

In April 2016 Christ Congregational Church (CCC) undertook an organizational wide assessment conducted by the Center for Progressive Renewal. Dr. William (Bill) McKinney engaged over 100 members in interviews and focus groups, gathering information on CCC past history, current perceptions and future aspirations. Here are some of the highlights of this report.

CCC in Context of Silver Spring MD

As participation in mainline religious organizations continues to decline, and while they are fortunate to live in a vibrant, growing, diverse, progressive and affluent area – attracting new members to CCC is going to require some self-analysis and change. CCC needs to look at who they really are, what they are capable of doing today, and what they want to become tomorrow.

The CPR report pointed out some interesting demographics about our neighborhood:

- It has been growing while their membership has been declining.
- It will continue to grow by 7% between now and 2020.
- Household incomes average \$100,000
- Home values range between \$350,000-750,000
- It is diverse on all axes (race, age, household make-up)
- 20,000 people (7,800 families) are not affiliated with any local church even though they are open to participating in one.

These are their future members – a mix of individuals and families in multiple age groups. CCC must view their continued investment in programming strategically to attract new members who share their progressive views, want to be involved, but do not want to adhere to a specific doctrine along the way.

CCC's Uniqueness within the community

CCC's commitment to being a progressive voice on social justice issues has been the greatest factor attracting people to their doors, followed by their connection to the United Church of Christ.

Three covenantal pillars define CCC and set them apart from the religious, community service and social justice organizations in their midst.

1. We are committed to embracing all people as an Open and Affirming community.
2. We empower each other to put words into action as a Just Peace community.
3. We recognize and are actively working to heal the wounds of discrimination in our midst as an Anti-Racist community.

Their worship, music and youth programming is another significant draw.

- Their Rainbow Banner and Black Lives Matter statements provide a welcoming message for newcomers looking for a safe place to experience community and The Spirit.
- OWL, Mission Trips, and Christian Education programming provide a safe place for their youth to develop healthy relationships outside the intensity of peer pressures in their every day school environment.

CCC's Challenges

Among current members, significant frustration exists with regard to how to govern themselves. The weight of board and committee duties is not clearly aligned with what they are doing to live out their three covenants or drive results related to their programming. The best representation of a structure

that aligns with what they value is a graphic from their website that is not grounded in the way they actually conduct the business of managing this church.

The CPR report recommends replacing ALL boards, committees and ministry circles with a new structure around these six areas.

1. Church-wide Coordination
2. Worship
3. Property & Finance
4. Member Care
5. Christian Ed
6. Mission & Outreach

Recognizing that they have a significant investment in doing their work according to the current governance model, implementing structural change of this magnitude will be a tremendous task.

Other recommendations:

- CCC needs a long-term financial plan that maps specific programs and initiatives to future income and spending.
- Their community needs to invest more energy into non-business activities that are fun and truly fellowship-oriented.
- Retreat house investment is of significant value to about half the congregation, and of little value to the other half. Perhaps CCC could envision a retreat endowment that allocates resources toward the type of activities and environment that was once found at the retreat property – but utilizing property owned and managed by another organization.
- CCC should consider live-casting or making available on-line their sermons.

With a focus on Community Outreach, Serving Their Own People, and Congregational Development as three legs of a stool, they should be able to craft a governance structure and operational plan. There are 20,000 future Silver Spring members who are hoping for CCC to reach out to them with a progressive vision, creating line of sight between the church and these potential new members. CCC needs to find joy and enrichment through the work of governance and through their support of this institution. The programming and use of their facilities should maximize the impact of the ideas and ideals they are committed to.

A limited number of full printed copies in the CCC church office and members may request a full digital copy by sending an email to cccoffice@cccsilverspring.org