

## Discernment Review

Members and Friends:

Our current pastor, Rev. Kim Graber is serving St. Paul as a Temporary Supply Pastor. In accordance with the Presbyterian Book of Order it is possible for a supply pastor to be called to a church as an installed pastor with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote of approval from the Denver Presbytery Assembly.

However, first a discernment process needs to be completed in which St. Paul answers a series of questions concerning the make-up of its congregation, the community in which it is located and future plans. At a congregational meeting on April 3, you approved the formation of a Discernment Team consisting of Deanna Gordon, John Black, Sally Garwood, Cleve Dixon, Sue Warner, Jeanne Pote and Dave Goss. Jeanne subsequently had to drop off the team.

Since then, the Discernment Team has been reviewing the New Beginnings Report, the previous answers to similar questions used when Pastor New was called and discussing where St. Paul is today.

The team has drafted our proposed answers to these questions which we believe reflect the overall sentiment of the congregation and where St. Paul is headed in the future. Our answers are attached.

We invite you to review these answers and **provide us your feedback by an email to Dave Goss ([dave@dcgoss.com](mailto:dave@dcgoss.com)), or in writing to any of the team members.** You are welcome to mark up a paper copy or we can provide you an electronic version for your review. A copy of these answers will be available on the St. Paul website ([www.stppc.org](http://www.stppc.org)) until July 11.

Our intent of these answers is to reflect who St. Paul is and what our needs are for the future. Once these questions are finalized and approved by Session, they will be submitted to the Committee on Ministry along with our assessment as to whether Rev. Graber can meet our needs for the future or not.

We will have an open discussion on July 10 following worship in which we can discuss the answers and address any questions you might have.

**We ask you to provide your feedback to us as soon as possible but not later than July 1st.** This will allow us time to revise any answers and have a final draft ready for July 10.

We ask you to prayerfully consider these answers in your review and be led by the spirit as to our needs for the future.

Thank you, the Discernment Team

Proposed Responses to Twelve Strategic Questions  
St. Paul Presbyterian Church  
**DRAFT THREE June 21, 2016**

1. What demographics of age, race, sex, and education describe your neighborhood and the community you serve? How will this demographic information shape the next five years of your ministry? How might this same information shape your search for your next installed pastor?

St. Paul participated in a New Beginnings Assessment offered by the Presbyterian Mission Agency. A part of this study was a thorough demographic evaluation of the neighborhood immediately surrounding the church. According to definitions of MOSAIC codes for the population closest to St. Paul, we find the neighborhood is predominantly a melting pot of middle class persons with a fairly significant percentage of baby-boomers and their adult children who have returned home to live with parents. Interestingly, the congregation of St. Paul represents many of these same attributes, are moderate in their viewpoints, and are filled with confidence as they have reached retirement age. However, the majority of St. Paul's members live further than a ten minute drive from the building and therefore, we need to be more aware of the needs of those living close to the church who do not worship with us or other congregations. We need to become more involved with those within a few miles of St. Paul who may have spiritual, economic and social needs that we could serve. As we continue to refine our Bold Decision made through New Beginnings, we will need an installed pastor who can help us create programs to serve the immediate community.

2. Describe the culture of your congregation and how your congregation is different from churches or other denominations in your neighborhood.

We believe that we are an open, friendly, caring community that values and treasures children. We enjoy being challenged intellectually and spiritually. The majority of worship and education activities are on Sundays with several other weekly gatherings for both reflection and education. Although we cherish traditions based on our 30 plus years as a worshipping community, we are willing to step out of our comfort zone to try new approaches to spiritual development, education and fellowship. We value music and music programs and have recently hired a part-time choir director to lead our volunteer choir during the school year.

We try to be inclusive but also recognize that we have some groups reflecting members who have been part of St. Paul for many years. Therefore we can be slow in integrating them into our church family as we should. The congregation is generally non-confrontational which can contribute to failing to deal with issues that are in front of us. That trait hampered our ability to resolve some conflicts with two previous

pastors. However, we have learned from those experiences and believe we know we must deal with problems in both a loving and assertive **yet** professional way. We demonstrate acceptance of all members and visitors despite their sexual orientation, race, education, occupation, age or economic conditions.

We are a smaller congregaton than the other church's closest to us. A Catholic congregation just north of St. Paul numbers over 2,500. Two non-denominational congregations just across Hampden Avenue to the south both number well over 1,000 each. A Lutheran congregation less than three blocks away numbers almost 800. Our small, welcoming nature seems to set us apart from our church neighbors. We are not as intimidating in size as the other churches and it is much easier for a person to become known and welcomed at St. Paul.

3. What areas of outreach are important to your church and in what areas have you been active? As you think about outreach, which segment of your community is likely to respond most readily? What characteristics does your congregation have that can change your community?

A little more than a year prior to doing New Beginnings, we were contemplating the possibility of closing our doors. In the preceding eighteen months we had been focused almost entirely on our financial condition and the challenges that our large mortgage and plateaued membership were creating. Our designated pastor helped make us aware of the seriousness of the financial issues but did not provide us the kind of leadership that allowed us to move away from an inward looking to an outreaching perspective. She left one year into her three year designated pastorate, and we were shaken by her departure. However, by participating in a Church Development sponsored financial program, we conducted a very successful capital and operating financial campaign that gave us confidence for the future. After an extended period of pulpit supply, we hired a half-time temporary supply pastor. Over the next year, we concentrated on ways to identify our strengths, train lay leaders, develop educational programs, and partner with an American Baptist congregation that rents space at our church. This relationship with Landmark Ministries has been very positive and has enabled us to regain financial stability while opening us to new opportunities of ministry within and outside St. Paul.

As part of our New Beginnings process, we made a bold decision to focus our mission and outreach on feeding the hungry and ministering to children in the community. Through New Beginnings, we realized that the modest food pantry we operated in the past was actually a potential opportunity for an expanded mission outreach. By defining this element as one part of our Bold Decision, we then committed to expanding our food pantry and formally making it a signature mission. St. Paul and Landmark Ministries have entered into a joint agreement to operate this expanded Food Pantry, providing food assistance to the hungry in our community. We constructed a new food storage area within our Celebration Center using volunteer labor and modest funds

from both congregations. Volunteers from St. Paul and Landmark Ministries staff the pantry on Tuesday mornings and Thursday evenings, and we anticipate expanding these hours in the future. We have just received a grant from FBR for a commercial refrigerator at no cost and are excited as it will provide us the ability to provide perishables as well as dry goods.

The second part of our Bold Decision is to minister to children in the community. Initially, this is being implemented through a relationship we have established with Sunrise Elementary School, a Cherry Creek school located about ½ mile from the church. In the past we have raised funds and contributed food and clothing to the school. Now we are developing a more comprehensive outreach that, in addition to school supplies and clothing, may include mentoring and after school programs for students in the future. This is still under development.

4. What is your new typical member like and is that different from current membership? How do you assimilate these new members?

We believe in the last year we are demonstrating to visitors and potential new members a revitalized congregation with focus and enthusiasm. We hope to attract those who share the desire to grow actively in their faith and are committed to supporting others such as through our food pantry and children's outreach. Recently we have had a number of persons join specifically to be part of the expanded pantry. They were also attracted to our adult education class. We seek people of all ages and in all stages of life but also recognize that our congregation seems to attract more seniors than families with children as that is both the community demographic and the makeup of our membership. Interestingly, several volunteers in the congregation have taken upon themselves to re-establish our St. Paul Youth (SPY) group and in so doing have brought new excitement to children and families of that age group (generally fifth grade through middle school). We have no senior high youth, yet. We welcome both faithful Christians and seekers of Jesus Christ who want to learn and grow with us as we seek God's way in the Aurora and Centennial area.

5. Why do people join your congregation and why don't people join your congregation?

In our recent past, people did not join St. Paul because of a perceived instability of pastoral leadership. With two interim pastors, a short-term designated pastor and a number of pulpit supply pastors, visitors had the impression we were a congregation without a clear future. Similarly, many members of the congregation shared this concern and questioned our ability to survive. The last new member class at St. Paul was in 2012, until St. Paul offered two classes in 2016. In each of these classes, five people joined and have continued to participate in the life and worship of St. Paul. In part, they have said that we are a friendly and welcoming congregation with a strong sense of community. Several emphasized their desire to join was motivated by the opportunity to serve in the food pantry and youth ministry outreach. Defining a vision

for the future through New Beginnings has given visitors and members alike a measure of confidence not seen before 2014. Our various groups help people share common interests and develop lasting friendships. A new class to read the Bible over the course of a year has resulted in an Adult Sunday school that numbers nearly 30. A large percentage of membership has demonstrated an enduring commitment to St. Paul throughout the leadership struggles of the past.

6. Which parts of your church life are calling cards for your congregation?

We pride ourselves on our inclusion of children in worship. We intentionally include the youth as liturgists, acolytes and to stay throughout the entire worship service as we believe this helps promote the example of Christian family worship. Our music programs – both vocal choir and a part-time bell choir under excellent musical leadership - are very important to the congregation. We have a number of small groups that meet regularly such as Agape, book club, Elderberries (a monthly lunch outing for seniors), mid-week gathering and most recently a continuing holistic healing class. We follow the traditional Reformed worship style weekly as well as conduct special services. Our relationship with Landmark Ministries and their joint use of the building and cooperation in worship services and special events has become a new calling card for us. Likewise, we have opened our building for community groups such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, as well as music recitals and meeting space for other non-profits.

The implementation of the Bold Decision to feed the hungry and minister to children in the community is far from complete. We expect it will take several years for these two mission activities to mature and become an integral part of St. Paul's outreach. We have started strongly with the food pantry, which services families and people of all ages. We will soon be expanding that program as a distributor of food items specifically for qualifying seniors within certain monetary level guidelines. We anticipate that some of our own congregational members may be eligible for this program.

The implementation of ministry to children is still in its infancy. We will need strong Christian Education leadership from both the next installed pastor and from lay leaders for this program to be developed. The recent loss of the Christian Education Elder has slowed work in this area. We want to strengthen all our Christian Education programs, for adults, children and youth in the congregation. A number of volunteers have been very effective in this ministry, but we realize more leadership effort will be needed. Last year's Vacation Bible School was very successful, and thanks to many volunteers, this child oriented program will be held again this summer. We also have an annual fall community outreach event known as the Fall Festival. We offer an opportunity to the neighbors to see St. Paul and Landmark Ministries working together in this part of Aurora.

7. What do you anticipate will be areas of growth and challenge for your congregation

in the next few years?

As has been mentioned before, the implementation of our New Beginnings Bold Decision will be our priority for the next three to five years. Already we are seeing some modest growth, partially as a result of the new mission focus. At the end of 2015, we reported 104 active members to the General Assembly. So far in 2016 we have added ten new members and are expecting another new member class to be held in July, as five more people have asked to join. These last five represent two families who were former members more than fifteen years ago and are anxious to rejoin. If they all join, we will have experienced a growth of nearly 14% in the first half of 2016.

The serious financial concerns that we had in 2013 have not been eliminated, but with Landmark Ministries renting space our burden has eased. The half-time supply pastor was converted to  $\frac{3}{4}$  time in August 2015 and to full-time on March 1, 2016. We hired a part time choir director in April as well, and these staff changes were all done within our projected income and expenses for 2016. We no longer receive any subsidy from Denver Presbytery for our mortgage but wish that we could secure some sort of lump-sum funding to pay down our mortgage even further. In discussions we have had with Long Term Initiatives, we believe that a refinancing of our loan based on a shared payment by St. Paul and Denver Presbytery could reduce our monthly mortgage payment to a manageable amount even if Landmark Ministries were to leave. Our capital campaign was conducted to cover three years (through the end of 2017), and we anticipate continuing to hold specific capital campaigns over the next few years.

Perhaps the most important aspect of our future is going to be stable pastoral leadership. The last installed pastor was removed by Administrative Commission in 2010. We had interim leadership until September 2013. At that time, we selected a designated pastor through the "Journey Between Pastors" process who was hired for three years. She left after one year, and we resumed temporary pastoral leadership through pulpit supply until we hired our current temporary supply pastor in February 2015. The last eighteen months of consistent leadership has proven that we can successfully refocus and redefine our role in the community and the Denver Presbytery.

8. What issues of faith are engaging your congregation?

The membership of St. Paul exhibits a strong sense of faith and is particularly interested in Biblical learning. The new class this year to study the entire Bible within one year has resulted in a number of adults attending this class who were not part of the regular Adult Sunday school program. That class draws between 25 to 30 adults each time it is held as compared to 10 to 12 in Adult Sunday school. A mid-week book study class attracts a much smaller attendance, but these individuals are committed to this year long learning activity. Also, the growth in our youth group is attracting parents and children to the group. We are planning a confirmation class for five youth who have asked to commit themselves to Christ.

Changes within the PC (USA) concerning ordination of gays and lesbians and same sex marriage has been received at St. Paul with little anxiety or concern. We understand and support changes of government within the Presbyterian Church USA, and we have revised our own polices to reflect these changes. Historically our congregation has been made up of diverse backgrounds and varying ethnic and religious experiences. We have welcomed and integrated the non-Presbyterians as readily as someone transferring to St. Paul from another Presbyterian congregation. We are tolerant of differing viewpoints and focus on spiritual growth as well as caring and fellowship.

Our New Beginnings process is clearly demonstrating that our focus on mission and outreach could clearly convey our faith and commitment to those in need within our community. This decision and its initial implantation has created an atmosphere of enthusiasm and renewed optimism. It has convinced many of us that our difficult times of the past were simply God's way of challenging this congregation to look outside its own problems and give. Caring for others is a powerful remedy to one's own problems.

9. What has been your most energetic dispute and how was it handled?

The leadership style of the designated pastor who recently resigned was difficult. Although a Presbyterian, her background reflected a dictatorial approach to change. She made wholesale changes without buy-in by Session or the congregation. She shunned the Board of Deacons, telling them they were neither leaders nor officers. That rift has been slowly repaired but still causes some sensitivity. In response to her departure, lay leaders came forward and worked to carry out programs and ministries. Although she brought to Session's and the congregation's attention the seriousness of our financial situation, she distanced herself from being part of the solution. She became critical of "us" and often referred to St. Paul as "they" or "them" in discussion with her peers at Presbytery. She demonstrated no interest in helping us resolve the problems with finances and, instead, seemingly abandoned us to our own dilemma.

Her departure created the catalyst for the membership to rise up and demonstrate that we could manage these issues, and that we would survive. The Holy Spirit worked within many individuals and groups. The congregant-led financial campaign raised funds, both operating and capital, that sparked new hope. A number of retired women have served for five or more years as "Office Angels" to help the church secretary in the office four days a week and have been largely responsible for many tasks that would have otherwise been left undone. We have come together more closely as a church family through our recent past and believe that God has a purpose for St. Paul in our community. We are ready to fulfill that purpose, which we believe is, in part, defined by our Bold Decision: "Serving Christ by feeding the hungry and ministering to children in our community." This statement is found on our website, in our monthly newsletter, the Sunday bulletins and our correspondence.

10. What is the role of the pastor? For example: a. Describe the strengths and weaknesses of your last called pastor? b. How did your last pastor divide time among things like worship, teaching, pastoral care, administration, and church growth? c. Can you describe the strengths of your ideal pastor? d. Have you considered diversity in your search?

We seek a pastor who is energetic and joyful in worship and demonstrates that approach in dealing with members, officers and visitors. We want a person with a strong desire to provide pastoral care and who exhibits sound preaching skills. We would like a pastor who is well-organized and willing to share responsibility with Session. This person should delegate work to staff and laity while holding them accountable in a friendly, non-judgmental way. He or she should encourage and empower laity to accept leadership responsibility. We seek a person that demonstrates openness and a welcoming nature. The next installed pastor must have a commitment to our Bold Decision and be willing to support us as we grow into the areas of feeding the hungry and ministering to children. A strong Christian Education background would be helpful as the congregation works to strengthen the second half of our Bold Initiative.

We seek a person who is secure in his or her role as leader and is not thin-skinned nor resentful of criticism or disagreement. We seek collaboration rather than divisiveness. We do not seek a CEO-type but rather a person with a caring, collaborative personality. We believe a person with both sensitivity and confidence can help this church continue its revitalization and grow its service to the community. We also seek a pastor who is willing to further develop a relationship with Landmark Ministries and who encourages dialogue and understanding of the diversity of our two congregations. The challenge for this congregation will be to recognize that in a single-pastorate congregation, the pastor cannot do all things and be all things. We must provide the next pastor support and space to lead us spiritually, not just administratively.

11. Describe the relationship among current staff, session and congregation. How would you like these relationships to change?

The current supply pastor is full time. Our paid staff includes an office administrator/secretary who works 24 hours a week. Five "Office Angels" work with/for the office administrator and perform a number of tasks outlined in a "handbook" three hours a day, four days a week. St. Paul has a contract custodian, a contract musician who works 8 hours per week throughout the year, and a part time contract choir director who works 6.5 hours per week, mid-August through Memorial Day. The Pastor meets monthly with the Ministry of Administration and Personnel and periodically with other contract employees as needed to plan music and worship activities. The pastor moderates monthly Session meetings and attends (monthly) Deacons and Ministry of Worship meetings. The supply pastor also meets with the other six ministry units as needed.



The current relationships are cordial, caring and very stable. No changes are needed, and collaboration is strong. The congregation is quite fond of the current supply pastor and is hopeful that the Committee on Ministry will support calling the temporary supply pastor as the next installed pastor if the discernment process were to recommend it.

12. How is your congregation different from other Presbyterian churches?

St. Paul, through the New Beginnings process, is implementing a Bold Decision to feed the hungry and minister to children in the community. This new focus has revitalized this church in ways we did not expect when we began the process in October 2015. We believe we are further along in the overall process than some congregations in the Presbytery that started several years ago. We are an inclusive congregation that readily welcomes anyone in our worship and membership no matter their background, gender, sexual orientation or race. We expect children and youth to be part of the worship service. We have a number of established traditions created in our thirty two-year history but we are flexible and willing to try new worship and music styles. We have a love of music with a renewed vocal choir and with periodic hand bell performances that stand out as a blessing. Our newly formed partnership with Landmark Ministries is unique in that we jointly operate a food pantry as a partner agency with the Food Bank of the Rockies. This partnership extends to occasionally shared worship and special events, which help bridge our diversity.

13. What are your church's financial strengths and weaknesses? Please provide copies of the last three year's Treasurer's Reports, including financial balance sheets and Profit & Loss statements for those years. Also include a discussion of any significant debt impacting the church.

In 2002, when we called an installed pastor, our membership was at nearly 300 members. At that time, we were seeking a pastor to lead us through a building expansion program. The capital campaign for the new sanctuary was conducted and resulted in St. Paul successfully securing a loan from the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program (PILP) for \$1 million. The new sanctuary was completed in April 2007. However, by the time the pastor was removed by an Administrative Commission in 2010, our membership had declined to about 110 active members. Our debt was large and thanks to Denver Presbytery, St. Paul secured a subsidy to help cover our mortgage for five years. That subsidy ended in 2015. Our monthly mortgage payment is approximately \$6,200; our loan balance with PILP is approximately \$667,000 and our loan balance with Presbytery is approximately \$285,000. The PILP loan is tracked under a capital account. This year's operating income is expected to be about \$209,000. Our expenses, not including the mortgage interest, are expected to be about \$200,000. A portion of our mortgage (\$30,000 in interest) is carried as an operating

expense but tracked separately as part of the capital campaign. Compared to where we were in 2013, we have made great progress. The monthly rent from Landmark Ministries (\$2550) covers much of our monthly mortgage expense. This rental income is helping us manage cash flow and operating expenses. This makes us optimistic, but cautious as we realize should they leave, our cash flow issues will be significant. We even anticipate a modest surplus at the end of 2016.

Three years of financials will be provided separately.

Comments: (Please mark up this copy or add additional sheets if necessary)

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Name (In case we need to contact you for clarification)

Please give your comments to Dave Goss ([dave@dcgoss.com](mailto:dave@dcgoss.com)); John Black; Deanna Gordon; Sally Garwood; Cleve Dixon or Sue Warner