

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
OF CHESTNUT HILL

# Report of the Mission Study Committee August, 2018



## I. Where We Are

### A. A Brief History

In the fall of 1850, when Chestnut Hill was little more than a small village on a well-traveled road, Rev. Roger Owen, the head of a boys' boarding school in Chestnut Hill, began holding Sunday afternoon religious services. The area's small but mighty Presbyterian community asked him to hold Sunday morning services at his school, and the first was held a year later, on November 16, 1851. The First Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill was chartered in May, 1852 and was built at the corner of Rex and Germantown Avenues. In 1889 a schism among members over Christian education resulted in the formation of Trinity Presbyterian Church. Trinity Church was built on the northwest corner of Gravers Lane and Germantown Avenue.

In a very short time, however, it was felt by many that it was a mistake to have two churches of the same denomination in such close proximity. Talks of a merger began. Finally, in December 1929, Trinity Presbyterian Church and the First Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill joined to become The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill. The congregation occupied a building on Rex Avenue. Corydon Curtis Tyler of Trinity and William Colin Lee of First Presbyterian served as co-pastors. After a few years, Trinity Church was demolished and the land sold.

The new united church grew and facilities became strained. Plans had to be made for the future. Dr. Burleigh Cruikshank was called to the pulpit in 1941. When asked by the members how big a new building should be, he replied, "Make it as big as you want. I'll fill it." But World War II put everything on hold. Nevertheless, a gift of land for the new building from Annie Laughlin, as well as several unexpected and substantial gifts from individuals outside the congregation, and the monies from the sale of the old building, led to a ground-breaking. When the foundation for the new church was dug, enough Chestnut Hill stone was removed to construct the new building.

On November 14, 1948, the cornerstone was laid and on March 12, 1950, the first service of worship was held in the present sanctuary.

During the next ten years, the growth of the congregation was remarkable. Membership reached 1,300. Two Sunday morning services were necessary and the Church School had 75 teachers serving 500 children. Soon it was time to build again. A long-range planning committee was formed and recommended that the church add a Church School wing, offices, a choir room, a reception room, a new kitchen, an organ, a chapel and an expanded parking space. Within a year of these additions, the church decided to open a pre-kindergarten school that continues to this day. During these years the church was led by a beloved minister and teacher, Dr. Joseph E. McCabe, whose book, *The Power of God in a Parish Program*, recounted his ministry in Chestnut Hill.

Since Dr. McCabe's time, the church continued under the leadership of Paul Stauning, Lincoln Griswold, and C. Vincent Wilson. In 1996, the congregation called its first female head of staff, Cynthia Jarvis. The last two decades have seen the total renovation of the sanctuary, Widener Hall, the chapel and staff offices as well as the installation of a magnificent Mander Pipe Organ. Young families once again fill the pews while an active ministry to older adults has been made possible by a gift of \$2 million to the endowment. A thriving Center on the Hill and preschool program have made the church a regional center for lifelong learning. The established residencies of a number of superior music organizations has earned the church a reputation as one of the region's premier centers of musical excellence.

## B. The Surrounding Area

The Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill (sometimes known affectionately in the community as "Ches Pres" but also as PCCH by members of the congregation) is located in Chestnut Hill, a "suburb in the city" of 10,000 people. While located within the city limits, much of its congregation is drawn from suburban communities in Montgomery County. Only about 20% of the membership lives in Northwest Philadelphia (the neighborhoods of Chestnut Hill, Mt. Airy, and Germantown) and 80% in Montgomery County communities such as Wyndmoor, Erdenheim, Flourtown, Lafayette Hill, Plymouth Meeting, Fort Washington, Ambler, and Blue Bell.

The village of Chestnut Hill was part of the German Township laid out by Francis Daniel Pastorius and came to include the settlements originally known as Sommerhausen, Crefeld, and Cresheim. It served as a gateway between Philadelphia and the nearby farmlands. During the American Revolutionary War era, the area was one of many summer vacation spots due to its higher elevation, 400–500 feet above sea level, and cooler temperatures than the historic Center City.

From the mid-19th century through the mid-20th, the neighborhood served as both a "railroad suburb" and a "streetcar suburb" of Center City, although it is within the Philadelphia city limits. Two regional rail lines still carry thousands of commuters and shoppers to and from Center City. The neighborhood contains a wide variety of 19th and early 20th-century residential buildings by many of the most prominent Philadelphia architects.

The communities from which the church's congregation is drawn are some of the most affluent and well-educated communities in the Philadelphia region. The median home value in Chestnut Hill is \$533,300; in Montgomery County, \$301,800. By comparison, the median home value in Philadelphia is \$147,800, but has gone up 11.3% over the past year, more than twice the rate of increase in Chestnut Hill and Montgomery County.

Household incomes and levels of education are consistent with real estate values. Over 75% of all adult residents of Chestnut Hill have a college degree or higher (compared to 28% in the city of Philadelphia and 38% in the Philadelphia metro area). Median household income in Chestnut Hill is \$79,000, and in Montgomery County is \$81,000, 30% more than the median in the Philadelphia region (\$62,000) and more than twice the median in the City of Philadelphia (\$37,000).

## II: Who We Are: The Congregation & Our Facilities

Over the last four years church membership has averaged 555 and has held steady or grown slightly over that time. During this period, weekly worship attendance grew from 190 to 205. In that same period, the number of members between the ages of 26 and 55 has grown by more than 20%. As a consequence, half the membership in 2017 was between the ages of 26 and 55, up from 42% in 2014.

The congregation is largely white (95% in 2017), affluent, and well-educated. There are more female than male members (53-65% range over the last 4 years).

Results of an anonymous church-wide survey (the "CAT" survey, which will be discussed in more detail below) show that 90% of respondents have earned at least a college degree and nearly half reported earning a graduate degree. The same survey found that two thirds of respondents reported a household income greater than \$100,000.

PCCH sits on approximately 3.3 acres. In addition to the 4,500 square foot sanctuary, which was completely renovated in 1998, including the installation of a magnificent pipe organ built by the Mander Organ Company of London, the church complex contains several other facilities which are all connected.



In the main building, the ground floor contains the Center on the Hill, staff offices, the choir room, and the Harris Room, which serves as a meeting space. In addition to the sanctuary, the first floor of the main building contains Widener Hall, which serves as a large meeting space for the congregation after worship. The adjacent kitchen enables us to use Widener Hall for dinners and receptions as well. The church administrative office and the reception room are also located on the first floor of the main building. The second floor (which is not currently accessible by elevator) contains the Melcher Room, where the session meets, and the head of staff's office. Handicapped accessible restrooms are on the ground floor of the main building and first floor of the Strouse building.

The Strouse building houses the Preschool on the ground floor and the recently-renovated chapel, Church School rooms, and wheelchair-accessible bathroom on the first floor. Seating in the 800 square foot chapel is open, making it easy to configure for many events, including small worship services, funerals, play readings, concerts, and Church School. In a courtyard between the main building and the Strouse building is a memorial garden, which is the final resting place for about 160 former members of PCCH.

### III: What We Do

#### A. Worship



Above all things, the Presbyterian Church of Chestnut Hill is an inclusive community of faith.

We strive to keep God at the center of our lives in worship. As our Book of Common Worship states, "Our attention is drawn to the majesty and glory of the triune God, who created all things and by whose power all things are sustained...." The worship service at PCCH begins with a voluntary intended to prepare us for worship and center our thoughts on God. After a hymn of

praise, we offer words of contrition, acknowledging our sins and our dependence on God's grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. At the center of our worship is the word read, sung (we sing the psalms every Sunday as was the custom of the earliest Reformers), proclaimed, and acted out in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Our children come forward after the reading of Scripture for a conversation about what the story might mean to them.

In the sermon, the minister seeks to interpret the meaning of Scripture through the work of the Spirit, the help of the church's theological tradition and biblical scholarship as well as the best and brightest voices from the sciences, the arts, and the humanities. This is truly a church whose preachers have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. After the word is proclaimed, the rest of the service is our ordered response to what we have heard: through our prayers for the world, our gifts offered for the work of the church, and our affirmation of the church's faith. Often the final hymn sends us out into the world as bearers of the news of God's love, justice and mercy. On the first Sunday of each month, we celebrate the Lord's Supper.



Our worship service is also graced by our excellent Gallery Choir, under the direction of our music director and organist. The choir, which sings a variety of challenging music from all periods, is composed of members of the congregation and paid soloists. Occasionally the choir also performs public concerts for the community which have received enthusiastic critical reviews in the local press.

Services are held on Sunday at 10 a.m., with two services on Easter Sunday. On Maundy Thursday, we hold a Tenebrae service of lessons, meditation, and communion. On Christmas Eve, a family Service of Lessons and Carols with a children's pageant is held in the late afternoon and a Service of Lessons and Carols in the evening.

## B. Leadership and Governance



Our congregation is led by our 24-member session, but the day-to-day operations of PCCH are run by the staff, as follows:

Rev. Cindy Jarvis (Minister and Head of Staff)

Rev. Austin Crenshaw Shelley (Associate Minister of Christian Education)

Rev. Brian Russo (Associate Minister of Youth and Senior Adults)

In addition, the church employs the following lay staff:

Dan Spratlan (Director of Music)

Ken Lovett (organist and Associate Director of Music)

Esther Cole (church administrator)

Carla James (director of the PCCH Preschool)

Leslie Lefer (director of the Center on the Hill and communications director)

Evelyn Carpenter (administrative assistant)

Felix Delgado (sexton)

Owintier Charles (Sunday sexton)

Icilda James & Debbie Lambeth (Sunday childcare givers)

Finally, a 24-member Board of Deacons serves as the hands and heart of the congregation for those who welcome our ministry of care. Providing pastoral care is a critical part of our church's ministry.

In addition to the session, we have many standing committees that help to lead the church.

- *Adult Education Committee*- provides educational opportunities that work to increase the spiritual growth of the congregation. Additionally, the committee assists the staff in planning programmatic educational series and collaborates with other committees to diversify the educational offerings of the church.
- *Christian Education Committee*- provides and oversees opportunities for Christian education for children and youth.
- *Finance and Budget Committee*- The Finance Committee and the Treasurer facilitate the adoption of the annual operating budget for PCCH. The operating budget is the financial roadmap for the church as we journey through the calendar year.
- *Hospitality Committee*- coordinates events in the church involving food as needed (including but not limited to brunches, High Coffees, receptions, potlucks) and creates a community among those who volunteer to staff hospitality events.
- *Music and Arts Committee*- advises and supports the ministers and music staff in the planning and promotion of the arts (music, visual arts, drama, poetry, literature) in the life of the church; increases literacy and appreciation of the arts in the congregation through educational opportunities; plans and coordinates music and arts events throughout the program year.
- *Nominations Committee*- places before the congregation the names of members of the church to serve as elders, deacons, at large members of the Nominating Committee, and members of the Audit Committee at the annual meeting of the congregation in February of each year. Occasionally this committee will be asked to fill vacancies on the session or Board of Deacons that occur during the church program year.
- *Personnel Committee*- The Book of Order of the PCUSA states that the session has the responsibility to provide for the administration of the church, including employment of non-ordained staff. The Minister and Head of Staff supervises the ordained staff and works with the church administrator and Personnel Committee in the hiring and supervising of non-ordained staff.

- *Preschool Committee (pending approval of Session)*- acts as liaison between the school and the session, providing oversight and support to the Preschool Director and advising the session of any financial, personnel or programmatic concerns that may arise during the school year.
- *Property Committee*- has general charge of the administration and upkeep of the grounds and building under the direction of the Church Administrator and with the oversight of the session.
- *Social Witness Committee*- seeks out and provides opportunities for the congregation to be witnesses in the world to God's love as well as to support, oversee and act as advocate for these ministries.
- *Church Life Committee* - plans opportunities to increase the membership of the church, provides fellowship opportunities for members, and helps new members find a place within the church community.
- *Investment Committee* - oversees and actively manages church investments.
- *Planned Giving*- encourages members to remember the church in the process of estate planning.
- *Stewardship* - seeks to nurture and grow the financial generosity of the congregation, as together we grow towards a tithe, remembering that our lives depend upon God and not just our bank accounts.

A congregational meeting is called once a year to receive the budget and approve the ministers' terms of call. An annual report of the church's activities is distributed at this meeting. Weekly communication with the congregation includes news emailed to everyone and the weekly bulletin distributed at worship and posted on the website. In order to be better stewards of the environment, whenever possible PCCH communicates by email instead of regular mail.

PCCH also has an active and informative website at [www.chestnuthillpres.org](http://www.chestnuthillpres.org).

## C. Christian Education

Our goal is to love God and to love each other by sharing the story of our faith. To that end, we seek to teach and remind children of all ages that they are unconditionally loved and compassionately claimed by a gracious God. We work to engage children in actively and imaginatively learning the stories of the Bible and the traditions of the church. We help children to experience the love of God as it is manifested in our life together as a church community. In our words and actions, we hope to inspire children to live the Christian faith day to day as they

reach out to others in love and service and encourage children to worship and to serve God with joy and thanksgiving.

We believe that children and family ministries include ministry to and ministry by children and families. All children and families of all shapes and sizes are invited to participate in our life together. Perhaps no scene better captures the vitality of PCCH than a flock of children running to the front of the sanctuary for the Children's Moment during a regular Sunday service.



## 1. Church School



Approximately 40 percent of our households are families of three or more individuals. Our Church School—under the direction of Austin Shelley, our Associate Minister for Christian Education—typically educates 30 to 50 students from preschool through 5th grade each week. Rev. Shelley writes much of the curriculum, organizes and assigns teachers from the congregation, and leads the opening exercises.

Children attend the worship service with their parents from 10:00 a.m. until about 10:15 a.m., when they are invited to the front of the Church for the Children's Moment, after which they go to the chapel for the Church School gathering. From there they are dismissed to their church school classes with their teachers. Teams of volunteer teachers and clergy lead the classes. The preschool class is based on the *Godly Play* curriculum, using dolls and figures to help children see and “play” with the story. Our 1st through 5th grade lessons focus around a Bible story or passage presented with creative activities that promote questioning, wondering and learning. Our 6th and 7th grade class dig further into that day's scripture readings and begin to see how scripture informs the life of the church, preparing them to continue on to confirmation class in 8th grade.

Following church school, children in grades 1-5 (older and younger children are welcome) gather for Church School Sings - a children's choir and musical instruction class led by Ken Lovett, our organist and associate director of music. The children sing in worship on the first Sunday of each month, in addition to other special services such as the Christmas Eve pageant and Palm Sunday.

## 2. Youth Program and Confirmation

We currently have a strong and active youth program at PCCH under the leadership of Brian Russo, our Associate Minister for Youth and Senior Adults. Our middle school youth group

averages about 10 youth per year and our high school youth group averages 15-20 members per year. The size of these groups has more than doubled over the last 8 years, when Brian was hired as interim for senior adults and then director of youth and senior adults. The youth group meetings every Sunday evening average about 14 attendees. The confirmation classes at PCCH are run every other year and include 8th and 9th graders. About 15 to 20 youth join the church every other year.

The youth group participates in a wide variety of service activities including work with Habitat for Humanity as well as partnering and enjoying worship and fellowship with West Kensington Ministries. There is also a popular monthly meeting called “Theology and Pretzels” in which the youth spend a Sunday brunch discussing and debating faith, theology, ethics, and current events. Each year the youth organize and lead the entire congregation in worship on “Youth Sunday.” The youth group also organizes outings to escape rooms, laser tag, day trips to Center City, college visits, basketball games, and other opportunities for fellowship.

An annual highlight of our youth program at PCCH is the summer mission trip. These trips have included both domestic and international locations and have been very well attended. In the last three years, a contingent of 24-25 traveled to Calgary in Alberta, Canada, Rapid City, South Dakota, and Ghost Ranch, New Mexico. The youth complete volunteer projects to help the local community, worship together and with the local community, reflect on faith, and enjoy fellowship together. In addition to the strong attendance, the commitment to our youth program is illustrated in congregational fundraising for the youth mission trip, which has been consistently \$3,000-6,000 above what has been budgeted. An annual congregation-wide spaghetti dinner, which the youth prepare and serve, is a popular fundraising activity for the mission trip.



### 3. PCCH YMGA Camp

For the last several years, during the last week of August, Rev. Austin Shelley, PCCH’s Minister of Christian Education, has organized a week-long Vacation Bible School, which is open to the community as well as the congregation. Now called YMGA Camp, it attracts as many as 50 children and provides a study of bible stories through fun and a spiritually enriching mix of activities in yoga, music, gardening, and art.

## 4. Adult Education

Our ministry to children and youth may be the most visible manifestation of our dedication to Christian education, but we provide several educational opportunities for adults in the congregation, as well. As John Calvin asked in his *Institutes*, “Is it faith to understand nothing, and merely submit your convictions implicitly to the Church?” This question serves to remind us that ours is a religious tradition that encourages discussion, intellectual debate and lifelong learning.

Our weekly Wednesday morning Bible study is consistently well-attended and provides an opportunity for ministers and members to discuss and wrestle with the lectionary readings for the week. Additionally, the ministers, often in conjunction with the Adult Education Committee, plan educational programming for Second Hour, a period after the Sunday worship service. This program typically sees 10-20 participants and has recently included series on the history and enduring relevance of the Protestant Reformation, the Book of Confessions, race relations, and a series that we call “Faith at Work” in which members speak in panels about the intersection of their Christian faith and professional lives.

On the third Tuesday of each month, associate minister Brian Russo leads Theology on Tap at a local restaurant. It is well-attended and provides an opportunity for members of the congregation to discuss theological questions and issues in a relaxed setting.

## D. Social Witness

PCCH bears witness to God’s love through mission work to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, protest lives lost to gun violence, bring joy to children in poverty, welcome refugees, provide a safe harbor for victims of domestic violence, educate children, free the innocent, and so much more. In the Germantown neighborhood (15 minute drive from our church) we actively support the work of the Germantown Avenue Crisis Ministry (GACM)--of which we are a founding member-- and Face to Face Germantown. Both mission-focused nonprofits serve poorer residents in our community with meals, food pantries, and social services. Our members prep and serve a community meal monthly, donate food and funds monthly, and donate Thanksgiving “fixings” baskets in the fall and “reverse Advent boxes” of homegoods at Christmas. One of our members currently teaches six-hour financial literacy sessions as part of GACM’s THRIVE life-skills program. Our other anti-hunger efforts include financial support and donating food once a month to Our Brother’s Place men’s shelter and raising funds for West Kensington Ministry to “Stock the Pantry.”

We actively support the work of organizations that shelter the homeless. We work on Habitat for Humanity home-building projects several times a year. For at least one week each year, sometimes two, our members cook and share dinner with four families experiencing homelessness who are guests of Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network (PIHN). We hold a late summer back-to-school drive for PIHN and donate at least 30--but usually more than 50--backpacks filled with supplies for preschool and elementary school students. At Christmas, we share gifts with 25 children who are guests of



ACHIEVEability's transitional housing program for homeless families and four families who are supported by PIHN. Recently we supported The Welcome Church by participating in their outdoor worship service on the Parkway in Center City and hosting the coffee hour afterward, which has a special focus on hungry and homeless Philadelphians.

Our members are active in efforts to end gun violence, primarily through attending vigils and being active in the work of Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence. Recently, an artist in the church founded the art movement "Souls Shot," which pairs artists with those left behind when a loved one is killed by gun violence to create a portrait of the victim. PCCH's Music and Arts Committee's 2017 Festival of Music and Arts weekend was dedicated to ending gun violence, raising funds for Heeding God's Call and launching the Souls Shot exhibit, which is now traveling around Pennsylvania and is being replicated in other communities.

We also financially support, through our Social Witness budget, all of the organizations in which we are involved. Two other organizations we support financially are Dawn's Place, which improves the lives of women who have been victimized by commercial sexual exploitation, and Centurion Ministries, which works to free people on death row who were wrongly convicted. We also participate in a faith coalition created to support a young Syrian woman who came from a refugee camp in Turkey to study at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, mostly with financial support.

In addition to what is noted in this section, our youth are witnesses to God's love through the work they do on their annual mission trip, described in more detail in an earlier section. The congregation supports these trips financially through the Social Witness budget.

## E. Financial giving and stewardship

PCCH serves its congregation and communities with about \$950,000 a year in income. In a typical recent year, about 65% of the church's income comes from regular contributions, another 20% from other income (including rentals and program fees), and the remainder from investment income. Our stated goal is for each member to grow their contribution towards a tithe.



The church budgets and spends its funds conservatively. Income has met or exceeded expenditures from 2014 to 2016, and in that time both have increased about 6%. With about 190 of 325 potential giving units pledging each year, and \$580,000 in average annual contributions, annual giving per active giving unit averaged about \$3,000 from 2015 to 2017.

A small but growing Legacy Circle consists of members who have included a bequest to PCCH in their wills. These bequests have been of enormous importance to the church and its mission over the years.

In the last 20 years the church has also held three successful capital campaigns, each of which raised between \$1 and 1.5 million from the congregation. With those funds, the church was able to execute important capital improvements:

- Renovate the sanctuary and install a Mander organ and a state of the art of PA system;
- Renovate Widener Hall and transform it into a community space that accommodates everything from coffee hour after church to art installations, musical performances, community meetings, and receptions;
- Renovate the ground floor church offices
- Create a modern, airy space for the Center on the Hill, which was originally a bowling alley and storage and meeting space;
- Renovate its lightly-used chapel into a smaller performance space that works very well for chamber concerts, play reading, and small worship services, weddings, and funerals;
- Upgrade critical systems in the complex, including HVAC, energy-efficient windows, an elevator from the parking lot to the sanctuary, restrooms, and the church kitchen.

In all of our capital campaigns, the Session also decided that that one-tenth of all pledges would be given to mission outreach.

## F. A Hub of the Community

Over the last 20 years, PCCH has become an active community for music and the arts, early childhood education, and continuing education for older adults. Its resident groups position PCCH as the most important musical hub in Northwest Philadelphia and one of the most significant in the entire Philadelphia metropolitan area. The Gallery in Widener Hall is also frequently in use to exhibit important works by regional artists that give visual voice to the church's mission and social witness. Last fall, for example, artists within the PCCH congregation organized "Souls Shot," a powerful exhibition of portraits painted of victims of gun violence in Philadelphia over the preceding year.

Whenever possible, the church tries to go out into the community, to make our presence known and (we hope) to attract new members. We always have a booth at the Chestnut Hill Community Association's Fall for the Arts and Spring Garden Festivals on Germantown Avenue. For the last several years, we have also been a favorite stop in Chestnut Hill's Harry Potter Festival, providing parking, serving pancakes, and screening movies. Our annual pancake breakfast with Santa is also a community favorite.

In addition, PCCH hosts a wide variety of civic leadership and educational activities, including a weekly meeting of the Rotary Club, a monthly community speaker series luncheon, a local Boy Scout troop, and a variety of community support groups.

### 1. Music and the Arts

PCCH serves as the home to several remarkable musical ensembles, including the Grammy-winning new music group The Crossing, Piffaro: The Renaissance Choir, Tempesta di Mare, and the Pennsylvania Girlchoir.

The Crossing was founded in 2005 by Donald Nally and a group of singers with whom he worked in previous ensembles in Philadelphia and Italy. Their purpose is specifically to commission and perform new choral music. Its critically-acclaimed concerts have included works by James MacMillan, John Luther Adams, Jonathan Dove, Judith Weir, Benjamin C.S. Boyle, Herbert Howells, Bruno Bettinelli, and Gian Carlo Menotti. Since the premiere concert in November 2005, The Crossing has regularly garnered accolades acclaiming the beauty and accuracy of its performances, and in 2018 their recording Gavin Bryars: The Fifth Century won the Grammy award for Best Choral Performance.

Piffaro, the nation's finest Renaissance wind band, enjoys a dynamic full year season performing both in the US and globally in a variety of public and private venues. World-renowned for its highly polished performances as the pied-pipers of Early Music, Piffaro is also active in education and workshops, as collaborators in the research and making of

historically based instruments and programs, and as experts in reed-making and Renaissance performance practice.

Tempesta di Mare performs baroque music on baroque instruments with what the Philadelphia City Paper describes as “zest and virtuosity that transcends style and instrumentation.” Led by co-directors Gwyn Roberts and Richard Stone with concertmaster Emlyn Ngai, Tempesta di Mare’s repertoire ranges from staged opera with full orchestra to chamber music.

The Pennsylvania Girlchoir, founded in 2004 by PCCH’s then-music director Mark Anderson, has grown to over 150 girls between the ages of 8 and 18 from Philadelphia and five surrounding counties. PG, as it is known, performs a repertoire steeped in the classical tradition and enhanced by music from many cultures and time periods.

## 2. The Center on the Hill

The focal point for PCCH’s educational outreach to the community is The Center on the Hill, which bills itself as “the place for active adults.” The Center on the Hill provides a variety of programs, activities, and resources to enrich the lives of older adults in the greater Chestnut Hill area. This beautifully renovated space on the ground floor of PCCH is dedicated to activities and classes for active adults from Monday through Friday throughout the day.

Founded in 2009, The Center on the Hill partners with other organizations and individuals in the community to create a wide variety of programs for active adults. These partners include a variety of local health care facilities such as neighboring Chestnut Hill Hospital, local academic institutions such as Chestnut Hill College, and senior advocacy groups such as the AARP Safe Driver Program, Meals on Wheels, and the Alzheimer’s Association. Since 2013, when Leslie Lefer took over the role as Director of the Center on the Hill, the amount of programming offered has more than doubled. Programming includes health and wellness classes covering topics such as dementia, bone and heart health and nutrition as well as weekly fitness and wellness classes including yoga, T’ai chi, and meditation. The Center also offers classes on singing, foreign languages, arts, and crafts such as jewelry making. The Center organizes trips to popular attractions around the Philadelphia area and hosts holiday parties and community luncheons, which regularly bring in 150-200 people, including ~80% from outside of our church membership. There are typically 3-8 programs offered daily, bringing 40-125 people through our doors.

The Center on the Hill is largely supported through the church’s Senior Adult Ministry endowment, although Director Leslie Lefer has also acquired outside grants and gifts to help support this important ministry. Of particular note, she organized and executed a fund-raising campaign in 2016 that brought in \$12,000 and oversaw a \$22,000 gift from a partnering organization in 2017. Fees collected for some of the programming (\$2-\$15 per session or class)

also contribute to the financial strength of the Center. The strong leadership, responsive program offerings, and enterprising fundraising have combined to make the Center on the Hill an indispensable resource for active senior adults in the Chestnut Hill community.

### 3. PCCH Preschool

For more than 60 years, the PCCH Preschool has prepared children in our community for kindergarten. It is a non-denominational school of fun-loving, energetic 2 to 5-year-old children, guided by the values of creativity, integrity, stewardship of the earth, curiosity, and kindness. The school emphasizes the study of “Famous Folks” in its curriculum, wherein teachers and students learn together about heroes of color, innovative women, inspiring scientists, famous artists, moving musicians, and those who have worked for social justice. The preschool curriculum is one of learning through play in a project-based program including music, science, fine arts, literacy, mathematics, Spanish, and movement/dance. A large playground is located at the far end of the PCCH property.

Although the preschool program has historically been well-enrolled and financially self-sufficient, even contributing to the church budget to help cover the cost of overhead expenses, recent changes in the school’s leadership and competition from other preschools resulted in a significant reduction in preschool enrollment, which led to a financial shortfall in the program and increased pressure on the church’s operating budget. In response to these challenges, the church created a committee to provide additional oversight to the program. The preschool has now returned to self-sufficiency and the church recently hired a new director, Carla James. Among the exciting changes she has overseen is the introduction of Philadelphia’s first 5-day interdisciplinary Spanish immersion preschool program.

### 4. Other Community Groups

The PCCH facilities are also used by numerous other community groups throughout the week, including the Boy Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers, and even an area square dancing club. The building is occupied, and the parking lot is busy, nearly every day of the week and on many evenings.

## G. Church Life

There are many ways for members of PCCH to share in fellowship outside of worship.

Coffee Hour is held immediately after worship each week in Widener Hall or on the church lawn when weather permits. We gather together six to eight



times a year after the service for all-church brunches in Widener Hall or for BBQ/potluck lunch on the church lawn. Dinner Church is held quarterly in the Cruikshank Chapel and provides a chance to gather together for a potluck dinner and brief worship service.

The Church Life Committee also helps organize other social events throughout the year, ranging from Kentucky Derby and Shrove Tuesday parties to a night at the theater and family-friendly hikes. Occasional Texas Hold 'Em poker nights are popular events that raise money for the mission trips.

The Music and Arts Committee also plans our annual Music and Arts Festival, which includes art exhibitions in Widener Hall, play readings performed by members, and musical performances. The performances are typically preceded by a wine and cheese reception. One relatively recent innovation has been an annual Evening of Melody & Comedy in which members (including children and youth) get up on stage and sing or perform, with proceeds going to support the Music and Arts program. Artistic gifts are also offered to the glory of God every Sunday through the work of a relatively new and very active flower guild.

## IV. Transition

In September, 2017, Rev. Cynthia Jarvis announced her intention to retire.

Traditionally, at the time of the pastor's retirement, PCCH would hire an interim minister, engage in a period of self-study, elect a Pastor Nominating Committee, and begin to search for our next pastor and head of staff. However, there was a great deal of concern on the Session that such a path would be unduly long and disruptive of our progress and program as a congregation. Instead, the Personnel Committee and the Session, in consultation with the Presbytery, have decided to pursue a different path, as outlined in Section G-2.0504 of the Book of Order. This path, though relatively new, has been employed by at least three other churches in the Presbytery, including the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, and several churches in the denomination, including the Second Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis.

Accordingly, in February, 2018, the congregation approved the selection of a Mission Study Committee. In May, the congregation elected a Pastor Nominating Committee, which will begin its work after the Mission Study Committee completes its report. Rev. Jarvis will remain at PCCH while the Pastor Nominating Committee reviews candidates, although she will not be involved in the search. Once a new pastor and head of staff is selected and approved by the congregation, Rev. Jarvis will remain at PCCH for a few transitional months, as the new pastor moves in, and then she will officially retire.

## V. The CAT Survey: A Portrait of PCCH

In the spring of 2018, in order to gauge the opinion of the congregation as we begin our search for a new pastor and head of staff, the Mission Study Committee commissioned a detailed survey of the congregation, the Congregational Assessment Tool (CAT), produced by Holy Cow! Consulting. One hundred and eighty members of the congregation (close to 90% of the average weekly attendance) completed the survey. The Mission Study Committee held an after-church interpretive session, led by a consultant from Holy Cow!, and also three informal listening sessions to enable members of the congregation to ask questions about the transition process and to state their opinions face to face.

### A. Overview: high energy, high satisfaction

It is gratifying to learn that the large majority of our congregation is happy with PCCH, its program, and its direction. Nearly 90% expressed agreement with the statement that they are “satisfied with how things are in our church” and nearly as many disagreed with the statement that “we are just going through the motions of church activity.” Overall, respondents expressed a high level of satisfaction with our church and its energy level.

There was widespread agreement with the statement that “Our pastor articulates a clear vision for the church and keeps it before the people in a compelling way.” This support extended to our worship services, preaching, and music. Nearly 91% of respondents agreed that the worship services are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content. Furthermore, 93% of respondents felt that the music at the church is outstanding in quality and appropriate in style to our congregation.

Support for the current way of doing things was not unanimous, of course. Although ours is a congregation that for the most part embraces theologically complex and challenging sermons, a few respondents expressed their belief that the sermons are of a “highly cerebral caliber” which sometimes left hearers behind. Others remain uncomfortable with two particular changes that have been made in the service of worship over the last several years: changing the communion service to intinction and a weekly passing of the peace. Some members feel very strongly that we should return to serving communion in the pews and limit passing of the peace to once a month. As these changes were made several years ago, the enduring nature of these concerns illustrates the sincerity of the feelings of those members. Furthermore, that these members continue to remain active in the church and work to restore the worship services to the previous format is testament to their dedication to the Church.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) reported that a friendly atmosphere prevails among the membership of the church, but a perceived political bias in sermons and services

has left some members feeling uncomfortable. One member commented that there are times when conservative members “wonder if there is still a place for them at PCCH.” While it is not surprising that our clergy and congregation may discuss when the teachings of Christ have application to current events, PCCH strives to be a welcoming environment for individuals of diverse political beliefs and, as noted above, there is a strong belief that a friendly atmosphere prevails. As our sign out front says, we are an “inclusive community of faith”—and that applies across the political spectrum. It is incumbent on the leaders of the church—both lay and clerical—to ensure that there are avenues for dissatisfied members to raise concerns within the church and to see that concerns are addressed and resolved fairly and openly.

The survey also confirmed that the congregation feels PCCH provides high quality Christian education that is appropriate to every age and stage of life—with more than 90 percent of the congregation tending to agree, agreeing, or strongly agreeing with that sentiment. More than half of us agree that we have a responsibility to continue our learning and spiritual formation throughout our lives. When compared with other congregations who have answered these questions, our commitment to and rating of our quality of Christian education are extremely high.

The CAT survey did show a widespread belief that there is room for improvement in readiness for lay ministry. Only about 40% of respondents believe that we do a good job of helping our members understand that each of us is called to ministry, as well as preparing us for ministry by helping us discern our gifts. However, most of us do believe that those who are involved in lay ministry are well supported.

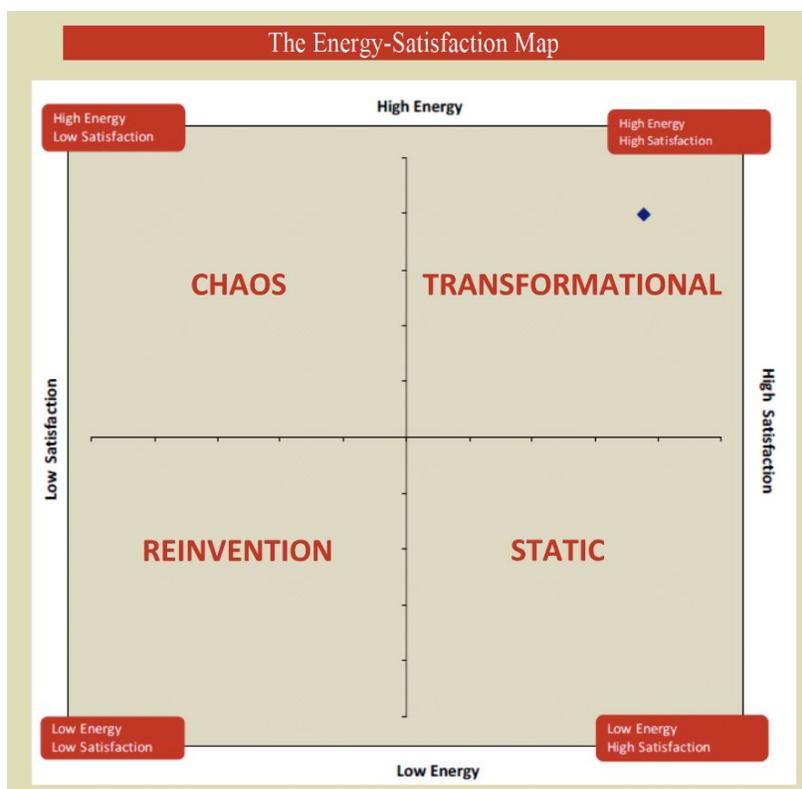
The congregation is supportive of the decision-making structures of the church. Substantial majorities of the congregation agree that our leaders are representative of the church, show a genuine concern to know what the congregation is thinking regarding important decisions, and provide adequate opportunity for consideration of different approaches. Although about 30 percent of the congregation agreed with the statement that the “same small group of people” make most of the important decisions in the church, the survey creators noted that the share of the congregation holding this view is lower than in 90 percent of other similar congregations. Nevertheless, this is a concern of which church leaders, and the Nomination Committee, should be cognizant.

On the whole, the congregation believes that our church manages internal conflict well and that conflict within the congregation is resolved appropriately. More than 90 percent of the congregation believes that problems between groups in the church are usually resolved through mutual effort. Similarly, fewer than 10 percent of the respondents agreed with the notion that there was a disturbing amount of conflict in the congregation.

Overall, the creators of the CAT survey, Holy Cow! Consulting, tell us that the “health and vitality” of a church can be measured by how much energy and engagement the congregation

sees in the church and how satisfied the congregation is with the church overall. Through the results from the survey, we see that our congregation experiences a high level of energy and excitement in our church, and is also highly satisfied. Nearly two-thirds believe that PCCH has been effective in fulfilling its mission. This assessment is underscored by the fact that no specific issues internal to our church were identified by more than 20% of respondents as needing to be discussed so that satisfaction could increase.

Along the same lines, when asked if the church needs to rethink its basic purpose and mission to be effective in the future, nearly 50% of respondents disagreed. About 20% of those responding support moderate change (undefined), half the respondents believe some (less than moderate) change is necessary, and about 20% call for no change at all. There is no clear focus for improvement.



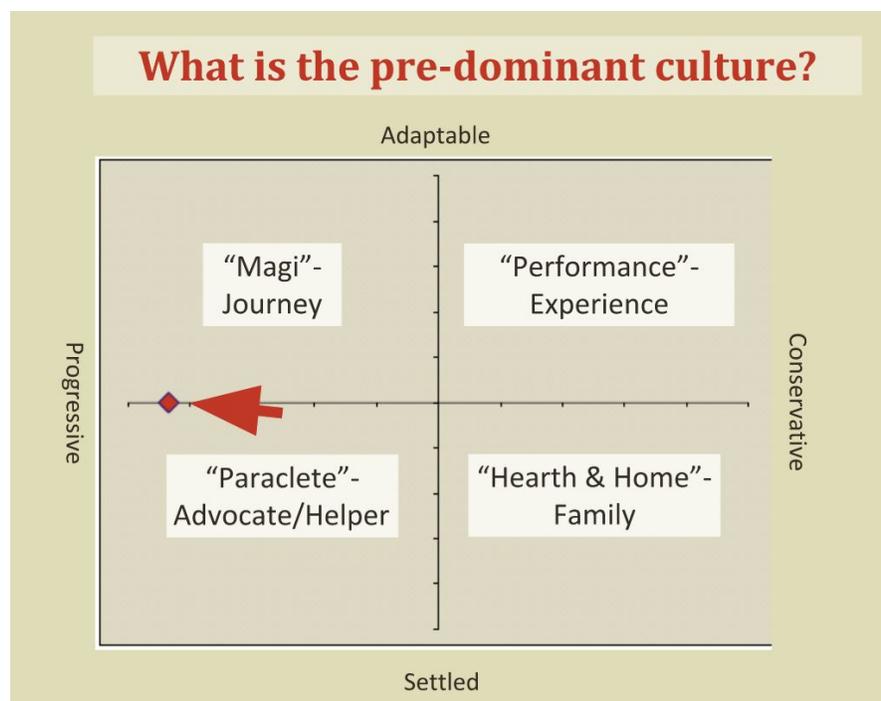
## B. A “Magi” and “Paraclete” Church

Holy Cow! Consulting uses some survey responses in order to “map” where a congregation lies on two axes which lead to characterizing a congregation among four different types. The axes are: approach to change (ranging between “adaptable” and “settled”) and theological perspective, (ranging between “conservative” and “progressive”). Our responses show us as a congregation that is strongly (but not extremely) theologically progressive, while in equal measure adaptable and settled - placing us on the edge of two types--the “Magi” church and the “Paraclete” church. This reflects the diversity within our membership.

According to Holy Cow! consulting, a Magi church is one that is “ultimately concerned with the rational integrity of their faith, the just application of faith to life, and the journey of understanding and discovery”. Such congregations value the faith journey of questioning and discovering and are strong advocates for those who are not in the majority or cannot advocate for themselves. A “Paraclete” church, on the other hand, is “ultimately concerned with the development of communities that are intellectually open and reflective but pay attention to structure and ritual.” Paraclete cultures, then, “tend to be less demanding of a particular understanding of faith but more clear about the benefits of a particular liturgical tradition.”

Taken to their extremes, of course, these strengths can become weaknesses. Magi churches, the consultants say, can sometimes seem cold or uncaring, can “overthink” issues, and can forget that, for many, it is emotion that leads to action, and not just rational thought. Paraclete churches can appear “wishy-washy” regarding values and unable to balance openness with reasonable expectations of others. Any pastor of PCCH should embrace these models while also striving for balance.

We believe, however, that the outlook for our church is bright. Using the language of the survey creators, churches in our high energy - high satisfaction position are “transformational ...[they] are sources of new meaning and purpose for their members”. Clearly this is a positive position for a church to occupy! Our challenge, then, is to understand which characteristics of our church are that source of meaning and purpose for us, so that we maintain them while at the same time continuing to be flexible and adjusting to our congregation’s needs.



## C. Challenges

When asked where PCCH should invest additional effort and energy going forward, the congregation chose the following as their leading priorities. One in particular stood out:

1. The church should develop strategies for attracting and reaching new people—and for incorporating those who join PCCH into the church’s life, so they meet people, get involved, and feel a part of the congregational community as quickly as possible.

The next four priorities were grouped closely together.

2. The church should work vigorously to stimulate the desire and willingness of the congregation to increase its financial giving and enable the development of new programs as they seem desirable.

3. The church should develop ministries to provide pastoral care to “those broken by life circumstances.”

4. The church should create more opportunities in service and fellowship for members, new and old, to develop relationships with one another, expanding and enriching the sense of family and fellowship within PCCH.

5. Finally, the church should expand outreach ministries, both on its own and in cooperation with other faith communities, serving surrounding communities.

It should be noted that members indicate in other answers that they believe that these steps are already being taken in the life of the church. We believe that by choosing these as priorities, the congregation is emphasizing the importance of putting even more planning and resources into them.

A number of members, especially in the free-response section of the CAT survey, suggested other priorities for the church to consider as it embraces its future. These challenges include, in no particular order, working intentionally to attract visitors and prospective members from Chestnut Hill itself and from nearby sections of Philadelphia; increasing diversity (defined variously) within the congregation; providing more programs to aid parents in raising children—and trying to schedule such programs while the children and young people are involved in their own activities at church; and ensuring that the outstanding work of the continuing ministerial staff be allowed to flourish.

## VI. Critical Abilities for the Next Pastor

As reflected in the CAT survey, the congregation views the following as the most important qualities in our next pastor:

1: Preaching

2: Strategic leadership, specifically the capacity to cast a vision and lead the church toward the realization of the vision

3: Pastoral care

(Note: these three abilities were far and away the top three choices of the congregation, according to the CAT survey. The next three items were very close in rank.)

4: The capacity to lead a church through a significant and necessary period of change

5: Teaching and training the congregation to deepen understanding, form character, and equip members with new skills

6: Administration, including the capacity to manage the church operationally

## VII. Conclusion

As PCCH faces the departure of its longtime pastor and begins the search for new leadership, it finds itself with many strengths. In fact, its very strength may be its greatest challenge. At a time when many mainline churches find themselves in decline, crisis, and despair, PCCH has been blessed with strong leadership and a thriving program. The CAT survey, our conversations with members, and our study of the data all demonstrate not only love and respect for Rev. Jarvis as a person and our pastor but also the combination of “high satisfaction—high energy” that is the hallmark of strong churches. Likewise, our congregation’s identity— its sense of its own nature, life, and mission— consists equally of an interest in progressive theology, meaningful worship, infusion of faith with intellectual inquiry, and personal growth on the one hand and on the other its vitality through fellowship, friendship, pastoral care, and social outreach.

The congregation doesn’t want to lose this identity. It doesn’t want its satisfaction or its energy to decline, and it doesn’t want change that would endanger its satisfaction or energy. Repeatedly, the evidence affirmed “the church’s *vision* of itself and its ministry” that the pastor helped create during her tenure at PCCH. Yet the congregation recognizes that there is a time to let go and a need to face change—indeed, to embrace it. The challenge is how to retain what is best in a previous pastor’s “shaping” of a church and at the same time be open to a new future—new leadership, new approaches, new initiatives, new directions of the Spirit.

In short, satisfaction must not become complacency or resistance to change. The primary challenge for PCCH is to avoid trying to replicate Rev. Jarvis or freeze the life of the church at the moment of her departure, but to go forward from where she has led us and build on the best of her legacy.

The comments of several members captured this tension and goal. One said, “Cindy has made great progress here and we need to continue to build upon this progress.” Another wrote of the notable qualities that Cindy has brought to her ministry at PCCH, and added, “I would hope that we can find such leadership in the next senior pastor.” And from a third: “My hope is for a new minister who will want to help us grow—not change who we are.”

These comments speak for many: a recognition within the congregation of the importance of celebrating its past, appreciating its foundation, and preparing for a new chapter in its life.