

## **Park Presbyterian Church (PPC)**

### **Congregational Self-Study**

#### **WHO ARE WE?**

##### **Mission/Vision/Purpose:**

Mission: "Our mission is to make Christ visible by believing, living and sharing the word of God."

Vision: "Our vision is to be God's light – a beacon of love, interaction, and guidance in faith and comfort."

Purpose: "To work together to support individual needs for spiritual growth, fellowship, and acceptance."

##### **History:**

On April 20, 1825, the Commission appointed by the Presbytery of Geneva convened at the School House in the Village of Newark and constituted the Presbyterian Society of Newark, NY. It was made up of sixty-three charter members: thirty-seven members came from the East Palmyra Presbyterian Church (The East Palmyra Church was founded after the Congregational form of government in 1793, and later adopted the Presbyterian system in 1807); twenty-three members came from the Oaks Corners Presbyterian Church (Oaks Corners also started as a Congregational church); and three came from either a Baptist church or another Congregationalist church.

The land on which the church stands was originally purchased from Joseph Miller, who was instrumental in the development and the layout of the village of Newark, basing it on a typical Colonial New England style town with a village green in the middle (the church building sits in the heart of the village next to the village green). The current Park Church building was constructed in 1915 and was an expansion of the circa 1880's building. A major renovation in the 1950's configured the offices, chapel, and classrooms as they now exist. The building is unique for this part of the country because its architecture is a combination of Byzantine and Early Romanesque style.

##### **Demographics:**

In 2013, PPC had an active membership roll of 345, and now 2023, it has 142. The average age of the congregation is over 65. Only 32 of the 142 active members live out of the town or village limits. Thirty-nine live in the Town of Arcadia and 71 live in the village of Newark. Thirteen members are Shut-Ins and are visited by our deacons regularly. Approximately 26 members have been participating in Park Church for 50 or more years. Average attendance at Sunday worship is 48, with the other 95 or so "active members" participating in giving, activities in the church such as

Rummage Sale and book studies, or ask to receive the Parkview, the church newsletter. The congregation is approximately 61% females, and the ethnicity of the congregation is 98% Caucasian.

1961 was the peak of the membership of Park Church with 936 members. At that time, PPC's membership included many doctors and business professionals, with the church being described by some as "clicky" or a country club. Between the years 1960 to 2000, PPC saw a 33% membership decline. Membership dropped approximately 75% between 2000 and 2020. This loss of membership is greater than the loss the denomination suffered in the same period when the denomination lost 51% of membership.

### **Programs:**

In congregational discussions facilitated by the Interim Pastor, long-time members stressed how much activity there was at PPC in its past. This included but was not limited to mission, music, fellowship, worship, and individual classes (e.g., Bible Studies/Sunday School). While current church programming may not be as robust or diverse as in the past, congregational teams and task forces work hard to fulfill our mission, vision, and purpose.

### *Teams:*

- Deacons: The role of deacons is to provide an organized way to bring the love of Jesus Christ to the church and the community. Regular activities for deacons include visiting shut-in members to provide support and to serve communion (whether at home, in the hospital, or in nursing homes), and hosting congregational gatherings at the Sunday morning coffee hour.
- Presbyterian Women: The focus of the Presbyterian Women (PW) is to nurture our faith through prayer and Bible study, to support the mission of the church worldwide, to work for justice and peace, and to build an inclusive and caring community of women that strengthens the Presbyterian Church (USA) and witnesses to the promise of God's kingdom. Recent activities have included fundraising for the local food closet, as well as for other causes through the annual rummage sale and baked goods sales, and collecting new bedding and household items for refugees in partnership with Call to Care.
- Finance: This committee of the Session manages and reports upon PPC financial assets. The team members make decisions about investment of the church assets, create, and monitor an annual budget, and provide support to the church's treasurer.
- Fund Raising: This team conducts various sales throughout the year, generally the sale of food such as take-out meals and baked goods, to raise funds for general activities of the church.
- Personnel: This committee of the Session manages the personnel/human resource policy and practices of PPC. It creates position descriptions and other necessary documents, conducts job searches as needed,

oversees the evaluation and discipline of staff (including the pastor), and recommends changes in personnel policy to the session.

- **Property:** This committee of the Session deals with the maintenance and upkeep of the church facility. It addresses a wide range of church needs, from replacing light bulbs to the repair of a major beam failure. This team also provides oversight and support for various equipment upgrades, including boilers and computers.
- **Worship and Music:** This committee of the Session deals with activities related to the worship service. Interacting with singing and bell choirs and the church organist is part of their monthly work. This team also assists with the decoration of the sanctuary and with providing worship services at the DeMay Living Center. The team was responsible for maintaining pulpit supply in the absence of a pastor.

#### *Task Forces:*

The Interim Pastor asked for volunteers for several Task Forces to reinvigorate lapsed programming, address congregational needs, and to help move PPC forward. These included:

- **Christian Fellowship Task Force:** This task force identifies, promotes, and supports various events and gatherings that are attended by church members and other people in the community. Events such as the local strawberry and ice cream social, music on the Erie Canal, miniature golf tournament, and group attendance at the Newark Pilots home games are some of this task force's promotions. Within the building, they support such activities as a monthly dish to pass and a reception for scouts.
- **Christian Education:** This task force provides book studies at various times during the year (e.g., Lenten Book Studies, PW Horizon's Study), provides a K-2 Sunday school, and presides over the Mechie/Steven's Scholarship Award.
- **Mission Task Force:** This task force is covered in the section on Mission on page 8.

#### **Leadership:**

The current staff employed by PPC include Interim Pastor, Organist, Choir Director, Bells Director, Outside Sexton, Church Secretary/Office Administrator, and Streaming Technician. Not surprisingly, this staffing level is much reduced from prior years when PPC had a larger membership. For example, PPC used to have a full-time Associate Pastor and a full-time Christian Educator. The loss of these positions had a direct effect on church programming. It is worth noting that some changes in staffing reflect positive attempts to meet the needs of the congregation. For example, the position of Streaming technician was created to support the live streaming of Sunday service, and the

position of Church Secretary/Office administrator has evolved from full-time to part-time, and from in office to a hybrid workplace (i.e., part done at home and part in the office).

Between 1946 and 2004, PPC had two pastors, each of whom served over 30 years. Since that time, PPC has had five different interim or permanent pastors with an average tenure of 3 years. Each pastor of PPC has had varied gifts, conflict styles and leadership qualities. The succession of different gifts and styles, the comparison made by members between ministers, and sometimes the process by which new ministers were selected, created (or revealed) fissures in the congregation which contributed to the loss of membership. Fortunately, the gifts and style of the current Interim pastor have helped to heal these wounds and to bring former members back to the congregation.

Facilitated discussion among congregation members of the various pastors has revealed what attributes, competencies, or characteristics are critical to the congregation. These include:

- Community Involvement -- pastors who are active in the community learn about community needs and issues and make others in the community aware of Park's presence. This is done through engagement in groups such as Together in Christ and Rotary.
- Interpersonal Connection – simple actions such as knowing people's names and keeping in touch with them make members feel welcome and noticed. Active listening and advocacy for those in difficulty or pain has resulted in people coming to PPC for economic help and guidance on practical matters. The connection between pastor and individual congregational members matters more as people age: pastors showing up means something. Visitations are important.
- Worship Leader with Spiritual Maturity – the congregation welcomes and appreciates engaging sermons and thoughtful Bible studies. A clear and consistent theology based on a strong knowledge of scriptures shared in creative ways with enthusiasm is a plus.
- Cooperative, Compromising and Harmonizing Conflict Styles -- Varied conflict styles are needed while leading a church, but it seems as if cooperative, compromising and harmonizing orientations leave people feeling valued and important and thereby inspire more peaceful resolutions to problems and differences as well as foster individual growth. The pastor should follow the example of Jesus as a servant leader.
- Administrative and Organizational Skill – for better or worse, a large part of the pastor's role is dealing with the business and administration of the church. The congregation values administrative skill, consistent follow-through, and in today's world a knowledge of technology.

Pastors who displayed these attributes, competencies, or characteristics were viewed favorably by the congregation. Pastors who did not meet these expectations served as sources of conflict or disappointment.

One other factor that emerged from the congregational discussions of church leadership was the idea that PPC “avoids risk”, meaning the church administration/congregation is very sensitive to risk. PPC’s reaction to Covid was seen as exemplifying this. Church members feel that PPC was “(too) slow getting back after Covid”, noting that “Mission work stopped during Covid”. When PW tried a Bible Study outside, they were told NO, they couldn’t do this. The treasurer said that she had a hard time doing her job: she needed to get in the building even though the church was closed.

In accordance with the Book of Order, the Session has remained a consistent part of church leadership. As noted above, Session Teams (Finance, Personnel, Property, Worship and Music) play a critical role in church programming. While the disputes in the congregation that arose during the succession of pastors also played out in disagreements among Session members, the current Session members work well together and are committed to using their unique gifts to fulfill PPC’s mission, vision, and purpose.

It is worth noting that the disputes in the congregation and among Session members that arose during the succession of pastors were reflected in PPC’s relation to presbytery. Several Session members felt that the Presbytery did not provide adequate support to PPC during its times of need or even acted in a manner detrimental to PPC. Hopefully, recent changes in the presbytery will help to heal these wounds.

#### **Finances:**

The finance of Park Presbyterian Church covers the three areas of investments, budgets, and payments.

The church is blessed with a sizable endowment that helps meet the expenses of the church. The amount used from the endowment in support of the annual budget is a self-imposed amount of \$65,000. However, this amount may increase to meet church obligations or maybe reduced if the funds are not required. Current projections suggest that PPC could remain solvent and viable for up to five years using its current endowment with no member contributions and up to 10 years with no change in member contributions.

An annual budget is prepared in the fall of the year outlining the estimated income and expenses for the next year. The budget is approved by the Session, and presented to the congregation for review at their annual meeting. For 2023 our budgeted expenses were \$202,516 with the four major components being administration at \$82,472, property at \$64,352, music/worship at \$27,636 and mission at \$15,374.

Finance works with the church Treasurer on payments and the money needs of those payments. Our payment system requires a voucher to be prepared for all payments requested which go to the Treasurer who writes the check and signs it. If the amount is greater than \$400 a second signature is required. All vouchers are reviewed by a

second person who must sign approval. All bank accounts are reconciled, and an Audit Committee is appointed each year to verify recording accuracy.

The congregation was very responsive to a request from the Finance Team to establish an Emergency Maintenance Fund. A capital drive started to meet the costs of a new boiler exceeded the necessary amount, with the remaining funds now available for future emergency repairs.

### **Summary:**

Park Presbyterian Church is an aging congregation experiencing the anxiety of declining membership, and despite a substantial endowment, the added financial burden from the upkeep and maintenance of both its large and aging building and declining pledges. The last twenty years have been filled with intrigue, conflict, and estranged relationships with both the presbytery, with interims and pastors, within and between members, and to a lesser degree, its charter relationship with the Boy Scouts of America.

Park's membership loss can be attributed to the same factors that have affected churches nationwide. Decline in regular attendance, increase in Weekend family activities, and an increase in the percent of population not belonging to a religious institution. Local factors have also influenced the membership loss. The retirement of a 30-year pastor, reactions to intern and installed pastors were sometimes not favorable and resistance to changes in institutional norms have added to the local membership loss.

Yet PPC displays remarkable strengths: its building and its resilient and committed members. The church building serves as a remarkable resource for the congregation and many community groups. Despite everything that happened over the last twenty years, members consider the church a part of their life; they cannot imagine life without it. PPC is seen as a place to come where they didn't feel pressured to join. Friendships formed. These members see PPC as a good example of what church was and still could be.

### **WHO ARE OUR NEIGHBORS?**

#### **History:**

Newark is in the Town of Arcadia, in Wayne County NY, 30 miles east of Rochester NY. Wayne County, with a population in 2021 of 91,283, was formed in 1823 by combining portions of Seneca and Ontario counties.

Early settlement in the Upstate New York area began in the 1790s but the survival and development of the present village can be directly attributed to the "digging of a ditch". That ditch would become the Erie Canal.

The construction of the Erie Canal took eight long years to complete and on October 26, 1825, the canal towns of Miller's Basin and Lockville celebrated the "Wedding of the Waters" and the Grand Opening of the Erie Canal, bringing in an influx of settlers and a measure of prosperity that this area had not known before. The majority of workers chose to remain in Miller's Basin and Lockville, seeking other employment opportunities, which within a year became plentiful in the area. In 1853, the communities of Miller's Basin and Lockville merged to become the present Newark, New York.

Wayne County has a long agricultural history and ranks as New York's top apple producing county. Newark's early industry centered on agriculture as the growing of fruit trees and berry bushes were made available by direct sale to customers. The C.W. Stuart Nursery which began in 1864 evolved into one of the largest and most diverse direct selling enterprises in the country. Following closely in its footsteps were Jackson and Perkins (the "World's Largest Rose Growers"), Comstock Foods, Bloomer Bros. Paper Co., The Mora Car Company, Sarah Coventry, and others. Many of these early industries put Newark on the map, and their closures, along with that of other major employers, also had a significant impact on the local economy.

For example, Jackson/Perkins left in 1973, Sarah Coventry closed in 1984, and the State School closed in 1991. Accompanying changes to the local economy included the departure of many professionals, the closing of the Country Club, opening of group homes for those leaving the State School, large houses turned into apartments, the development of low-income housing (there are presently seven low-income housing complexes around Newark), and the Urban Renewal of the village, which some feel destroyed the old-time charm of the village by tearing down many of the older buildings in favor of newer establishments.

### **Demographics:**

The population of the Village of Newark peaked in 1961 with an estimated population of 12,868. The Village lost 30% of the population between the years 1960 to 2020 (12,000 in 1970; 9,145 in 2010; and 9,017 in 2020). In the past 20 years the Newark Central School District has seen a loss of 31% in its student population. When compared to the Village population loss during the same period of 8%, this points to a decrease in the Village of families with children and possibly an increase in no child families or the retirement age households. The Village of Newark 2020 Census statistics indicate the median age is 42.8 with 42% of the population aged 50 and above. The median income for the Village is under \$45,000, and the Poverty Rate is 14.7% (2019). In 2021, the village population was 8% Hispanic/Latino, 80.6% White alone, 7% Black, and 4.4% Other.

**Summary:**

Like all canal towns in upstate NY, Newark's industrial and commercial base has changed dramatically in the past decades. The loss of major businesses through sales and closures has required the community to shrink and focus on support for the development of a variety of small and mid-size ventures. Recent economic developments have improved the local business environment and the future for Newark is favorable.

When compared to the Pew Research Center Study of the PCUSA, there is a significant statistical variation between members of PCUSA over age 50, 68% and the percent of members with incomes over \$50,000 being 61%. The local population distribution and economic status of Newark does not compare favorably with the typical PCUSA membership. These factors may contribute to PPC's difficulty in attracting new members.

**MISSION:**

Mission involves the application of church resources to meet the needs of the community and the world. PPC's primary resources are its building, finances, and member's use of their gifts and talents.

PPC had a robust mission portfolio at its peak. Members recall Work Camps in which students learned to "love their neighbor" through hands-on work experiences, learning to do without, seeing other people different from themselves in another light who were living marginalized lives but still deserving. The students came back better people from the experience. Others brought up mission in general, noting that PPC had provided opportunities to be involved in mission work that they might not have been involved in without the church paving the way. Examples include involvement in the Heifer Project, volunteering for the holiday kettle campaign, collecting supplies for Church World Service (CWS), both monetary and hands-on support for Living Waters and West Virginia Mission trips and temporary support for a missionary.

Like programs, mission activity declined over time and during Covid (e.g., the mission team was dissolved). Yet PPC continues to apply its three primary resources to address the needs of the community and the world. PPC makes its building available for meetings of local groups on a recurring basis, including AA, NA, DAR, Babies Etc., the Garden Club, Wayne County Gem Club, and the boy scouts. Other groups and individuals can also access the building with approval of the Session after completing a building request form. PPC has served as a host for the local boy scout



troops for over 90 years, and maintains rights to a property, Camp Hauser, that is for use solely by boy and girl scout troops.<sup>1</sup>

Financially, PPC has been faithful to pay its per capita (\$50 per member) to the Presbytery of Geneva. This money is used at the presbytery, synod, and assembly levels, often to fund mission in different forms. PPC supports the four yearly offerings: One Great Hour of Sharing, Pentecost, Peace and Global Awareness, and Joy. In the last year, it also supported Presbyterian Disaster by sending funds for refugees of war in Ukraine and flooding in Kentucky. For several years, PPC has applied to the Presbytery for a Matthew 25 grant, most recently obtaining a grant of \$3,000 to the Newark Food Closet.

As noted in the section on program, the Interim Pastor established a Mission Task Force to restart the work done by the disbanded Mission Team. Recognizing that PPC should only take on what the church can handle with decreasing membership and an aging congregation, and considering the confusion surrounding some attempted projects, the task force came up with seven criteria for a successful project and developed a calendar of mission projects throughout the year. The seven criteria are: 1. Community (joint effort); 2. Specific need identified; 3. Specific items needed; 4. Set time frame; 5. Helping less fortunate; 6. Do something/hands-on; and 7. Internally motivated.

Based on these criteria, the 2023 calendar for mission activity contains the following projects: Warming Tree for Lake Ontario Child Development (January); Sock-it-to-me Super Bowl Sunday for Common Threads (February); Warming Tree for Lincoln and Perkins Elementary Schools (March); Rummage Sale for Newark Community (April); Collection of coloring books for the distribution in the Children's Book Garden to support children in the community and support Christian literacy (May, June and July); Undees for Common Threads (August); Hope in a Tote for Survivor advocacy (September and October); Advent Bags for shut-ins/assisted care/nursing homes (November); and Christmas Bags (food) for the Newark Food Closet (December).

PPC provides both monetary and volunteer support for the Wayne County Family Promise Program. Family Promise helps families experiencing homelessness and low-income families achieve sustainable independence through a community-based response. The Presbyterian Women's group has a special interest in this program and has provided financial support to bolster Family Promises non-grant contributions. The church has also provided temporary housing and meals for homeless families in this program.

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<sup>1</sup> PPC's relationship with the boy scouts has gone through some difficult times because of the sexual harassment claims against the scouts, with PPC being named as a defendant in some of the claims. The Session has modified the charter with the scouts to avoid any future issues.

## Summary:

Confronting the challenges presented by a declining membership and an aging congregation that does not mirror the community, limited contact with and few means to communicate to the community, PPC has been able to utilize community partnerships and an active Mission Task Force to apply its primary resources – building, finances, and member volunteers - to the needs of the community and the world.

## WHAT IS GOD CALLING US TO DO AND BE?

Park Presbyterian Church is an aging congregation experiencing declining membership and the financial burden from the upkeep and maintenance of aging building and declining pledges. Yet PPC displays remarkable strengths, with its resilient and committed members applying its primary resources – building, finances, and member volunteers - to the needs of the community while supporting individual needs for spiritual growth, fellowship, and acceptance. Our neighbors too have changed. The loss of major businesses through sales and closures has required Newark to shrink and focus on support for the development of a variety of small and mid-size ventures. One consequence of these joint changes is that PPC's membership no longer mirrors the community. Thanks to active economic development, Newark's future looks favorable. What about PPC's future?

At least three developments need to take place for PPC to discern what God is calling us to do and to be. The first is a serious look at the status of the church. The congregation is emotionally invested in the church building and events in which they and their families have participated in throughout the life of the church. This, combined with PPC's noted tendency to avoid risk, can prevent us from asking critical questions about the building and the structure of the church. The time to ask these questions is now. Critical questions revolve around:

- *The Church Building* – The church building is a valued resource, but upkeep and maintenance require significant annual investment. While PPC's endowment can maintain the church and building for at least five years, what then? Should we consider options such as downsizing the building or partnering with other congregations? Are there ways to make better use of this valued resource? To help answer these questions, the session has approved a "Big House Task Force"<sup>2</sup> to recommend actions to ensure the congregation remains viable until 2023.

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<sup>2</sup> The task force name draw on the metaphor of a older couple that remains in a big house long after their children have grown up and moved out. What should the couple do to maintain a healthy life in a home that is larger than they are fully using or potential need?

- *Leadership Structure* – PPC currently has an Interim Pastor. One purpose of this document is to inform the deliberations of a Pastor Nominating Committee that will develop a MIF for use in the search for a new pastor. That requires that we consider the appropriate leadership structure for the church. One element of this is whether the pastor is a full- or part-time position. Presbytery considers 35 hours a week full time, and many congregation members still think the pastor’s duties are 365/24/7. There is a reality about what PPC can expect and afford. The idea of a part-time pastor, a shared pastor or combining with another denomination deserves consideration. If we had to choose, would the building or the Pastor go?

A second element of leadership structure revolves around the role played by church members. During the congregational discussions, members stressed that in addition to the pastor, leadership and congregation members alike need to participate in partnerships in the community. How do we improve membership engagement in the community? Equally important, when we look at the members that are actively involved, given the age of the congregants, if something happened to even one, what would happen?

- *Programs and Mission* – PPC’s programs and mission activities should all support and reflect the church’s mission, vision and purpose: “to make Christ visible by believing, living and sharing the word of God” (Mission); “to be God’s light – a beacon of love, interaction, and guidance in faith and comfort” (Vision); and “to work together to support individual needs for spiritual growth, fellowship, and acceptance” (Purpose). As noted throughout this document, members’ view of programs and mission is driven in large part by their experience and memory of past programs and mission activity. It is good to draw from the strength of these past endeavors. It is also important to recognize, however, that future programs and mission activity must consider the decisions that will be made regarding the building and leadership structure. That said, program and mission ideas that emerged from the congregational or Session discussions include:
  - Fellowship, i.e., activities that will bring people together in fellowship, whether that be working on mission or just informal get togethers where people can get to know each other better. Suggestions include game nights, movie nights, informal services/sandwiches, Harvest Dinner, and informal classes such as painting/peace theme, cooking classes, and gifts of the handyman.
  - Spiritual growth by offering informal lounge services at various times, providing “special services” on topics of Meditation, Serenity, and Peace, and developing a youth program that incorporates food (pizza), singing, and ways to act out the scripture.
  - Mission with a local focus through activities such as a free transportation service to/from appointments, using “hobbies” to promote Christ (e.g., golf team), and monthly educational forums provided by members of the community.

Communication to the community also emerged as a critical component of programs and mission activity. Suggestions to improve communication to the community and enhance PPC's visibility in the community included: a blog to provide an online presence, and consistent news releases in regional papers (Finger Lakes Times, Times of Wayne County/WaynesCounty.com, Canandaigua Messenger) bragging about what we do to provide community presence. A more hands-on suggestion was to provide tours of the church, using a Scavenger Hunt with food and games as an appeal to youth.

It is the hope that these programs and mission activities will provide increased community exposure to PPC, resulting in increased membership in the church, more cultural diversity within the membership, and a younger congregation.

**Conclusion/Summary:**

As PPC looks to its future to discern what God is calling us to do and to be, a key issue is whether its institutional memory will serve as asset or an anchor. As an asset, institutional memory can capture the strengths the church has displayed in the past and turn them into possibilities for the future. As an anchor, institutional memory can keep the church in the past and prevent it from taking advantage of the opportunities that await. As noted during a congregational discussion, perhaps expectations must change: the PCUSA has changed. Geneva Presbytery is changing, and PPC will need to change. May the spirit guide us in the right direction.