

In the fall of 2014, Germantown Presbyterian Church began a six-month evaluation and strategic planning exercise. The purpose was to engage the congregation in identifying our church's unique God-given history, current values and strengths, and our future areas of ministry. GPC has had a vital and meaningful existence in Germantown, TN, for over 175 years, and GPC currently is, by most standards, a healthy congregation. We acknowledge, though, that our good history does not automatically guarantee a strong future. Following this process of evaluation and soul-searching, we pray that GPC will be inspired to maintain our identity as we reform, improve, and grow. We are prepared to embrace new opportunities and address new challenges for Christianity as we approach the third decade of the 21st Century. We, the leaders of GPC, earnestly desire to understand our current ministry context so that we may be useful to God in demonstrating God's love and drawing more people into a life-saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Chris Joyner, of TAG Consulting Group, led our church in the evaluation and planning process by engaging the church in the following:

1. **Broad surveys** soliciting opinions regarding a wide-range of church life and activities, including, worship services, education programs, fellowship opportunities, mission and outreach, evangelism efforts, hospitality, innovation, style, impressions of the church to outsiders, and much more.
2. **Multiple focus groups** consisting of 8-10 people who delved deeper with Chris regarding the survey questions and results, as well as other aspects regarding GPC's identity, history, mission, effectiveness, and appeal as a church.
3. **Consultant calls** with staff and church members, including multiple conversations with pastoral leadership.
4. **Extensive demographic studies** within a five-mile radius of the church, examining ages, income levels, education levels, church participation, racial-ethnic backgrounds, and more.
5. **Three Leadership Retreats** involving Deacons and Elders in which we listened to, discussed, debated, and prayed over the meaning of the surveys, focus groups results, and demographic data. We discussed the church's history and key moments in GPC's life, and we thoughtfully considered our strengths and shortcomings.

At the conclusion of this process, we have identified the following:

A. GPC's Five Core Values: Germantown Presbyterian Church affirms the core theological beliefs and themes of the Reformed Tradition, which we cherish as our theological heritage. Such beliefs include the centrality of the Lordship of Jesus Christ; the glory of the Trinitarian God, who has revealed himself to humanity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; God's sovereignty over creation; the majesty of God's grace in response to the depravity of human sin; the work of the Holy Spirit in justifying and sanctifying believers in a life of faith and discipleship; and the authority of Scripture as our final rule in faith and life. We value our Presbyterian and Reformed heritage within the larger history of Christianity.

In addition to all that we share with other Christians and churches in the body of Christ, we have identified certain ideals and traits that are unique to our church after 175 years of existence. We call these unique traits Core Values, because they run deep into our life and identity as a church. Our Core Values have not been and will not always be the same as these, but these are ours now.

1. **Trust in God's Enduring Faithfulness**

GPC has a wonderful 175 year history. Through many different seasons and struggles of the church's life, God has been faithful. We have an important history in the Germantown community. God has guided GPC and has blessed us with growth as the community has grown. Historic Evans Chapel is symbolic of the church's legacy over the decades. Even more important than any physical structure, though, is the spiritual house that God has built among the congregation of GPC. We are a witness to God's enduring faithfulness to his people. We believe that our congregation embodies the affirmation of Psalm 100:5: "For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations."

2. **Unity: Communion over Controversy**

We treasure our unity in Christ. We take seriously the Scriptural mandate for unity, as stated in Ephesians 4:3: "Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Like all other churches, there will be disagreements among our community of faith. At times there will be painful conflict. As the church engages the world around us, we will not always agree on theology, doctrines, strategy, and issues. We do not naively gloss over the potential for disagreement that emerges from dearly-held Christian convictions. There is, however, an abiding belief among us that our unity is more important than any issue that threatens to divide us. Scripture praises harmony among believers, and we emphasize this unity in our life together over and against divisive issues. We strive for Christ's love and our mutual love to bind us together when forces would seek to divide us over controversial events or issues.

3. **Honoring our Important Moments**

A life of faith is a series of important moments in the continuum of discipleship, and we celebrate these moments in each other's lives. We cherish life's defining moments best of all: births, baptisms, confirmations, graduations, weddings, funerals, achievements, and more. We recognize the special joy and meaning of these events among us. We honor to God and each other when we celebrate life's abundant blessings and carry life's heavy burdens as a community of faith.

4. **Transformative Education**

God created our minds and engages us in spiritual growth through both head and heart. Jesus is a teacher, and we are his disciples and students. He is training us to live as he did. Through our education ministry we seek to follow the command of Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." Our church emphasizes and appreciates excellent education programs, in both church and secular settings, and we believe that a life of the mind is invaluable to the development of human flourishing. We listen for God's Spirit to guide us in understanding the Bible and how it speaks to contemporary life and discipleship. We value education for children, youth, and adults, and we recognize that people learn through a variety of different methods.

5. **Generous Spirit**

GPC is a giving congregation. We have been blessed with a spirit of generosity throughout our history, which includes financial generosity and much more. Whenever needs are raised among us, we respond with generous acts to demonstrate our faith in the manner of James 2:14-17: "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." We enjoy the challenge of financial stewardship toward the church and its ministry budgets. Our generous spirit moves well beyond the financial realm, however, as our members are generous with their time, their

compassion, their prayers, and their service. We believe that God is generous toward us beyond measure, and we respond to God's grace by living generously to those around us.

B. Clarifying our Vision and Strengthening our Connections: The result of our TAG consulting process is the identification of how we might offer our unique values and strengths to serve God in our place and time. Through our witness, we hope that God will draw more people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and an on-going life of discipleship. We believe that our church will be most beneficial to God if we concentrate on clarifying our mission and strengthening the connections that bind us to God, one-another, our community, and the world.

1. **Clarifying our Vision:** Our church's purpose is found in Jesus' final words to his disciples: *"Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus charges us to engage the world on his behalf so that more people will know him and become his disciples. He promises to go with us, to prepare the way for us, and to strengthen us along our way. This report and the TAG research material are meant to offer clarity on how to fulfill our mission in our day and age. GPC has a rich 175-year history, and our commission has always been the same (to make and train disciples). Our strategy and tactics, however, have evolved and changed over our history. What worked to draw people to Christ in rural Germantown in 1850 is different from what worked in Germantown in 1900, 1950, and 2000.

We need to see ourselves in our context clearly. We are mid-way through the second decade of the 21st Century, and Germantown is no longer the rural suburb people have traditionally associated with our town. Germantown is now a small city in an urban area with a growing and diverse citizenry. Its population remains relatively well-off, but our demographic studies reveal a wide variety of people across the socio-economic spectrum within a five-mile radius of the church. In a culture that is moving further into the "post-Christian" era, fewer people claim faith and attend church, and churches are competing for people's attention and participation on Sundays and throughout the week. As we build our church for the future, we want to see our culture and our place in it clearly.

2. **Strengthen our Connections:** God has called us to give witness to Jesus Christ and to make disciples in our community and beyond. We are a church that values the connections we have within the body of Christ. In comparing the church to a human body, the New Testament highlights the close connections between valued members. A local congregation, as a small part of the whole body, lives under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as expressed in Ephesians 4: *"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."* Our connections with other Christians are not solely dependent upon us and what we do. We are connected to the other members of the church by the Holy Spirit. We live in response to God's grace, and the church is God's gracious gift of community.

Our goals for the future aim at clarifying our vision and strengthening our connections. For the foreseeable future, roughly the next five years, we will analyze and develop our church's ministry and mission along these guidelines and in these areas. Our life together will reflect a commitment to these ideals, and we will build our communal life together with a special, disciplined emphasis toward:

1. Hospitality

Several of Jesus' parables are based on the principle of hospitality and how important it is to welcome the stranger into our midst. The Bible calls us to be generously welcoming: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself." (Lev. 19:34). There are many good friendships within our church, yet there are also practices among us that alienate. While we are friendly and polite in many settings, the Biblical mandate for hospitality calls for a depth of welcome and the development of relationships beyond our current habits.

2. Mentoring

The best kind of learning comes as an apprentice: one who learns under the guidance of another with experience, skill, and wisdom. Some of the most valued experiences of personal growth and faith in our church have come through mentoring relationships. Both mentor and mentee learn from each other in the process of sharing faith, ideas, and concerns with one another. The Apostle Paul mentored Timothy in their time together, and Timothy developed into a person of deep faith and an excellent leader. Naomi and Ruth shared a mentoring relationship, growing in love for one another in several seasons of life. We have reservoirs of wisdom born of experience in our congregation that ought be shared with others in a variety of life situations, and we will aim to engage mentoring relationships between members, especially in our education program.

3. Local School Partnership

In our discovery phase of this consulting process, we learned that our surrounding community does not know us very well. We will remedy this by concentrating the bulk of our new mission efforts on people and projects within our community and areas within close proximity of the church. Given our congregation's valued commitment toward education, we will minister to our community by beginning and developing an ongoing relationship with a local school. We will build relationships with students, teachers, and administrators through prayer and service so that the school as a whole will thrive.

4. Ministry to People with Special Needs

We will embrace people with special needs as if we were embracing Jesus himself. We desire for our church to be a leader in the Mid-South for ministry to people with special needs as a demonstration of the Gospel and God's kingdom at work. Jesus' ministry was spent with people who had various physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs. In the past, churches in general have not strategically engaged people with special needs, such as emotional and intellectual disabilities. We have discovered that there are many persons and families within our own congregation whose faith in God and participation in church would be magnified if we devoted our efforts to special needs ministry.

5. Communication

Communication is the key to healthy relationships. Communication is essential to a vital church life where trust is built and maintained through openness and a steady flow of information and decisions. Members, staff, and whole groups make assumptions that others know and understand their operations and decisions. Our church has frequent, and sometimes debilitating, breakdowns in communication which lead to breakdowns in trust. These breakdowns are frustrating and dividing, and we will find tactical ways to increase communication and the flow of information about church ministries and leadership decisions.

6. Technology Roadmap

In a rapidly-changing world, technology changes fastest of all. These changes can be confusing and difficult to keep pace with, and yet they can also be used for good in enhancing faith and strengthening connections. The advent of the Internet Age in the late 20th Century is resulting in changes that are bringing people together and connecting whole communities in constructive ways. Social media and digital technology are

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just two examples among many of the growing use of technology to advance faith and learning. We will embrace appropriate technology in advancing the church's worship, ministry, and programming for people of all ages.

C. Mission Statement: "Celebrate God's grace in Christ together: accept it, live it, share it!"

While no single statement can adequately capture all that our church stands for and hopes to be, these words demonstrate key components of our faith and life. The emphasis is on God's grace and our response to it. A life lived with and for God is grounded in grace. Our worship services are celebratory. We glorify God in worship and offer our gratitude and joy for all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We strive for unity and for a sense of community in what we do together as the body of Christ. A life of discipleship begins by acknowledging and accepting God's grace, and the beginning of the Christian life is the start of one's personal and spiritual renewal as a creature made in God's image. Living gracefully as a follower of Christ is the most rewarding life possible. Trusting God through life's various seasons and seismic changes is challenging, and discerning God's guidance is often hard. We want our congregation to be a community of Christians relying on God's grace through life's sorrows and joys, through failure and success, through sin and forgiveness. This life is contagious, and we are called to share God's grace through active evangelism. If we believe that discipleship is the most rewarding life, then we will tell others about it. If we believe in our church, then we will invite others into it. If we believe in God's grace through Christ, then we will demonstrate it in how we live.