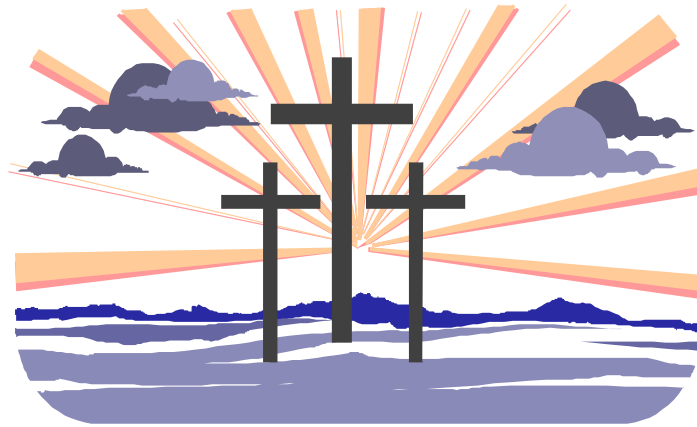


Report of the Mission Study Committee

United Parish of Bowie

April 2007



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Preface

The Parish Board of the United Parish of Bowie authorized the creation of a Mission Study Committee in December of 2006. The purpose of the committee was to formulate the goals and purposes of the church for the next three to five years, and to make recommendations as to the type of pastor we will need to accomplish these ends. The committee met from January 11 through April 1, 2007. During this time it reviewed and discussed the Great Ends of the Church (Book of Order, G 1.0200), the history of the United Parish of Bowie (UPB), a statistical survey of UPB, and a demographic study of the Bowie area. We also discussed three books: Alice Mann, *Raising the Roof*; Charles Olson, *Discerning God's Will Together*; and Lovett Weems, *Take the Next Step*. And, finally, it held small group meetings of interested members of the congregation to allow the whole congregation the opportunity to reflect on what our goals should be in the near future in the light of the Great Ends of the Church. The result of these efforts is summarized in the Mission and Vision Statement found on page 3.

The committee decided to retain the Mission Statement that UPB adopted some years ago. It was felt that this remains a clear and succinct statement of how the church sees itself living out the message of Jesus Christ. The Vision Statement, in contrast, is a fresh expression of the specific goals that we believe that God is calling us to pursue. The congregation would like to continue to be a church that is welcoming to all believers in Christ, but at the same time, we see ourselves as committed to the Reformed tradition. Church growth was a priority that was generally embraced by all. On the other hand, most members of the church appreciate its small nature. Therefore, the committee discerned that moderate growth to a total membership of 150 members would allow us to retain the nature and character of the congregation but at the same time responsibly pursue the Great Commission. It was evident to all that some changes and innovations will have to be made, and the vision statement notes a number of possibilities. In general the committee felt that the church should explore the possibility of an earlier Sunday morning service and a second evening service that would appeal more to youth. It also felt that future efforts at growing the church numerically should focus on younger families. Other traditional strengths of UPB were affirmed and, it was felt, should continue to be priorities. These include education, community service and music in the church. Areas that we need to specifically target for improvement are: more variety in music for all services, the promotion of Bible studies and other affinity groups, retreats, and greater publicity for all the activities of the church. Finally, most felt that the church needs to make some changes to its physical appearance. The cross at the center of the church, for example, should be more visible. Also, the parking lot should be improved to make access to the church more convenient and the appearance of the church more pleasing to passersby.

Both the Missions Committee and the congregational small groups noted a number of things that we would like to see in our new pastor (see pages 11-12). The pastor should be friendly, accessible and well-informed. S/he should preach biblically based sermons that have contemporary relevance. Political, partisan and highly controversial issues, it was felt, should not generally be preached in the pulpit. These would be better addressed in other settings, such as the classroom. The pastor should also be an organized person who is able to work well with committees. S/he should be able to lead the congregation to achieving both numerical growth and spiritual depth.

The following is faithfully submitted by the members of the Mission Study Committee: Gene and Jan Barbato, Matt Bickel, Alec Burgess, Bill Collins, Diane Eades, Charlotte Melichar and Nancy Snyder.

Mission and Vision Statements

Mission Statement – United in Christ, Our Mission: To Serve.

The United Parish of Bowie welcomes followers of Christ from various backgrounds and at different points of their faith journey to join us to do God's work in our community and the world.

Vision Statement – We believe that God is calling us to:

- Be welcoming to all followers of Christ, from varied cultures, and/or religious backgrounds
 - Members affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ
 - Everyone is treated as Christian brothers and sisters in a loving community of faith
 - We are a unity church in the reformed tradition of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ
- Provide worship services that are sensitive to the needs of all participants
 - Preach strong Biblically based sermons, with contemporary relevance
 - Explore the possibility of an earlier Sunday morning service
 - Consider the option of a Sunday evening youth service
 - Provide a greater variety of music styles for all services
- Be a community of believers that is growing spiritually
 - Maintain a strong Christian education program for all ages to meet the needs of people at the different points of their faith journeys
 - Promote small group Bible studies and similar affinity groups
 - Maintain a strong cadre of trained Christian educators
- Be committed to community service and worldwide missions
 - Participate in community service projects
 - Publicize the United Parish of Bowie involvement in community service to members and the community
 - Support and participate in the mission activities of our denominations locally and worldwide
- Have a vibrant youth program that attracts teenagers and prepares them to become Christian adults
 - Support youth group activities involving the community
 - Sponsor youth retreats in which all are encouraged to bring friends
- Enlist all church members in an effort to increase the membership of 100 to 150 members in the next 5 years
 - Emphasize members bringing friends and neighbors to church
 - Promote events and programs for members, friends and the community such as education classes, fellowship events, concerts and other activities for children and adults
 - Sponsor retreats for spiritual growth and fellowship
 - Establish a young adult program to keep them involved in the church and to attract others
 - Publicize events in the life of the church to the wider community
 - Establish programs to support young families
- Be clearly recognizable to the community as a Christian church with a welcoming appearance
 - Increase visibility of the central cross
 - Establish and maintain clear and visible church sign(s) with changeable messages
 - Introduce seasonal banners in the parking area
 - Improve and maintain an attractive physical plant, capitalizing on the United Parish of Bowie's unique architecture
 - Improve the parking lot
 - Renew the commitment to expand the church by adding a fellowship hall to accommodate increasing membership.

Demographic Study of the Bowie Area

Located within the City of Bowie, the United Parish of Bowie draws about 50 percent of its current members from within the city's boundaries. However, many of the members who now live outside the city did live at one time within Bowie.

Bowie is located within Prince George's County, Maryland. Though less affluent than the Washington region in general, Prince George's population earns more than the national average by a considerable amount. Also, it is a majority-African American county, although in 2000 the City of Bowie was still under one-third black. Asian and Hispanic minorities in 2000 were well below national averages.

Prince George's County is expected to grow at a slower rate over the next 25 years than the rest of the Washington region, but still there is a projected 23% growth rate during that period.

Bowie's growth has occurred largely by increasing the number of housing units and expanding its borders. There was a doubling of the number of housing units between 1980 and 2000, and average household size has fallen. Still, the population of Bowie increased from 33,695 in 1980 to 53,840 in 2004. The proportion of children in that period has declined, but it has climbed somewhat since 1990. The percentage of blacks within the city rose from 4 to 31% between 1980 and 2000.

Compared with the Washington region, the proportion over 65 is typical, and there is a slightly larger proportion of families with children. A larger-than-average proportion is in the 35-54 age group.

The City of Bowie is composed of parts of four zip-code areas. An examination of characteristics of these four areas, as well as a popular area-of-destination zip-code area for current church members seemed a promising route to help us understand aspects of our growing (but not too quickly) affluent (but less so than surrounding jurisdictions in the region) church neighborhood. We have exactly one family from one of the zip codes (20720). We have no families at all from a second (20721). The church and the largest number of members are in 20716, and the second-largest number of members are in 20715 (the older part of Bowie). The Anne Arundel County zip code and a popular destination choice for members leaving the City of Bowie and County of Prince George's is 21035 (Davidsonville).

The three largest zip-code areas in population are 20715, 20721 and 20716. Only about a third as many people lived in 21035 as in each of those three in the year 2000.

In terms of people aged 25-44, the three largest zips had the most, between 7 and 8 thousand, and only 1,377 were in 21035 (at least back in 2000).

While 20716 and 20720 are evenly divided between black and white residents, 20715 is largely white and 20721 is largely black. Zip 21035 is overwhelmingly white.

Family households with children make up the majority of 20716, 20721, and 20720. The zip areas 20715 and 21035 come closer to the national average but are still considerably higher than that.

Looking at median income in 1999-2000, the two highest zip areas were 21035 and 20721, followed by 20720. Still, 20716 and 20715 were nearly double the national average.

While about a quarter of USA adults over 25 have bachelor's degrees or higher, in the zip area 20721 over fifty percent have that much education. The other three zips are between forty and fifty percent each.

It seems clear, then, that these zip code areas all abound in well-educated families—the ones in Bowie more densely than the Davidsonville zip area. And when we have trouble finding poor families for our charity projects, it is now better understood why no one is looking particularly impoverished.

Whether the families in these zip areas are culturally attuned to the United Parish of Bowie's worship style or mission is not clear. The Weight Watchers meetings seem to reflect more closely the neighborhood demographic profile than the congregation on Sunday mornings. Still, UPB seems well located and has seen demographic change, but not for the poorer or less educated.

(For the supporting material to this demographic study, see appendix I.)

Statistical Study of the Church

The following presents trends in UPB over the last ten years. Based on data for the period of 1995 to 2005, the average yearly trends are as follows:

Participation

Year	Membership	Attendance	Christian Ed.	Baptisms
1995	95	105	92	7
1997	97	103	88	3
1999	101	104	90	5
2001	98	75	50	1
2003	93	85(2004)	56(2002)	20 (2004)
2005	98	85	44(2004)	

Contributions

Year	Per Capita Average	Total Weekly averages	Giving to Community	Total for Year
1995	\$ 871	\$ 788	\$3,704	\$82,755
1998	1,044	1,013	2,025	103,371
2001	1,104	1,295	2,487	97,160
2004	1,289	1,471	8,250	125,114
2005	1,124	1,296	300	110,206

Summary of the Congregational Group Studies

During the three and a half weeks from February 28 through March 17 the congregation of the United Parish of Bowie (UPB) met in small groups in a series of three meetings. During this time each group discussed the work and mission of UPB in the light of the six Great Ends of the Church. The following is a summary of these discussions.

1: The Proclamation of the Gospel

Many agreed that the minister should continue to follow the lectionary so that all the great themes of the Bible would be preached in any given three-year period. Many commended the Women's Bible Study group and suggested that the church needs more of this type of activity. Informed members, it was suggested, would be better equipped and therefore feel more comfortable speaking to others about their faith.

A number of specific areas emerged that need improvement. Outreach, many suggested, is not one of our strengths. More specifically, it was suggested by many that the church should focus on seeking younger members. This could be done by hiring a permanent pastor who would be attractive to children and young adults. S/he might even have children her/himself. Children should be encouraged to come regularly and to bring a friend to church. A children's sermon might help. A second service in the evening would help if it were more youth oriented.

Some of the things that might be hurting our outreach to children include: young people have many other activities on Sundays, declining numbers of children in the Sunday school weakens the whole program and leads to further decline, the parents themselves must teach the Sunday school during the worship service, and Bowie is an aging community with fewer and fewer young people to draw on.

Most people seemed happy to be in a relatively small church and favored moderate numerical growth in the next 3 to 5 years. We currently have about 100 members. This could be increased to 150 without altering the nature of the church. A numerically larger church would allow more successful programs. The latter, it was suggested, would include a vibrant Sunday school, vacation Bible school and adult education classes.

Although there was no consensus on some of the things that may be blocking or retarding the numerical growth of the church, a number of things were repeatedly mentioned: we ought to reexamine how we are advertising the church and consider new approaches; the smallness of the church sanctuary and the necessity to enter the sanctuary from the front may make visitors uncomfortable; the gravel parking lot creates difficulties for women with heels and disabled persons, it is probably too small, and it is poorly lit for night activities; the look of the building itself might be altered to increase its visibility as a church.

2: Shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God

Many people expressed satisfaction with this aspect of the church. The smallness of UPB, they felt, adds to its sense of community. They appreciated the many spiritual activities that are available: the worship service, adult education, Bible studies, pastoral counseling, retreats, Lenten dinners, Christmas in April, mission contributions, reaching out to members in times of need, and other opportunities to participate.

A number of suggestions for improvement were noted: members (adults and youth) might participate

in leading the worship service; the prayer board seems moribund, so a way should be found to bring the prayer needs of the congregation more easily to everyone's attention; volunteers are not always shown appreciation; the number of teachers available to teach Sunday school is not sufficient; we should have more purely social events to enhance the fellowship of the congregation; a way of "catching" visitors before they leave should be found; a fall evening series on the foundations of the faith might be added to supplement a New Members course. Several noted that they felt let down by Laura Collins.

3: Maintenance of Divine Worship

In general the congregation seems to like the current worship service. The things especially appreciated include: sermons that follow the lectionary, the order of worship, the choir music, the occasional special music (such as from the Prism Brass), chatting before the service and the Chat 'n Chew following the service.

Many expressed concerns about the music and possible unwanted changes. Many want live rather than canned music, and they did not want the words to appear on a big screen. Some expressed a preference for older hymns, some for greater variety, some for gospel, and some for more contemporary music. Some wanted applause following a choir anthem that is especially good. Some suggested the use of creeds, prayers from the floor, and prayer requests written on the attendance sheets. Some preferred UPB's traditional form of Holy Communion because it allows more time for contemplation and creates a greater feeling of communion among the members. The time of the worship service was a concern for some. Some would prefer an earlier time such as 9:30 or 10:00 AM. Others suggested that an evening service with contemporary music would be welcome.

4: Preservation of the Truth

Most seemed to feel that we are doing a good job in this area. We teach, proclaim, defend and demonstrate the truth through sermons, Bible studies, education classes and our community involvement.

We are, however, currently falling down in two areas. We only have one adult education class at a time, but we should have two: a Bible or theology class, and a more practical or social-oriented class. Secondly, our children's Sunday school is not doing well because of a lack of attendance and available teachers.

Most agreed that in general controversial issues should not be broached in sermons. If this is done in sermons, it should be occasional and it should be done with sensitivity for those with opposing views. Hot button issues are more appropriately discussed in Sunday School or similar classroom settings. As a congregation with diverse views and with a tradition of being non judgmental and accepting of one another, it is felt that if divisive issues are aggressively handled the result will be unnecessary divisions in the church. It was also expressed by some that UPB is not well informed about the positions that its two denominations have taken about controversial issues. More information and clarification about the denominations, but not necessarily identification with them, was an expressed desire of some. The next permanent pastor needs to take all the feelings expressed here very seriously.

5: The Promotion of Social Righteousness

The general feeling of the groups was that UPB is doing well in this area. The various social programs that the church regularly performs or supports (Christmas in April, the Bowie Pantry, Christmas gift bags, Warm Nights, Easter baskets for the children at the Family Crisis Center, financial support for missions, etc.) are about all that a small congregation can reasonably handle. We could do a better job in keeping each other and new members and visitors informed about our activities. A membership

brochure listing the activities would help.

It was noted that we are a civic or sanctuary church, rather than an activist or evangelical church. In practice this means that we do not want a pastor who will be preoccupied with a single issue and try to organize the church to be active in promoting his/her position. We prefer to be engaged in promoting social justice through helping others rather than in being activists for social or political change.

It was suggested that we might be more ecumenical by promoting joint ventures with other churches, e.g. Lenten lunches and sunrise services. Also, we should learn more about what our denominations are doing in this area, both in our community and around the world.

6: The Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World

We seem to be in general agreement that UPB does not have much visibility in the community. A number of things were discussed that might improve the physical appearance of the church: the building needs to look less like a “model home” and more like a church; a more effective sign on the corner would help; and banners in the parking lot would help, too. We should improve the outreach materials (e.g. brochures) that we use. We could be more visible in the community by advertising more than we do in local newspapers and other publications. Our website could be improved with testimonials and pictures of the choir, picnics, the Christmas pageant and other church activities. We should try to reach out more to the parents who use Play Day, inviting them to events, etc. Visitors to the church need to be better greeted, and follow up needs to be done when possible.

During the third session three additional issues were raised.

1: Denominational Involvement

The groups discussed the extent to which UPB should be involved with its two denominations. Most favored remaining well informed about denominational activities but many also expressed a certain wariness about being drawn into denominational controversies or having denominational views imposed on the church. Most believe that we should be taking more advantage of the benefits that the denominations offer: e.g. use of the Meadowkirk retreat center, informational material, etc. All seemed to agree that the pastor should remain well informed about the activities of the two denominations. Also, the church should consider electing commissioners to the meetings of the two denominations.

2: Members were asked to describe the type of pastor they would like to have

S/he should be personable, approachable, energetic, a role model and mentor, devoted to God, accommodating and sympathetic. S/he should like people of all ages. S/he should enjoy being a minister and like spending time with her/his parishioners. S/he should be a pastor who is there for us when we need her/him for counsel or support. S/he should be a person who can laugh with us. S/he should appreciate the ministry of music.

As a preacher, s/he should preach sermons based on the Scriptures and that appeal to the mind. In another context, however, it was said that sermons should not be too didactic and should have a simple and practical message that people can easily carry away with them. The pastor should not be pushing a social issue or political agenda. S/he should guide us to understand the Scriptures and let us have some freedom in interpreting the Bible as we grow spiritually.

The pastor should be an engaging speaker, knowledgeable, well-grounded in the Scriptures and theology, well-versed in Christian thought and perspectives, knowledgeable about the two denominations and able to keep the congregation informed. The pastor should be an organized person and one who can work well with committees and share duties. S/he should be a dynamic person, one

able to facilitate change but recognize that change takes time. S/he should be able to lead the congregation to become a more mission-centered church. The pastor should be able to focus on the recruitment of new members and programs that make us more visible. S/he should be good at pastoral care and place a high value on all aspects of Christian education. S/he should also be involved in the local and wider community in its various social aspects.

S/he may have strong doctrinal beliefs but must not be dogmatic. We do not want a pastor who will insist on strict membership tests. We prefer not to have clear positions on some of the divisive issues that are currently vexing our denominations. Ecumenism and tolerance of diverse views have always been hallmarks of our congregation. We want a pastor who will respect this tradition.

3: Specific goals the church should pursue over the next 3 to 5 years

The church needs to grow numerically. This can be done in a variety of ways: reach out to recent members who no longer attend (especially young people); reach out to Play Day parents; develop a second service in the evening with a different style of worship.

Our emphasis in numerical growth should be placed on gaining more young people. We should reach out to those college-age recent members who have dropped out. We should seek to retain the young people that we have. A contemporary worship service begun with the youth group would help. Youth programs and a nursery program will be critical to attracting young families. We should probably have a paid staff person to organize the Christian education program. This program should include separate programs for children five and six years olds, and those in elementary school, middle school and high school.

We also need to become more visible in the community. This might be done by: learning more about interfaith community groups, such as FISH; bring more attention to the community service projects in which we participate; improve the exterior of the church; install a larger and more flexible sign(s) in front of the church; put up banners on the light poles in the parking lot; pave the parking lot to help handicapped attendees; provide a basketball hoop for the youth.

We should put more emphasis on reaching out to the non-churched and non-Christian population in our community. This could be done by continuing to be a caring and joyful congregation, preaching and teaching the fundamentals of the faith, having a foundations course in the fall, and doing more intentional outreach into the community.

One person suggested that we select a social concern that would engage the congregation in more “hands-on” involvement; we might also become more involved in our denominations and more effectively use their resources. Finally we could further develop our library and increase its utilization several fold.