



CAPITOL HILL  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## DREAMS AND VISIONS REPORT TO THE SESSION

*June 2023*

### **Part 1: Receiving Our Charge**

CHPC has undergone many challenges and changes in recent years. And now there's a strong sense of excitement and new possibilities. What drives it? How can we capture the positive energy and provide some greater focus and direction? How can we move from surviving COVID, to thriving for the next 5, 10, 20, 50 years? Where is God calling us?

To better discern this call, last June, the Session voted to create a Strategic Dreams and Visions Task Force, comprised of 5 members broadly representative of the congregation, and guided by the Holy Spirit, to develop and report to the Session within one year a strategic vision with specific areas of focus and action steps for Capitol Hill Presbyterian Church to take over the next 3-5 years to become the church community that Jesus Christ is calling us to be. The effort was to include broad input from the congregation, its ministries, and the Capitol Hill community, commencing with the administration of the Church Assessment Tool in Fall 2022. This report summarizes that work.

The DVTF members are: Cameron Anders, Lee Cliburn, Clara Gillispie, Adrienne Marsh, Chris Smith (chair), along with the leadership of Pastor Rachel. The Reverend Tara Sphuler McCabe is our National Capital Presbytery liaison. Each person has worked diligently and faithfully throughout this process, and brought tremendous insights to the work of the task force.

Additionally, the Session subsequently acted on early recommendations from the DVTF to create a separate Building Assessment Team (along with the existing Energy Task Force), and a Fundraising Investigation Team. Also, when the Session and congregation previously voted to sell the Manse and dedicate a portion of the proceeds towards a Capital Campaign, it was decided that the campaign should also include a Service component. There is a lot going on! Yet while there are many branches, we are attached to one vine. Taken together, this is the essential work of "equipping the saints" to faithfully serve Jesus Christ now and for years to come.

### **Part 2: Building on Our Strong Foundation**

Our first step was to, last Fall, implement the Congregation Assessment Tool—the CAT scan—a structured survey instrument widely used by thousands of other churches. And the Congregational CAT scan results showed a big positive change in satisfaction and energy compared to the last CAT scan 2016: we moved from low energy and low satisfaction, to high energy and high satisfaction. It reflected a church that is healthy, open, and excited, overflowing with possibility. The work we do now will be from a place of strength and abundance and assurance, not fear and anxiety. We have a highly committed congregation, engaged leadership, all held together in the hands of a loving God.

Specifically, the CAT identified four key “drivers” and foci for additional effort and energy: “opportunities for learning and spiritual formation”, “an atmosphere of genuine care and concern for the congregation”, “enlarging/improving the physical facilities of the church to expand or enhance our ministries,” and “developing the spiritual generosity of the people to financially support the ministry of the church.”

In March, building on the CAT results, we then conducted two “visioning sessions” during Worship, with the Session, and online, to explore these topics in greater depth (see detailed Appendix). We explored the following questions:

- Share an impactful/formative experience from your life that deepened your faith.
- What does spiritual growth mean to you given your complex lifestyle?
- Share an impactful/formative experience when you received genuine care and concern at CHPC.
- In what way would you enlarge/improve the physical facilities of the church; and what ministry would be expanded/enhanced by this improvement?
- When have you seen spiritual generosity?
- What motivates you to financially support CHPC? Why?

The participation level and depth of responses were overwhelming and moving. It resulted in a rich database of feedback and input. The full responses were captured and shared with the Session and the BAT, and provided the basis for the next phase of the DVTF work.

### **Part 3: Focusing on Our Values**

Following the Visioning sessions, the task force met nearly every week. We engaged in prayer and study for how best to discern the key insights from the treasure trove of feedback and inspiration that flowed from Visioning Sessions. With the guidance and direction of our Presbytery liaison Tara Spuhler McCabe, we followed a structured exercise to identify a small number of core values flowing from the CAT scan and Visioning sessions. Based on that intensive exercise, the DVTF kept coming back again and again to four core values that rose to the top:

1. **Showing an Open Heart**
2. **Nurturing Spiritual Growth**
3. **Valuing All**
4. **Building Community**

**Stated together, CHPC is dedicated to demonstrating genuine care and concern with an open heart, building a strong sense of community, valuing all, and nurturing spiritual formation and growth.**

To continue to encourage and build on the high energy and engagement level of the congregation, these four values are being recommended to be used as foundational and organizing principles to infuse and inform all of CHPC decision-making going forward. In that way, they can act like a filter, to sort things to be advanced versus things to be left behind; and act like a funnel, to bring greater

focus to our varied activities and ministries to ensure the congregation's key drivers of engagement are being addressed. From that perspective, the four values can also be viewed as framing questions:

1. **Does it show an “open heart” of genuine care and concern? How?**
2. **Does it build community?**
3. **Does it value all?**
4. **Does it foster spiritual formation, development, growth?**

We believe it will be advantageous to use this formulation on a regular basis as a compass to guide and evaluate decisions in advance, and to inform them after the fact, in order to reinforce and build on the positive congregational dynamic of high energy and satisfaction; as a way to “tend our garden” for what to prune, and what to plant going forward.

#### **Part 4: Acting on Our Values**

Based on the development of the above four core values and additional feedback from listening sessions to date, the DVTF identified six recommendations to resourced CHPC to support and act on our values. These recommendations and their implementation are described as follows:

##### **1. Ordaining Deacons**

On the CAT, the number one energy driver for the congregation was “genuine care and concern for members.” During the visioning sessions, we heard over and over again about the meal trains, home visits, prayers of concern and other examples of hands-on help as evidence of this level of care. **We recommend that CHPC Ordain Deacons** as a way to cement this “genuine care and concern” as a high priority for CHPC, and give it a focus and dedicated resources. The Book of Order provides a guide, with great flexibility, for the ordination of Deacons:

*The office of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of sympathy, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, of exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies and sound judgment should be chosen for this office. It is the duty of deacons, first of all, to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith. They shall assume such other duties as may be delegated to them from time to time by the session... Book of Order, G-6.0401-02*

Deacons at CHPC could, for example, set up a system for maintaining regular contact with members and friends, to survey and respond to the congregation's care needs, and help to organize and deliver responses when needed, augmenting the Pastor and the Session. Under this proposal, Deacons are intended to serve as “worker bees”. There would not be a Board of Deacons. The Session would remain the decision-making body of the church per the Book of Order. Deacons would serve under the direction of the Session.

##### **2. Widening the Circle**

Scripture says: “*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*”

With so much positive energy, excitement, and activity, it is incumbent on us to share this “good news” more widely, and be more deliberate about doing it. That is why **we are calling for a “Widening the Circle” initiative for the year 2024** to highlight and promote opportunities for people to join our wonderful church, and for us to be more active, visible, and in partnership in the community. This begins by putting the question “how can we widen our circle” at top of mind for every ministry. It means being more intentional about the path from visitor to seeker to member. It means finding ways to raise visibility and partnerships beyond CHPC (e.g., the military presence in the neighborhood, organizations like More Light Presbyterians, Earth Care Presbyterian Network.)

### 3. Building The Digital Church

An important part of the discussion during the Visioning sessions was about ministering to and among “our complex lifestyles”. The new reality post-covid is that digital connections have become an essential means to augment in-person worship, meetings, gatherings, and information sharing, as well as lower the barrier to greater participation. Digital engagement, whether it be via email, the website, social media, Zoom, or YouTube—is now used to some extent across the entire congregation. In fact, we have elders and members who could not serve or participate at CHPC without these tools. Digital tools can also offer the opportunity to “automate” routine tasks to free up valuable volunteer resources. In short, the digital church represents the present and future of what it means to be “church”. Therefore, **we call on the Session to put in place in 2024 a Digital Church initiative**, to embrace this reality and ensure that all aspects of CHPC ministries are resourced and augmented with appropriate digital access and support tools. This could include anything from digital social events, to up to date and permanent hybrid worship and meeting capabilities, to optimizing the website, social media, scheduling and calendar to better serve both in-person and virtual participants, as well as the wider Capitol Hill community and beyond.

### 4. Spiritual Formation

The desire for spiritual growth was a top driver of congregational energy identified in the CAT, and articulated as one of our four core values. The visioning process confirmed how many people come to CHPC from differing walks of life and faith backgrounds, for example, spanning the catholic to the Jewish traditions and beyond. One visitor came to CHPC for the very first time on one of the special visioning Sundays—which was probably quite daunting—yet stayed for the whole program, and has kept coming back since. “Meeting people where they are” has been a hallmark of CHPC, and is a prime example of “valuing all”, just like “the essential tenants of the reformed tradition” remain central to our approach and understanding of the life of faith. Therefore, **we are calling for an Spiritual Formation initiative** to put a “scaffolding” and structure to more purposefully shepherd and guide members and visitors on their personal faith journey and discernment of what God’s call is for them. The goal is to walk together with people on the entire path from visitor to seeker to member to ministries and beyond. And it means also finding ways to honor the journey of finding God’s call outside of church, too. This could include elements like an annual spiritual self-assessment (beyond “time and talents”), structured one on one conversations, and related training. It could include tailoring new member activities, Sunday School, retreats, service projects along with this approach to keep the path of spiritual development more top of mind.

## 5. Engaging Our Neighborhood

The four core values might appear on the surface to be inward looking. Yet all four--Open Heart, Fostering Spiritual Growth, Valuing All, and Building Community—represent aspects that are outward looking too. We are called to be “in the world, but not of the world.” And our neighborhood is changing rapidly. Many years ago, CHPC participated in programs like Meals on Wheels, which provided many with first-hand contact with the needs of the neighborhood. It has been a number of years since we’ve done an updated neighborhood assessment; the PNC process provided a neighborhood overview several years ago. Now, **we are recommending that Session work with the National Capital Presbytery to conduct a Capitol Hill “Community Engagement” process.** This is a new hands-on program being offered that provides tools and resources to go out and listen and learn in the local community, and then come back to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider how to respond as a church. Some of our members have participated in the program in other DMV communities. This would directly reinforce and inform our efforts to “widen the circle.”

## 6. Building Implementation

Finally, a big part of the CAT and the Vision discussions involved a high level of interest in improving our physical property, especially to make it more welcoming, efficient, safer, and useful (did anybody mention bathrooms?), aka “as beautiful and warm as our people.” The listening sessions suggested that participants valued “improving”—rather than enlarging—the building. **We acknowledge and affirm the great work of the Building Assessment Team to collate and review these current needs along with prior efforts, and encourage the Session to move forward from assessment to execution with a building/capital campaign working group.** Additional input from the congregation will be useful as those priorities are further sorted out. We believe the four core values should also help inform the decision process so that our property becomes a physical embodiment of our values for years to come.

## **Appendix I: Visioning Sessions Executive Summary**

### *Congregational Sunday Visioning Session, March 5*

Question 1: Share an impactful/formative experience from your life that deepened your faith.

Respondents shared various impactful experiences that deepened their faith, including the power of prayer, experiencing healing through faith, the power of forgiveness, the kindness and support of their church community, and the importance of community in the church. Other experiences included finding a sense of community, redemption, and the unconditional love of God, as well as being involved in service projects, traveling and seeing other cultures, and attending faith-based programs and classes. Overall, these experiences helped them understand the role of faith in their lives and strengthened their beliefs.

Question 2: What does spiritual growth mean to you given your complex lifestyle?

The responses highlighted various perspectives on spiritual growth given a complex lifestyle. Some viewed spiritual growth as a means to move beyond survival mode and thrive, while others value the integration of faith into everyday activities, including work life. Many respondents stressed the importance of being part of a church community and actively engaging in church activities, such as adult Sunday school, praying for others, and service opportunities. Some found spiritual growth through stepping outside of themselves, getting out of their comfort zones, and listening to others. The role of church in providing a space to be comfortable and intentional with one's faith was also emphasized. Ultimately, spiritual growth is seen as a journey of loving God and others, putting faith into action, and finding God moments in daily life.

Question 3: Share an impactful/formative experience when you received genuine care and concern at CHPC.

The respondents shared various impactful experiences where they received genuine care and concern. These experiences include being involved in Sunday school, the building being saved by homeless individuals during a lightning strike, witnessing the rebirth of the sanctuary space, receiving care and attention from the pastor and the community, being welcomed through humor and support for family members, deepening relationships with a church through involvement of kids and young adults, and feeling the supportive network through experiences such as a meal train, mission trips, and women's prayer groups. The importance of welcoming new faces, intergenerational learning, and community involvement were also highlighted. Overall, the respondents felt a sense of belonging and support in their church community, and many credited their positive experiences to specific individuals such as their pastor or community members who provided care and kindness.

Congregational Sunday Visioning Session, March 12

Question 1: In what way would you enlarge/improve the physical facilities of the church; and what ministry would be expanded/enhanced by this improvement?

The responses focused on improving the physical facilities of the church to modern standards rather than expansion. The condition of the building should better reflect the health of the congregation. The Washington Seminar Center could be better utilized, and unused spaces could be repurposed for new ministries such as movies, drama, and scouting. The building layout and accessibility should be improved, including the renovation of the bathrooms and the installation of water dispensers. The Kidney Rush room is underutilized and could be repurposed for other ministries. Some suggested that modernizing the building should be prioritized before considering new programs. There could be a phased approach to prioritize smaller projects first. Accessibility was mentioned often.

Question 2: When have you seen spiritual generosity?

The most common examples mentioned were the church's work with migrants and refugees, such as Good Neighbors Capitol Hill, hosting homeless families in the church, and involvement in community outreach programs. Additionally, several individuals were cited as examples of spiritual generosity, including Pastor Rachel, David LaVoy, and Fred Lemke. Many respondents also noted that spiritual generosity can take many different forms, such as participating in committee meetings, volunteering time and energy, and seeking grants to support church programs. The church is seen as a safe place regardless of political affiliation or belief, and outreach efforts through social media are suggested. Overall, the responses suggest that spiritual generosity is a core value of the church and is demonstrated in a variety of ways by its members.

Question 3: What motivates you to financially support CHPC? Why?

Some people mentioned feeling a sense of obligation to give, and others felt that the church was doing good work with the money it receives. Many people appreciated the outreach and community-building efforts of the church and wanted to contribute to those efforts. Some felt that giving helped them to be more disciplined in their budgeting and spending habits. Others were motivated by specific projects, such as improvements to the building or the addition of handbells for worship. Several people emphasized the importance of sharing time and other resources in addition to money. Overall, people were motivated to give to the church because they saw it as an important institution that was doing positive work in the community.

Session Visioning, March 16:

The DVTF conducted breakout groups with the Session with an overview of the six discussion questions (above). The Session's comments mirrored many of the same themes heard from the congregation. Care and concern for members of the congregation is essential, as is ensuring that everyone is seen and cared for. Education is also important; meeting people where they are and offering different options for learning. Involving people is crucial and empowering more people to lead and be involved is necessary for growth. There were many comments about the need to modernize the historic church while retaining its character, and utilizing spaces more effectively. Finally, involvement and outreach to the wider community was emphasized.