

Task Force on the Life of the Church
Summary Report from Session Retreat

April 29, 2006

Turman Room – VMI Campus

The “life of the church” is about the life of Christ moving in our midst through the power of the Holy Spirit. To describe the “life of the church” at any given moment is to provide a snap-shot in time. The next moment the “life of the church” will not look quite the same because the Holy Spirit is ever calling us to new ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by pathways as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. The only thing we know for certain is that we step into the future trusting the good Lord to lead, judge, correct, and support us.

Lexington Presbyterian Church has had a long and rich history. By God’s grace, it shall have a long and rich future. Our hope is not to get in the Lord’s way...but to be discerning and faithful. Our prayer is that we may have eyes to see where God is at work and the mettle to join him there.

The Session of the Lexington Presbyterian Church met for a retreat on Saturday, April 29, 2006, in the Turman Room of the VMI Preston Library. The focus of the retreat was to consider the “findings” of the *Task Force on the Life of the Church*. Presenters from the task force were: Amy DeHart, John DeVogt, Fran Elrod, Dianne Herrick (chair), Janet Lofgren, Tim McElhannon, Hardin Marion, and Bill Klein.

The “life of the church” was considered in terms of the following spheres:

1. Facilities and Property
2. Outreach and Mission
3. Financial Management
4. Fellowship and Congregational Life (i.e., building community)
5. Worship
6. Communications and Volunteer Activities
7. Christian Education and Youth

Outcomes varied. Some outcomes involved minimal or no expense and so could (and can) begin to be implemented without delay. Some outcomes crossed over into several spheres and so would (and will) require careful coordination and conversation. Some outcomes required considerable expense and so would (and will) need further consideration.

What follows is an attempt to break down the outcomes in a manageable fashion. The hope is that the committees of Session will take this information and develop plans for implementation – being in conversation with other committees as the issues being considered suggest.

Some of those plans may be short term. Others may need a five to ten year strategy. Each committee is encouraged to develop a plan to be submitted to the Planning Committee of Session by December 1, 2006.

OVERALL OUTCOMES

1. That the minutes from each **committee meeting** shall be made available to the chair persons of each of the Sessional committees. (Rationale: to improve reciprocal communication; to see to over-lap of interests and programs, etc...)
2. That it is the task of every Session member (indeed, every member) to be **hospitable and welcoming** for Sunday mornings services. That the same hospitality and spirit of welcome be at play when members encounter other church members in the public arena.
3. That the strength of the church is in large measure dependent upon the **strength of the Session**. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every Session member to be engaged, prayerful, and active...remembering the ordination/installation pledge to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.
4. See that all members of Session are **informed**. See to it Session members have a copy of the Facilities Review Committee report and retreat reports going back several years. See that such reports are a part of annual Session review and Elder training.

FACILITIES AND PROPERTY

EASILY IMPLEMENTED:

1. Develop a **Yardbirds** program for special projects involving church properties. This may take various forms, including biannual work-days at the manse.
2. As a part of its regular duties, the Property Committee shall (at least) yearly “**inventory**” the church facilities – with an eye to see that the properties are user friendly, inviting to visitors, safe, and up-to-date. Develop plans necessary to improve and upgrade facilities.
3. Attend to the small **courtyard** off the children’s Sunday School classrooms. Take steps to make this courtyard attractive and usable.

ITEMS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. **Schedule of Maintenance:** Developing a schedule of maintenance is a high priority. This schedule will enable the Financial Management Committee to budget intelligently for items such as painting, remodeling, re-flooring, re-roofing, etc... This schedule will require regular revision – but a start toward developing a comprehensive schedule should begin immediately and be submitted to Session for approval. This schedule should include a five-year plan to be regularly updated.
2. **Handicapped accessibility:** Handicapped accessibility is a high priority – a priority that goes to the heart of what it means for the church to be inclusive and caring. Set into motion the gathering of prices, develop a comprehensive plan (including incremental steps) to make Murray Hall handicapped accessible, submit plan to Session for approval, work with Financial Management to devise a funding strategy. This includes making restroom(s) (all ideally, but at least one)

handicapped accessible. (It is worth noting that the Session retreat of 2004 cited handicapped accessibility as our highest priority.)

3. **Parlor:** The significance of fellowship opportunities for the health of the congregation cannot be overrated. An area requiring capital consideration has to do with the place where coffee fellowship is held on Sunday mornings, receptions following funerals, other occasional receptions. The parlor is under-used, largely because of its present state. Set into motion an investigation of how the parlor may be altered to better facilitate fellowship activities (including coffee fellowship on Sunday mornings). A possible solution could involve removal of walls that now contain parlor and men's bathroom – opening entire space for a variety of fellowship activities. This would create what could be considered our “gathering space.”
4. The Facilities Review Committee concluded that **Brady Chapel** is the most under-used room in our church facility. It is a space highly valued as a worship space. Early Worship could be relocated to Brady Chapel if adjustments in the seating could be made, providing an atmosphere more in keeping with the mood of Early Worship. Develop a plan for moving ahead with these modest adjustments to Brady Chapel. [Pastoral concerns suggest delicate planning.]
5. The **Kitchen** continues to be an area of concern. A special fund to renovate the kitchen was established in 2004 following the report of the Facilities Review Committee (don't know how much money is in the fund). Develop a comprehensive plan for the kitchen to be upgraded (*a la* the Facilities Review Committee recommendations) – with the intention of serving as a “cooking” rather than a “warming” kitchen. The intention is not to develop an institutional kitchen – but one what could be used on a frequent basis to prepare meals for the congregation. [Idea of the kitchen serving as the resource for a soup kitchen are not out of the question.]
6. That **Session set policy** (in terms of building usage, capital priorities, etc...) the Property Committee will implement. Have Property Committee consider and advise Session of those issues requiring Sessional consideration.

OUTREACH AND MISSION

EASILY IMPLEMENTED:

1. Gather and regularly place before the congregation **local census data** (i.e., of the sort provided by PERCEPT). The intention is to make sure people are aware of the “field” in which this church labors – that our “mission field” is not just within the church membership, but in the surrounding environs.
2. Keep **poverty issues** before the congregation. This may involved regular “minutes for mission;” articles in the church newsletter; providing reading materials; etc...

3. Be a “**clearing house**” for church members to be “in mission.” Make available to the congregation opportunities for service – keeping in mind the need to provide a wide variety of activities, as well as activities requiring a variety of physical abilities.

ITEMS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. **All Members Engaged in Mission:** Develop a plan by which every member of the congregation is engaged in mission. This will require envisioning mission broadly (i.e., locally, regionally, nationally, internationally) – as well as in terms of age appropriateness, physical ability, etc... Be mindful that no one is too young or too old, too able or disabled to be engaged in mission.
2. **Education:** Develop a variety of educational opportunities.
 - a. **Poverty Forum** – develop a seminar involving local community speakers (such as – Steve Shultis of the Food Pantry; Dennis Cropper of CSB; Aubrey Shinofield of W&L’s Campus Kitchen Project; Meradith Downey of Social Services; Fran Elrod of Shepherd Poverty Project; someone from the Free Clinic...) Such seminars could be repeated episodically.
 - b. **Faithful Response to Popular Culture** – develop a team to work with Bill & Deb Klein to develop a “class” to address the concerns of being Christian within the current cultural milieu. The “class” could be offered to youth, college age, and adults – and could be made available, not just to the church, but to the wider community. Work toward beginning the program by the Spring of 2007.
3. **Mentoring Program:** Resurrect the mentoring program to reflect present needs.
4. **Lay Care Ministry:** Develop and implement a program of internal lay pastoral care; especially mindful of visitation to the elderly and home-bound members of the church.
5. **Ecumenical Ministry:** Continue to foster the relationship that exists with 1st Baptist and Randolph Street United Methodist churches. Take leadership in fostering the relationship – and in devising new ways in which we can partner with one another for mission, fellowship, and mutual support.
6. **Soup Kitchen – Homeless Shelter:** Be a leader in the community in addressing the pressing need for a soup kitchen and for a homeless shelter. Partner where necessary. The intention is not to put LPC on the map – but to address the critical human needs.
7. **Use of the Building:** Give thought to ways in which we can be better stewards of our church facilities – i.e., making them available to groups for meetings, training events, receptions, exhibits, clubs, etc...

8. **Time and Talent:** Review and revise the Time and Talent sheet on an annual basis. Seek input from all committees in the process.
9. **Film series:** Provide a film series that can include the wider community. Aim is to provide entertainment – but more importantly, a community forum in which to discuss issues of the day from a Christian perspective.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

EASILY IMPLEMENTED:

1. Create a more **user-friendly financial statement**. Share that simplified statement with Session on a monthly basis.
2. Provide **frequent financial information** to the congregation via newsletter, minute for mission, talks at Thursday Evening Fellowship suppers, mailings... See that the information conveyed is varied and ultimately comprehensive.
3. Provide committees with a regular **“status” report** of their funds, spending, etc...
4. Meet with and assist the Personnel Committee in reviewing **church staffing** – i.e., configuration, salaries, benefits. Give serious consideration to including the following two positions: a youth director and a coordinator of volunteers.

ITEMS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. **Stewardship:** Rethink how stewardship is carried out. Develop a better system of communicating the financial needs of the church to the congregation, as well as a better system of obtaining and following up with pledges.
2. **Endowed Funds:** Develop a process for communicating to the endowments of the church. Routinely encourage folks to contribute to the endowed funds. Provide a process by which folks can more easily contribute to the endowed funds.
3. **Giving Possibilities:** Gather from the various church committees a list of special giving opportunities that may be made available to folks wishing to make a special need possible – i.e., when folks wish to provide a memorial for deceased loved ones.

FELLOWSHIP AND CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

EASILY IMPLEMENTED:

1. To mitigate the potential disunity from having **two separate congregations** (due to having two worship services), plan for periodic ways of bringing the two together.
2. **Coffee fellowship:** Consider when and how coffee fellowship takes place. Consider having coffee fellowship twice on Sunday mornings – i.e., 9:30-9:45 and then 10:45-11:00. [Having a place near the sanctuary to hold coffee fellowship would help to make this work more easily.]

ITEMS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. **Special Sunday Celebrations:**
 - a. Consider having a “Fire Sunday” to remember & give thanks.
 - b. Consider a “Homecoming” Sunday.
 - c. Consider having a “picnic Sunday.”
2. **Congregational Dinners:** have more frequent congregational dinners and suppers.
3. **Sunday morning visitors:** Devise a more effective way of identifying and welcoming visitors to Sunday morning worship.
4. **House Church:** Rethink and revitalize the House Church program.
5. **Small Group Ministries:** Small group activities can bring folks together for a specific task – such as to knit prayer shawls, to study a specific topic, to engage in Lectio Divina, to rake leaves for a shut-in, to knit baby caps, do minor repairs to a home, etc...

WORSHIP

EASILY IMPLEMENTED:

1. Expand the role of the **Beadle**.
2. Do a better job of identifying and welcoming **visitors**. Give some thought to making name tags available to all members – and to providing a place in the narthex to “house” these name tags.
3. Hold periodic **joint worship services** – bringing together Early and 11:00 worship service crowd.

ITEMS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. **Worship Teams:** Develop worship teams to work with the pastor to enrich certain aspects of the worship service. Ex. – have a team think how the time for scripture reading could be done in a different way – through drama, puppets, various voices, etc... These worship teams would not need to plan something for each Sunday.
2. **Joint worship services with other congregations:** We currently hold at least one joint worship service per year with 1st Baptist and Randolph St. United Methodist. We host an ecumenical Thanksgiving Service each year. We gather each Palm Sunday at Hopkins Green for a parade. When we renovated our sanctuary in 1998, we held joint summer services with Trinity United Methodist Church. Consider and plan other ecumenical opportunities.

3. **Elder visitation and Communion to shut-ins:** Give thought to how Elders (current and past) may be involved in these important ministries. Give thought to who should be visited and how to encourage folks to receive home communion.
4. What does it mean to be Presbyterian and Reformed in a changing culture? Give thought to what is essential and what is pliable in terms of Presbyterian and Reformed worship (i.e., dealing with clapping in worship, relevance for youth and folks who come from either no religious background or one other than Presbyterian and Reformed).

COMMUNICATIONS

EASILY IMPLEMENTED:

1. **Minute for Mission:** Have a weekly “minute for mission” as a part of Sunday morning worship. Establish a coordinator of such. Call it something like “About the Life of the Church.”
2. **ACS System:** Find ways to make better use of the information available from ACS.
3. **Signage:** Improve signage throughout the church building.

ITEMS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. **Web-Site:** Building upon the successes of our current web-site, in an ongoing way, have the committee review together other church web-sites with an eye to how ours may be improved.
2. **Volunteers:** Find a better way to identify and enlist volunteers. Give serious consideration to bringing on staff (as paid or volunteer) someone to coordinate volunteers.
3. **Leadership Development:** Develop a leadership recruitment and development program.
4. **Pictorial Directory:** Making use of the ACS capability, plan and produce new pictorial directories yearly. In between production of directories, make pictures of new members available as inserts that may be included.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND YOUTH

EASILY IMPLEMENTED:

1. Continue to offer high quality Christian education opportunities.
2. Encourage every church member to avail themselves of the educational opportunities provide.

ITEMS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSIDERATION:

1. **Youth Ministry:** A vital youth ministry requires special attention. A paid youth director (part-time or full time) is needed to provide the focus and enthusiasm needed for a vital youth program. Parents need to be implored to see that their children are involved in the youth programs. Adults need to be coaxed into serving as youth leaders.
2. **Teachers:** In order for us to continue to have quality Christian education, we need to have people willing to teach. Under “Communications” was listed the need for a comprehensive “leadership development.” Present and future teachers would be well served by such a program. Move forward in developing such.