco, Lillian Dinos, Jean Drevenstedt, Susan Loughridge, Danny Moates, Harold Robison, and Kirsten Traschsel,

² Following the risen Christ, and seeking to make the Church a true community of hospitality, the mission of More Light Presbyterians is to work for the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA). <<http://www.mlp.org/index.php?topic=aboutmlp>>

Members of the congregation are very active and serve as officers/board members and volunteers in organizations which help people.

Almost half of the survey participants have attended worship at AFPC for more than 20 years, about one-quarter for 6-20 years, and another quarter for 5 or fewer years. Nearly two-thirds of the congregation is over the age of 50. The church is experiencing an increase of younger professionals/families and young children and is striving to adapt and develop programs to meet the needs of this growing population. There are also a few retired persons moving to Athens for the benefits the university offers and/or to be near their children.

Many in the congregation are or were involved with education (university or public school) and Ohio University is the major employer in the area. Medicine, business and homemaking are also well represented. Attendance and church involvement are affected by health and energy of the elderly, and time is an issue for young professionals. A number of leadership roles are held by persons in their seventies and will need to be filled by younger persons in the near future.

This congregation prefers traditional hymns and sermons to more contemporary styles of music and preaching. Attendees appreciate incorporation of the arts (drama, media, music) into the worship service. The congregation prefers strong pastoral leadership with the inclusion of lay leaders. Also appreciated are children's moments, special services (Christmas Eve, Maundy Thursday, Easter) and after church organ recitals. The church is blessed with a fine organ, intergenerational handbell choir, chancel choir, music staff and soloists from the university and town.

The recent Mission Study finds a large majority considers the congregation as welcoming and inclusive, but a significant minority of respondents views the congregation as a collection of loosely knit groups.

What We Do

Through the Grace of God, AFPC strives to continue its Bicentennial legacy of service to others, whether within the congregation, the surrounding Athens community, or the larger world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The Church is the Church only when it serves others".

We care for all ages who attend our church. AFPC is blessed in having a dedicated Board of Deacons who regularly make visits to the home bound, often taking flowers or fruit. Dinners for Eight, Faith lunches, Lenten suppers, and celebrations marking milestones in the lives of our members, such as the altar rose signifying a birth, have brought us closer together. Members use their talents in chancel choir, intergenerational bell choir, and summer musicals produced and directed at the church. Banners sewn by our Liturgical Arts group, knitted prayer shawls and knitted baby caps for two local hospitals have made an evangelical impact on non-members outside the church as well. A monthly newsletter keeps us informed of both church activities and shared joys and concerns among the congregation.

Christian education at AFPC takes place in a variety of settings. The facilities for nursery, preschool and early grades have been updated. The children's classes held on Sunday mornings include

special music (singing with guitar and use of rhythm instruments). Adults have a study class on Sunday morning, Bible study at Thursday noon, a Wednesday dinner/discussion group (Presbyterians Unplugged) for young families, and study time within the Presbyterian Women meetings. The Genesis Theater project, directed by our choir director, has brought youth and young adults into the church to produce summer musical theater (*Children of Eden*, *Godspell*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Joseph and the Amazing Multicolored Dream Coat*, *Little Women*, and others.)

Within the community, service to others has taken various forms.

- During our 2009 Bicentennial celebration, generous grants were given to My Sister's Place and the Amesville-New England Parish to make much needed repairs. AFPC is privileged to extend both monetary support and, to some extent, hands-on involvement to nine local non-profits, including United Campus Ministry, the local food pantry, and Habitat for Humanity. Additional money remaining in the Bicentennial Fund was also distributed to these non-profits.
- Financial support goes to a community-based program, called "Hope and Possibilities," which provides emergency assistance to needy local individuals.
- A large bequest from a late parishioner provides the pastor with discretionary funds to distribute for local emergency needs.
- AFPC Presbyterian Women conducts a yearly children's Christmas stocking project within the congregation for the Salvation Army.
- AFPC conducts an annual local college scholarship competition funded by a gift from James and Martha Bratton .
- Local and national environmental concerns are being addressed through a recently formed Earth Justice committee of the church which is associated with other Athens congregations' groups. AFPC is a covenant congregation with *Ohio Interfaith Power and Light*.³
- AFPC financially supports the yearly Southeast Ohio Peace Prize for school grades 6-12, offered by the Appalachian Peace and Justice Network.
- Inasmuch as the church is located in the heart of downtown Athens, we are grateful that the building can provide space for community undertakings, such as: Alcoholics Anonymous; Brownies; a congregationally sponsored weekly free lunch for college students, regardless of faith; meetings of "the Special Group", composed of developmentally challenged persons; and periodic free-of-charge organ concerts.

Beyond the local community, AFPC is involved in several activities. We partner with a sister church, the Taworntham Church, in Changrai, Thailand. Each year a member of our congregation organizes Athens' participation in the Church World Service (CWS) Crop Walk. Our church helps support a mission co-worker involved in sustainable agriculture in Haiti, and the church contributes to PCUSA

³ Ohio Interfaith Power and Light is an affiliate of [The Regeneration Project's](http://www.ohipl.org/) national Interfaith Power and Light campaign. **Our mission** is to empower a religious response to climate change and to promote energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. We focus on tangible results in religious communities - putting our faith into action. <<http://www.ohipl.org/>>

special offerings and to the Annual Blanket Fund for CWS. Members of the Outreach committee have a special interest in the well-being of Montaña de Luz, a home for HIV/AIDS children in Honduras.

Vision, Goals -- Obstacles

The Mission Study results indicated a strong agreement among the congregation that the AFPC's vision for the church includes: (1) current aspects of the church that nurture faith; (2) strategies to address current practical challenges faced by the church; and (3) goals and wishes for the church's future.

The survey asked the congregation, "What are we already doing that nurtures faith?" The vast majority of responses identified "Sunday worship services" as the strongest contributor to nurturing the congregation's faith. The "music program" and "Bible study" were tied as the second most identified qualities. The next two items were "small group activities" and "fellowship." Finally, a significant minority of the congregation identified the "children's sermon" as an aspect of the church that currently nurtures faith.

Participants were also asked to identify the practical challenges currently facing the congregation. Four inter-related responses emerged, with "an aging congregation" topping the list. The next two challenges, both equally represented, were related to the first: "need for new members" and "need for more youth." The third and fourth most frequently identified challenges were "bridging generations" and "keeping up with changing times," respectively. Consideration should be given to augment staffing to implement programs.

Finally, the survey asked the congregation to identify the best thing that could happen at the AFPC. Four main responses emerged. Related to the practical challenge question, the single most important change would be an increase in church membership. The congregation identified increased programming (including Christian Education) as the second best thing that could happen at the church. A significant minority of participants requested more mission activities, and the fourth most-identified response was "an energetic/effective pastor."

Leadership Qualities for New Pastor

The survey asked several open-ended questions, including two about the qualities of a prospective pastor. These questions were scored in categories that seemed to pull together many individual comments that had related themes. In rank order, the qualities were that the pastor:

1. be "personable/loving/caring"
2. be "energetic/ active/engaged/dynamic" and "give relevant sermons"
3. "provide pastoral care,"
4. "adapt to modern times" and be "involved with community."
5. "Bible-focused."

These categories convey a substantial majority of the comments that were offered.

The survey also offered readers a set of ten pastoral skills, with room to add others, and asked readers to select the five they felt to be most important in a pastor. Readers were then asked to rank order those five, with the most important one being ranked number one. The study committee summed those rankings to produce the following rank ordering of desired skills, with number 1 being the most important in a prospective pastor.

1. Preaching
2. Administrative Skills
3. Home visitations
4. Youth Ministry
5. Community Involvement
6. Ecumenicism
7. Campus Ministry

In addition to the survey information, the Mission Study Committee concluded that it is very desirable that a new pastor be a decisive leader who can work collaboratively with the church staff and its Session and Deacons and can encourage lay leadership. For strengthening new members, it suggests an informed and supportive orientation of new members so that they feel they are contributing their talents to the life of the church. The committee also suggests enriching the confirmation process for young people so that they feel that church membership is important.

Appendix 1: Mission Study Survey Results

Mission Study Survey Results¹

Below are the preliminary results for the 108 Mission Study surveys that we have collected as of June 7, 2010. Surveys that have come in after that time are not reflected below.

Except for question 6B, the results reflected below are *percentages* of responses for each item, rather than the total *number* of responses. The committee calculated percentages because they're easier to interpret and translate into a written report.

For Sections 1 and 3, the percentages listed for each item should add up to approximately 100%. Note that in some cases, percentages of individual responses may slightly exceed 100% because of rounding them into whole numbers (i.e., 36.7% became 38%). In Section II, respondents endorsed more than one answer per item, so responses to these questions will exceed 100%.

Section I

1. How long have you been attending worship services at AFPC?

- | | |
|---|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Over 20 years | 47% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 years | 15% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than a year | 13% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 years | 9% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years | 8% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 years | 8% |

2. How often do you attend worship at AFPC?

- | | |
|---|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Usually every week | 78% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 or 3 times a month | 16% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Once a month | 2% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than once a month | 2% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christmas and Easter | 1% |

3. Are you a member of AFPC?

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | 80% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No | 10% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No, but I attend services | 10% |

¹ The survey form was prepared and formatted by Kirsten Trachsel. The survey analysis was by Joseph Bianco.

4. Your gender

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female | 57% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | 43% |

5. Your age

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 76-85 | 23% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 66-75 | 23% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 51-65 | 17% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 21-35 | 15% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 36-50 | 09% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Over 85 | 08% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 20 | 04% |

6. Marital Status

- | | |
|---|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Married | 63% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single | 19% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed | 11% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced | 04% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Committed relationship | 03% |

Section II**1. I personally prefer:**

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional hymns | 92% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New hymns | 37% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Praise choruses | 13% |

2. I personally prefer:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional sermons | 80% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interactive sermons | 23% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drama, media, music | 25% |

3. I personally prefer:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primarily pastoral leadership | 53% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Equal mix of pastor/lay | 48% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary lay leadership | 02% |

4. I personally prefer:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family nights with intergenerational activities | 59% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family nights with separate age-group activities | 21% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Separate activities for different age groups | 26% |

5. I personally prefer:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Traditional Sunday morning Sunday School | 38% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mid-week education program | 06% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mix of Sunday morning/mid-week programs | 50% |

6. For Christian Education, I personally prefer:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Traditional classroom settings | 44% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Small-group activities | 45% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Service groups with some study built in | 37% |

7. I personally prefer:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Hands-on mission projects | 52% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Giving to PCUSA mission projects | 34% |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Giving to local mission projects | 65% |

Section III**1. It is very important to me that our new minister be a great preacher.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
40%	54%	6%	0%	0%

2. It is very important to me that our new minister be a caring pastor.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
76%	24%	0%	0%	0%

3. It is very important to me that our new minister have a vision for our church and communicate it.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
51%	44%	5%	0%	0%

4. It is very important to me that our new minister be a strong administrative leader.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
32%	52%	16%	0%	0%

5. It is very important to me that our new minister have a passion for Christian Education and youth.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
55%	40%	5%	0%	0%

6. It is very important to me that our new minister have a passion for mission.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29%	52%	18%	0%	1%

7. It is very important that our new minister mobilize our lay leaders.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
32%	45%	21%	1%	0%

8. It is very important that our new minister is technologically savvy.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14%	31%	47%	6%	1%

9. It is very important that our new minister is highly inclusive.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
50%	38%	11%	0%	0%

10. It is very important that our new minister is Bible-based.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
31%	40%	22%	4%	2%

11. It is very important that our new minister is ecologically-minded.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15%	38%	40%	4%	1%

Section IV**1. I feel welcome at AFPC.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
72%	27%	2%

2. I think our church is more influenced by history and tradition.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
24%	63%	14%

3. I think members are similar in values and lifestyles to people in the Athens community.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
19%	61%	16%

4. I think our church is very involved with the Athens community.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
25%	43%	22%

5. I think our church is primarily oriented to serving our members.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
8%	68%	24%

I do not feel welcome at AFPC.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
1%	0%	0%

I think our church is more influenced by contemporary ideas and trends.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
3%	13%	2%

I think members are different in values and lifestyles to people in the Athens community.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
3%	10%	5%

I think our church is not at all involved with the Athens community.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
0%	4%	5%

I think our church is primarily oriented to serving others beyond our membership.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
1%	18%	10%

6. **I think our congregation feels like one big family.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
16%	54%	18%

- I think our congregation feels like a loosely knit association of individuals and groups.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
8%	23%	14%

7. **I think the church's approach to social issues is basically educational, leaving any action to individual conscience.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
16%	66%	18%

- I think the church's approach to social issues is decidedly "activist." We have a proven history of taking a stand on social issues as a congregation.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
8%	11%	9%

8. **I think the congregation's approach to individual salvation emphasizes education, nurture, and gradual growth in the faith.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
34%	57%	9%

- I think the congregation's approach to individual salvation stresses conversion and a born-again experience.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
4%	6%	4%

9. **I think our congregation gives strong expression to its denominational identity and heritage.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
27%	54%	20%

- I think it would be difficult for a visitor to know to which denomination the congregation belongs.**

Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree
0%	12%	9%

Section V

Note: Answers are ranked in order of descending frequency (i.e., #1 is the most endorsed response)

1. Please list or describe activities and qualities of previous pastors that were appreciated.

- #1: "Personable/loving/caring"
- #2: "Energetic/active/engaged/dynamic" - *tied with* - "Gives relevant sermons"
- #3: "Provides pastoral care"
- #4: "Adapts to modern times: - *tied with* - "Involved with community"
- #5: "Bible-focused"

2. Please list or describe qualities of previous pastors that you did not like. (This can be any pastor in any church that you have experienced.)

- #1: "Impersonal/unenthusiastic/disengaged"
- #2: "Gives irrelevant/confusing/boring/complex sermons"
- #3: "Ineffectual/indecisive leadership"
- #4: "Autocratic/authoritarian/rigid leadership"

3. What are the practical challenges facing our congregation?

- #1: "Aging congregation"
- #2: "Need for new members/growth" - *tied with* - "Need for more youth"
- #3: "Bridging generations"
- #4: "Keeping up with changing times"

4. The best thing that could happen to/at our church is...

- #1: "Increase in membership"
- #2: "More programs/activities" - *tied with* - "More Christian Education"
- #3: "More mission activities"
- #4: "An energetic/effective pastor"

5. What are we already doing that nurtures faith?

- #1: "Sunday worship services"
- #2: "Music program" - *tied with* - "Bible study"
- #3: "Small groups"
- #4: "Fellowship/welcoming"
- #5: "Children's service"

6. Read the following list of pastoral skills and circle the FIVE that are most important to you.

Preaching	Home Visitation
Administrative Skills	Community Involvement
Presbytery Involvement	PCUSA Involvement
Youth/Children's Ministry	Evangelism
Campus Ministry	Ecumenicism
Other_____	

b) Please rank the items you circled above. (1=most important. 5=least important)

1. Preaching
2. Administrative Skills
3. Home visitations
4. Youth ministry
5. Community Involvement
6. Ecumenicism
7. Campus Ministry

Appendix 2: Ten-year Trends for Athens First Presbyterian Church

The Scioto Valley Presbytery has recorded ten-year trends for our church for several kinds of church activities. These trends cover the period 1998-2008 and are summarized below.

1. Total membership for that period declined from just over 475 to just under 350. By May, 2010, the number stood at 284. Though we saw gains in every year, losses exceeded the gains, parallel to the experience of the PC (USA) nationally. In recent years, the majority of our losses have been a result of pruning inactive members from the congregation's rolls.
2. Average worship attendance has been as high as 128 in the middle of this ten-year period but has now dropped to about 100. In contrast, average worship attendance in the PC (USA) has remained relatively stable across this period.
3. Enrollment in our Christian Education programs was quite high during 1998-2002. There seems to be an inconsistency in the reporting of our Christian Education enrollment data with enrollment data exceeding average worship attendance. The numbers show a decline in the years 2003-2008. The enrollment figures for 2003-2008 are consistent with the worship attendance figures for the same period. Enrollment decline is reversing in recent years.
4. Total contributions to the church have risen gradually across the ten-year period, starting from a low of about \$180,000 and rising to about \$220,000 toward the end. The average for the ten-year period, about \$215,000, was below the average of \$240,000 for PC(USA) congregations. These figures stand in contrast to the decline in membership and decline in attendance at AFPC worship services.
5. Contributions per person are divided into two separate statistics: contributions per member and contributions per worship attendee. The latter represents the more active members of the congregation. Contributions per member have shown a gradual increase during 1998-2008, starting at about \$400 per member and closing at about \$600 per member. This increase partly reflects the trimming of inactive members from the membership rolls in recent years. Contributions per attendee start at about \$1400 and gradually rise to about \$2100 over the ten-year period. Those who attend worship regularly are more generous givers in this congregation.

Appendix 3: The Surrounding Area

First Presbyterian Church is located in the center of city of Athens, Ohio, in Appalachian southeastern Ohio. The Presbytery of Scioto Valley has prepared a *PerceptGroup* report of features of the area within a five-mile radius of the church.

The most significant feature is the presence of Ohio University, a 20,000-student campus that abuts the city center and contributes about half the population of the city. It gives Athens its typical college town atmosphere. It is the largest employer in the city and its oldest (1804) institution. It influences most aspects of the city, including AFPC.

The *PerceptGroup* report shows the population of the area to be a stable group of about 32,000, highly dispersed within this five-mile radius. The level of diversity in the area is somewhat high, reflecting especially the variety of lifestyles found on campus and to a lesser extent the racial/ethnic diversity found on campus. Still, racial diversity is not high; 88% of the population are Anglo. The age distribution in the area is not representative of the U.S. in general. The largest group, ages 9-28, contains 55% of the area population, in contrast to 27% for the U.S. Family structures in the area are not traditional, with 57% of families being single (never married) individuals, compared to 27% in the U.S. The population is highly educated: 46% have a college degree vs. 24% for the U.S.

Community issues among the people in the area reflect the age distribution. Household concerns include achieving educational objectives, finding a life direction, employment opportunities, having a satisfying job/career, child care, and achieving a fulfilling marriage. Though these issues are compatible with the student age range, there is also another source. The major stressor in the area is the 32% of households that are below the poverty line of \$15,000/year.

The last category the *PerceptGroup* discusses is religious attitudes in this area. Like the rest of the U.S., about two thirds of households are strongly or somewhat involved in religious activities. About three quarters of them prefer historic Christian groups, and they lean more toward traditional church styles than contemporary. Church programs that are more preferred in this area include sports and camping programs, marriage enrichment opportunities, divorce recovery programs and twelve-step programs, similarly to the rest of the U.S. The overall religious giving potential for this area is extremely low. The average annual household income is about \$45,000 compared to the average of about \$70,000 for the U.S.

These are features of the people and their preferences in the area within a five-mile radius of the church. Members of AFPC differ in a number of ways. For a portrayal of the members of AFPC, please see the Mission Study report. Also note that the area within a five mile radius of the church differs substantially from the whole of Athens County because of the presence of the university.