

New Beginnings Leadership Team

Members: Julie Courtney, Jeff Getty (Chair), Pam Jan, Michael Levitas and Lisa McIndoe  
Staff: Caroline Kelly

### **Establishing a Visioning Process for our Congregation**

In September of 2013, the Session approved our congregation's participation in *New Beginnings*, a process designed to help congregations consider a new vision for their ministry and appointed a leadership team. Originally designed for congregations who face urgent and often drastic decisions about change, the use of *New Beginnings* is now also used to help congregations who are getting older and smaller, like ours, engage in self-examination and reflection about how to adapt to the changing context in which we do ministry.

### **Assessing our Congregation**

We started the process in November of 2013, with an assessment conducted by a New Beginnings consultant. In January of 2014, we attended a two-day training to help guide us through a look at the assessment, which included a description of our community, the make-up and commitment of our congregation, our financial viability and total assets, our mission life, and our buildings and grounds.

### **Reviewing the Assessment in Small Groups**

An important assumption of the New Beginnings program is that *congregations* are **led by God** into the future, not by the Presbytery or an outside consultant. That's why more than 70 of you participated in small group conversations during March, April and May of 2014. We think those conversations helped us see ourselves and our context more clearly and raised helpful questions and exciting possibilities for our future.

### **Reporting on Small Group Consensus/Recommendations for Next Steps**

In June of 2014, the Session received the report and approved additional steps recommended by the Leadership Team. The Executive Summary from the report is included here.

**We believe that First Presbyterian Church members are committed to God's mission in the world and aware that our changing context requires us to adapt in order to remain a vital and faithful community of disciples. We also recognize the limitations imposed on us by our shrinking and aging community and our lack of knowledge about the needs of our community.**

**While congregational conflict and lack of pastoral stability over the last 10 years has left us smaller in numbers, we believe that our congregation has also experienced an increased level of commitment to the Church's vitality.**

**The congregation expressed support for and appears open to adaptive changes but, without a clear vision to guide those changes, is not ready to make any bold decisions for change.**

**Therefore, we recommend that, to gain clarity about our future direction, we engage in further study and exploration of our community, reflecting and evaluating our current community engagement in conversation with *The Externally Focused Church*, a practical, how-to book written with two types of churches in mind: (1) churches who are already externally focused in what they do, but want to learn what others are doing so they can broaden and deepen their impact in the community; and (2) churches that have heard about the growing external focus and want more information on how to become an externally focused church.**

*(A complete copy of the report is available on our website)*

### **Acting on the Recommendations: Book Study**

Twenty members of the congregation (half of whom are on session) participated in the six-week book study, led by Pam Jan and Julie Courtney. In addition to helping us find out more about the needs of our community, the study also included helpful information about partnering with existing community organizations, engaging members in community service and understanding community service as a way to live out Christ's commission to share the gospel beyond our walls.

### **Next Steps**

Based on that study, the Leadership Team proposed (and Session approved) these next steps:

- 1) to review and revise our mission and vision statements; and**
- 2) to send teams of three to learn more about the needs of our community by meeting with the following community organizations: the Allegany County Health Department; John Humbird Elementary School; The Kensington; the Allegany County Human Resources Development Commission; the Allegany County Department of Social Services; and the Union Rescue Mission.**

*(John Humbird was later dropped from the list.)*

Each of the six groups includes a member of the Leadership Team, a member of Session and a member of the congregation. The teams met for a brief orientation in December and are in the process of meeting with these organizations and compiling their reports, with the ultimate goal of helping us assess where our gifts as a congregation might best fit with the needs of our community.

The next step is to prepare and present a report to Session in February of 2015 to summarize the findings and recommend next steps.