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***BRADLEY HILLS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH***  
**REPORT OF THE CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY TASK**  
**FORCE *July 21, 2015***

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## **1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church (BHPC) has demonstrated strength in many areas during the past several years, including an increase in membership, growth in our church school attendance, and good financial support. However, difficulty in recruiting new and existing members to serve in existing lay ministry and broader church programs led the Session to identify a need to review the congregational life and determine if any new initiatives could be taken to enhance the vitality among members.

To conduct this evaluation, the Congregational Vitality Task Force was established, comprised of 12 members who spent the past six months interviewing members, performing research, conducting brainstorming sessions, and getting feedback on preliminary conclusions. The focus of the evaluation was on “Congregational Life challenges” and “Lay Ministry challenges.” This report covers the findings of the evaluation and offers recommendations.

From the Congregational Vitality Task Force analysis, major findings are as follows:

- The church exhibits multiple signs of health as evidenced by a growing membership, including many families with young children. However this growing membership of families desires a deeper connection to BHPC, which is not adequately being addressed.
- BHPC has a broader congregation of members, in addition to young families, who also desire a stronger connection and level of deeper engagement with their fellow church members.
- Lay ministries have been performing outstanding service for BHPC, but have faced challenges in recruiting members to fill open needs on certain lay ministries. In addition, a number of members have a limited understanding of the role of each the lay ministry.

The issues referenced above, if not resolved, could likely undercut the ability of the church to maintain its vitality, fulfill its mission, and remain relevant in the current era. The Congregational Vitality Task Force therefore identified specific recommended actions to address these issues. These actions focus on the following objectives:

1. Develop a full-bodied family ministry, attending to the needs of children and youth, in conjunction with parents who moving into participation and leadership.
2. Increase the level of engagement, congregation-wide, through both an expanded and robust small-group ministry and simplified procedures for connecting new and current members to the life of church.
3. Streamline our lay ministry structures, starting with Session carefully assessing the task requirements for all current lay ministries.

Each of the above objectives should include an emphasis on mission and service opportunities which address the ideas and desires of the congregation.

The recommendations included in this report are substantive and far-reaching, and require the Session to lead the congregation to make bold commitments of energy and resources. These commitments will position Bradley Hills to be a church that thrives in a changing world, that generates the spiritual sustenance and community its members crave, and that radiates God's love into the world in tangible ways.

With Session's approval, the recommendations covered in this report will help set the direction for planning, developing, and implementing changes to increase vitality at Bradley Hills. Session should be mindful that implementing these recommendations requires the investment of time and commitment across our congregation. The Congregational Vitality Task Force fully recognizes the effort required, and therefore is looking to Session to provide the sponsorship to lead this initiative.

The following sections covers outlines our approach to the task, our findings in greater detail, recommendations for improvement, and suggested actions for implementation.

## **2 APPROACH TO TASK**

The Congregational Vitality Task Force was convened to become acquainted with and to discuss the nature of the challenges and the most effective approach to assess them. This Task Force conducted an extensive brainstorming session that resulted in establishing a methodology for gathering and interpreting reliable information. This involved working as two teams to focus on two areas: "Life of the Congregation Challenges" and "Lay Ministry Challenges." Midway through the process, each team took up the alternate topic.

The methodologies used by the Task Force included research and discernment, and varied by group and individual skill. Research approaches included reading books, performing internet searches of relevant information, particularly on church websites, conducting individual and group interviews with persons inside and outside the congregation, conducting surveys among individuals and churches, undertaking Lenten prayer groups for discernment, and holding group discussions.

In the course of this work, members of the Task Force met with Joan Gray, author of Sailboat Church, and met numerous times in person and by phone as teams to share findings and to pray together. The Task Force also assembled a detailed list of observations and opinions provided anonymously by members of the congregation, and also by previous and current members of all the lay ministry committees of the church.<sup>1</sup>

On May 13 the Task Force reached a consensus on principal findings and recommendations for improvement. This summary report captures the central themes within the numerous findings and comments received, and formulates these themes in a way that allows the Session to develop an action plan for next steps.

Session members who serve on this Task Force introduced the core recommendations at the June 16, 2015 Session meeting and discussed their prioritization and possible

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to Appendix A for specific feedback gathered.

implementation. In this meeting, Session members provided feedback that the recommendations from the Vitality Task Force should be presented as foundational to the BHPC strategic planning process that will begin in early 2016. This Strategic Planning process will assess where we as a congregation want to be in 5-10 years from now. In response to that appeal, the findings and recommendations from the Task Force are presented here, in conjunction with proposed actions that could be taken by Session. The description of these actions include proposals for possible sequencing of initiatives, and identifying immediate, middle-term, and long-term implementation suggestions as a bridge to that strategic plan.

Know that the Vitality Task Force committed to approach this task with minds open to fresh guidance from the spirit of God. We were mindful of James 1:5:

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”*

### **3 PRINCIPAL FINDINGS**

As stated above, the Vitality Task Force conducted its analysis in light of the fact that Bradley Hills is a growing and well-financed church in the midst of a demographic change, with an influx of two-career families with children, a strong, growing segment of active committed Baby Boomers, and youth, who are drifting away. All groups desire a deeper connection. Key findings include the following:

#### **Desire for deeper connection with the church:**

- Need among all demographic and age groups to feel more engaged, included, and spiritually connected. People want to be a part of a community that offers spiritual formation and social outreach for established and new members alike.
- Need to overcome the sense of isolation from what is perceived as a “core” BHPC group that is felt by a majority of current members.
- Desire for more open collective congregation-wide fellowship, as members do not consider that fundraisers qualify as fellowship.
- Desire for personal connection based in friendship and caring. These respondents noted that community building can seem secondary when people feel they are only contacted for an “ask.”
- Desire for more community building events and service events with opportunity for intergenerational interaction, which is appropriate and fun for families and for children of varying ages.

#### **Desire for better understanding of ways to become involved in church life:**

- Significant time constraints among members are an obstacle for participation in our programming as it is currently scheduled, and members lack clarity about the nature of the tasks.
- Fear of engagement because members assume that too much will be asked of them.
- Perception that there are “cliques” in charge of programs, and when members try to join, there is a "group" already in charge who are reluctant to listen to new ideas or welcome new people.
- Need to streamline Lay Ministries to make them more accessible and their work more transparent. Common themes from respondents regarded term limits, overburdened members, not enough turnover, and limited cooperation among existing groups.<sup>2</sup>
- Need for a current and dynamic list of clearly defined opportunities for volunteering and engagement, such as a three-tiered system of increasing responsibility and more time-limited, single-focus occasions for service and fellowship.

**Desire to identify a community vision:**

- Members expressed a need for a clear community vision that everyone is able to identify with. These respondents observe that we as a church are going in too many directions.

**Call for clear messaging and expectation for new members**

- Need to revise the way we attract, welcome, and incorporate new members, (including families), with a variety of timely outreach initiatives.
- Need to ensure that current members feel valued and cared for while the church creates programs and outreach for new people.

**Need to be more responsive to members’ initiatives**

- Need to create a strong, supportive environment that encourages members to take initiative within the church in ways that support the clear vision of the church.

**Desire to have more fun, to experience joy, within the church community!**

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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to Appendix B for the Lay Ministry matrix.

## 4 CORE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED ENGAGEMENT

Following are the three core recommendations identified by the Congregational Vitality Task Force:

1. Develop a full-bodied family ministry, attending to the needs of children and youth in conjunction with moving their parents into participation and leadership.
2. Increase level of engagement congregation-wide through an expanded and robust small-group ministry; clarify and simplify procedures for connecting new and current members to the life of church.
3. Transform our operating structures, starting with Session's carefully assessing all Lay Ministries, with an eye to moving some toward ministry teams where appropriate.

*Underlying Focus: Through each of the recommendations run the unifying themes of Mission and Service. Members frequently emphasized the need for more widely-accessible, family-friendly, multigenerational service opportunities, and the need for a simpler pathway to action when ideas arise from members and small groups as well as from lay ministries or ministry teams.*

## 5 DISCUSSION AND RATIONALE FOR CORE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section provides an explanation and rationale for each of the three recommendations identified in Section 4 above.

### 5.1 BUILD A FULL-BODIED FAMILY MINISTRY

There are many dimensions to this proposed initiative, which address the ultimate sustainability of our congregation: developing a Family Ministry is an investment in the enrichment, friendships, and character-building of our children and youth, as well as the future of our membership. This initiative opens the opportunity for the participation of the parents who need full confidence that their children are benefiting and happy in order to engage themselves and to lead. It offers a new context for identifying, planning and carrying out more mission/service activities together as a church family, strengthening our bonds while reaching out to the world. All of these qualities lead to meeting the needs of youth (and their friends) who currently look for Social Service / Learning (SSL) Projects outside the church.

A Family Ministry with strong coordinated components for children, youth, parent, and other relatives of school-aged children constitutes the most ambitious and foundational recommendation, one which will require a significant amount of planning, reallocation of assets, and internal program adjustments. Yet this initiative promises the biggest adaptation to the changes in the society that impact these and other members – shortage of time coupled with hunger for spiritual/meaningful connection not available elsewhere.

We found that our church celebrates the visible influx of children and families. We also discovered that these adults became members with the need and expectation that their participation would be together with their children. The shortage of time, particularly felt by two-career families in this area, means they place significant value on weekend family time with children. Church is one of many options they have for spending time together. A robust program can tip the balance of enriching family time in favor of church. In fact, this introduces an absolute requirement – future willing participation of the parents in church activities is linked directly to the positive growing experience of their children. In effect, bringing family life into the church in itself will drive vitality.

The congregation must embrace the need to get this right; otherwise, we run the risk of alienating the newer members that are young families. Therefore, it is our first recommendation. It is not the only area, and it does not reach all members, but a lack of focus here presents a stumbling block and impacts our consolidation of recent growth. This is also a broad-scope recommendation, requiring a number of initiatives to be undertaken as financial and time budgets are worked out across the church. It intersects each of the other recommendations below.

***Mission Focus:***

- ***Encourage mission and service initiatives which provide low-barrier opportunities for families to engage in service together***
- ***Engage youth in decision-making and planning about projects to undertake, whether as youth or as a whole church***
- ***Build strong and creative SSL opportunities available for all Montgomery County youth available to serve.***

## **5.2 EXPAND THE SMALL GROUPS MINISTRY**

Bradley Hills formally launched a successful small-groups initiative during Lent of 2015. Congregational Vitality supported this process, participated in it, and monitored members' experience throughout and afterward. One of our Task Force members served as a Small Group host. We recommend that BHPC build on what Kori has started by deepening and extending it. We are in agreement that expansion of this ministry will give us connectedness, engagement, belonging and spiritual focus. This is where we learn to know one another's stories and learn to care about one another. All Bradley Hills generations should be invited into and become involved in this movement.

Into this fellowship we welcome our new, even prospective, members. This is where we learn our spiritual gifts. This is where our initial leadership will be trained and our new leadership will emerge. Developing this ministry is important enough that we challenge all Session members and recruits to participate, or even to lead a small group, becoming fully engaged in the effort and in recruiting members to attend small groups. We recommend initiating this action as early as the Welcome Back Brunch in September 2015.



Much planning and connecting can be developed around the small group commitment. While people are in small groups and having good experience, we can work on developing our other more challenging recommendations. We believe that the small-group experiences, while varying in their composition and style, will help build the fabric of the church community that will support our other endeavors.

**Mission Focus:**

- ***Encourage and enable small groups to discover and enact ways to be of service drawing from the ideas and passions that arise through their sharing.***

### 5.3 STREAMLINE OUR LAY MINISTRIES STRUCTURES

Since we found that the current structure of lay ministries provided barriers to participation, we recommend streamlining operations to enhance engagement in church service. The primary purpose for restructuring current Lay Ministries – which may best be accomplished by forming short-term, task-specific ministry teams – is to reconnect these ministries to members by making the activities visible, identifiable and accessible.

The Task Force research identified specific obstacles to participation with the lay ministries as currently structured. These varied from lack of term limits and clear succession strategies to lack of clarity (even perceived impenetrability) about objectives and procedures, to meeting times and formats that are increasingly burdensome to a wide range of members who might otherwise be interested in the work. Overall a sense that a select few members are overburdened with work, in comparison to the rest of the congregation, was pervasive on both sides of the workload. Some felt overworked while others felt that they were facing procedural closed doors, lack of visibility, self-satisfied maintenance of programs or “cliquish-ness.” This finding is clearly illustrated, especially in the first instance, by the Survey of past and present lay ministry chairs.<sup>3</sup>

As the small groups develop and flourish, we anticipate that the lay ministry assessment referred to below will inspire Session to consider ways to divide up the work of Lay Ministries into smaller, more focused teams (ministry teams) with tasks that offer a time horizon, providing clear expectations for new and returning members, and opening pathways for people to share and act upon their strengths and passions.

The mission focus stated in conjunction with each recommendation will impact current practice directly and requires a close examination of the activities now overseen by the Mission Coordination Lay Ministry and the willing participation of its members. At the same time, steps can be taken before and during any reorganization of that group’s work.

The theme that emerged from our research is that members need to be encouraged to propose ideas that they themselves would organize and participate in, perhaps with an annual calendar for events that would emphasize big service programs in sequence.

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Appendix A for feedback from lay ministry leads, as well as Appendix B for the Lay Ministry matrix.

People want to do mission with their children to teach them and to have meaningful family and community experience; they also want to connect with other (older, younger) generations through service.

The current approach to mission is that a committee proposes worthy programs and drums up interest. Bradley Hills must find ways for new ideas to come up from concerned Christians in its own congregation. There is a precedent at Bradley Hills –for example, Bob Reutershan moderated Mission Forums in 2000 and 2001 where members brought proposals. Bradley Hills Session participated in the establishment of county-wide programming to reach the poor. The Uganda project was born of the former and Community Ministry of Montgomery County was born of the latter. Getting behind members' passions in this way (also the Asia Endowment, Academy of Hope, Anacostia Children's Center, and other mission related-initiatives) is a hallmark of Bradley Hills. However, the long-term result we encountered is that, however noble or inspired the effort, the initial impetus has often been lost and the new or unconnected members feel alienated from (or at the least don't share) the energy that gave rise to it.

We should establish ways to endorse and promote ideas and initiatives that come from any members willing to take on leadership and organization of the new activity. We could organize to support these ideas with a planning group. We don't know what new ideas people will come up with until given a chance. This could be linked to Adult Education or Adult Enrichment or Mission Concerns. People could explore and promote the idea in the enrichment forums and then proceed.

***Mission Focus:***

- ***Create an environment where mission activities and proposals from members and small groups are celebrated and supported by Session and staff.***

## **6 ACTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

What specific steps might bring about a shared vision and new energy in the life of Bradley Hills? Currently there is a tension between the familiar way of doing things and new approaches that seem necessary to solve the problems we identified and then to build a thriving future for our church. We offer the following ideas for consideration by Session.

### **6.1 DEVELOP A FULL-BODIED FAMILY MINISTRY**

Focus on a Family Ministry will require long term planning for Bradley Hills that includes institutional commitment starting with the Session, and fosters a full-bodied children's and youth ministry at the heart of our declared mission. It will require visioning, budget, scheduling, staffing, communications, and messaging to reflect this central focus.

While our church school program is thriving in terms of attendance, we see a need for a two-pronged approach. First, we want to ensure the sustainability of church school. Some members of our task force are concerned that the recent difficulty attracting adequate numbers of volunteer teachers may be a chronic condition that, unless dealt

with swiftly, can become a serious detriment to the church's ability to continue to expand its mission to the next generation.

### **6.1.1 Identify Detailed Actions to Improve the Sunday Church School Program**

We recommend that session ask the staff (David, Kori, and Noelle) to provide a written report to the September 2015 Session meeting, evaluating the relative seriousness of the coming year's Sunday School volunteer teacher situation. This report should identify possible barriers keeping members from volunteering to teach. This report should also recommend immediate steps to sustain the quality of the overall program. These steps should include any recommended training, support for new volunteers, revisions to the schedule, and redefining roles of teachers, as appropriate.

### **6.1.2 Increase Engagement in a Full-bodied Family Ministry**

We recommend the formation a working group to envision the full scope of the undertaking, i.e., what a broader family ministry will look like. As noted above, we are competing for the time and commitments of a host of other family activities during the week and on weekends. Even our strong church school alone will not anchor families to Bradley Hills. Rather, we must think about how to engage and nurture the parents and the children at other times: in family/intergenerational activities, particularly service, and in enrichment times *parallel* to the necessary work of adults. The St. Mark PC model of "Spirit Sunday" (described elsewhere) entails one Sunday a month of lay ministry work conducted after church services: a family meal, followed by committee or team work, with dedicated activities for the children. Their experience as candidly shared with us, as well as our own with Family Connections lunches, makes it clear that these activities cannot be mere childcare, but must be purposeful, mission-focused, and fun – a ministry of their own, which breaks the mold for what has been done in other eras.

## **6.2 INCREASE LEVEL OF CONGRGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

How to fully engage the entire membership of any organization in the achievement of its mission is a complex problem, about which entire libraries of books have been written and for which numerous conferences convened. The following are some ideas we believe worthy of careful consideration, with respect to making active participation more attractive to members.

### **6.2.1 Expand Current Initiatives to Develop a Robust Small Group Ministry**

Consistent with the theme of breaking down church activities into smaller increments of time, we recommend expansion of the existing efforts to increase the number and kind of church-sponsored small group activities. By all accounts, the Lenten small group experience launched by Session and staff was considered a success by its participants.

We suggest that Session act to endorse support for a congregation-wide small group ministry, building on the positive lessons of the Lenten groups, which were called together for six weeks. Small groups should be of a size (8-12) that enables real connection and bonding. These could be established around issues and activities of interest to every generation to provide an occasion and a sense of belonging for all adult members. Small groups centered around common interests provide the setting which have the following features in common 1) considering topics raised in a reading,

TED talk, podcast, or mailing, 2) sharing our stories – which often leads to becoming better acquainted, and 3) seeking prayer requests which focuses on real needs. Groups can express as wide a range of common interests as exists within the congregation. We envision that the groups will be lay-led with hosts called upon according to their willingness and ability. The idea is that small groups provide an overall structure for congregational engagement, creating more connectedness and sharing.

Critical factors in the success of small groups include getting commitment from people willing to take leadership roles, considering members' limited time in setting the groups' schedules, and beginning with quality groups with the most likelihood of success. There is no need to push for majority participation in the first round. We want leaders to feel equipped, and for members to be engaged willingly. We suggest having perhaps three to four rounds of six-week small group sessions in a given year. As more people have satisfying experiences, the number of groups in each session will likely grow.

A first step to an enhanced launch could be for Session to assign immediately a working group, perhaps to be organized as a sample 'Ministry Team' with a limited assignment. This team would assist Kori in expanding and supporting a wider range of Breaking Bread groups than were constituted during Lent. Such a group may operate directly under Kori or eventually as part of a reconfigured Congregational Life Ministry. Our task force's initial survey of how small group life works in other congregations is very encouraging, offering ways to appeal to people where their interests lie – in biking or hiking together, dining together, reading together, discussing current events, sewing together, playing sports, supporting one another in caring for aging parents or dependent children, passionately pursuing social justice issues, struggling with chemotherapy, caregiving, overcoming grief, parenting, attending music events, etc.

There are many ways to advertise, alert and draw new participants into the process. It can be a very open process. For example we could do what one church did by making an announcement in worship that the church is considering moving in a new direction, gathering members and interested persons into small groups, asking people who stand in the sanctuary together to turn to one another, learn one another's name and prayer request. Then each participant is asked to agree to pray for that person or people, whether known or unknown to the attendee, in the coming weeks. At the end of the prayer for the stranger, people also agree to offer this additional prayer: "Lord, keep in me and in our congregation an open heart and an open mind to changes in our church that will make us more vital to your work in our midst and in the world." This closing prayer could be requested at each meeting of small groups as other changes proceed at the church – in family ministry, lay ministry and mission/service.

Once potential group interests are identified by the working group, approach and confirm with willing hosts/conveners, compile a listing and description of possible groups, print and circulate a paper on possible Small Groups and leave room for spawning new ideas.

- Alternatively at the next all-church meal (e.g., Welcome Back Brunch) set up tables with specific topics and let people self-select. One or two tables would be labeled unidentified or TBD.

- As mentioned, experience shows that groups are best limited to 8-12 participants. The group would determine when, where, and how often they meet. And what they want to do together.
- Groups could be encouraged explore and attend together community-based events, debriefing afterward.
- Intergenerational composition of groups may be critical to the success of some, since a number of respondents expressed interest in mixing with members of the congregation who are new to them.
- Groups could identify and choose to participate in onetime events, i.e. those that are task-oriented, and time limited.
- Training for group leaders needs attention, as this is critical to success. If leadership training had to be provided by the pastor and associate pastor alone, then it would become unworkable for either to host or lead a small group. Session could consider calling on the participation of our Parish Associates (all three) and our Coordinator for Spiritual Life to assist in leadership training and support for small groups, at least at the initial stages. They might also help in preparing our small group leaders --and our newly elected governing officers -- to strengthen their spiritual leadership.
- Considering the central role of small groups in the life of the congregation, we suggest (see above) that Session members commit to participating in some small group themselves.
- It seems a very appropriate role for Deacons to play a key role here since they come to know the members in a more intimate way. They could be asked to introduce small group opportunities through caring calls and other contacts, , particularly to new members in helping them to be better integrated.
- New members could be asked to visit one or more of the groups upon joining the church to get acquainted or find a good fit, or special Connect groups could be designed to appeal to them.
- We anticipate that the management of the small groups would remain under the purview of the Associate Pastor.

Group opportunities can be structured in a variety of ways -- informal gatherings -- including youth -- to get to know one other, (comprised of persons not sure if they are ready for bigger commitment), groups conceived as covenant groups (wanting to read and discern together in a deeper way), and connect groups, (which new members could join right away).

It might be advisable to include a couple of "Ministry Teams" designed as small groups as an experiment to see how the idea of a connectional group running a ministry might work, such as a Fellowship Hour ministry team focused on ministering through hospitality. Current affinity groups in the congregation may be incorporated as Breaking Bread groups if they so desire.

As the small groups begin, we suggest providing a broad, fairly unified "curriculum" to these groups. This can link part of the discussion in small groups across the congregation to issues around which the pastors build their sermon series, that the session thinks in its visioning we could rightly explore as a congregation, or even that current lay ministries propose should be put before the congregation for serious or special attention as we move into new mission, service and form of governance.

### 6.2.2 Improve Processes for Connecting Members to the Life of the Church

Prepare a brief introductory document that describes, succinctly, the basic structure and activities of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), the basic structure and activities of BHPC, the BHPC cultural values referred to above (including the dependence of the BHPC vision on lay person engagement in church life as well as pledged monetary support), and other relevant information of this nature.<sup>45</sup>

- Introduce Church Membership expectations related to time commitment in addition to financial pledging, by introducing expectation of worship plus one additional church activity. This initiative requires that members would have access to the list of options referred to above (revealing high responsibility and low responsibility, time and skill commitments, etc.) to allow for clarity about nature of the activities and a choice in their level of involvement. In addition to the work necessitated to list the church service opportunities this would likely require someone to administer or coordinate this (see suggestion below of possible program coordinator role)
- Give new members a Time and Talent Sheet prepared for this purpose, asking them to indicate specific activities that interest them, and give space for suggestions.
- Develop a specific chain of responsibility to ensure that someone from the relevant lay ministry or team will reach out *immediately* by phone or email.
- Capture Time and Talent responses from all existing members as well – perhaps making it an annual part of pledge season – and explore a way of keeping all of the above in a secure central data base such as through the BHPC Connect portion of the website that has such potential, with clear standards for its accessibility (perhaps restricted to lay ministry chairs when searching for volunteers or other activity events?).
- As the lay ministries compile their activities as elsewhere proposed, prepare an explanatory article or changing opportunity list describing it all, and how it can be

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<sup>4</sup> An important part of this briefing document should be an explanation of where the polity of the Presbyterian Church falls, in the spectrum of structures that range from hierarchical control by clergy (e.g., Roman Catholic Church) to congregational control by laypersons (e.g., Disciples of Christ). PCUSA calls for an equitable, shared responsibility between clergy and lay members relying on scriptural accounts of the growth and vitality of the early church.

<sup>5</sup> This would make clear the equal weight given in Presbyterian polity to the responsibility and authority of both clergy and laity, and the corresponding importance and value of voluntary engagement of lay people in active ministry (c.f. explanation of this background provided previously to BHPC Adult Education classes by Bruce Douglas, Reformed Institute of Metropolitan Washington).

accessed by everyone, and post or circulate it to the entire membership as part of a general series on keeping everyone informed.

### **6.2.3 Establish Program Coordination Capacity**

We see a heightened need for coordination if these changes are to be introduced. This could possibly occur through expansion and adaptation of the role currently known as Coordinator of Connectional Ministries or a Connectional Ministries Team, formed for that purpose. A large part of the effort to engage new and current members will involve data management. There must be a task definition (for perhaps a team of two or three) - not one of the pastors -- who takes responsibility for 1) collecting the Time and Talent data/interest surveys from new members, 2) sharing it with lay ministries (or ministry teams tbd), and 3) following up to make sure each new member who expresses an interest gets a call from the right contact person in a specified (short turn around) time.

This team could also manage an annual collection of Time and Talent sheets during pledge season from current members with a similar response, though perhaps with longer turn-around time due to “bulk” collection. Ongoing “Help Wanted” notices for quick service opportunities, in the bulletin or online, could also be coordinated through this position or team.

### **6.2.4 Solicit the Participation of the Board of Deacons**

We also have an active, committed Board of Deacons who are well positioned to take on some of this work of integrating new members and may be willing to embrace it as part of ongoing caring call work giving shape and continuity between the calls and the unfolding changes in the church programming. They could consider delegating members to serve in this capacity, or through volunteering to enter data or make calls after a group of new members joins the church. It would be a natural segue to share with them small group and service opportunities.

Beyond that, we could consider having the Board of Deacons coordinating personal outreach to each new member for a set time. They could follow up on the Time and Talent sheet, call within a few weeks to ask if they’ve been contacted, or devise some other way of ensuring new members are brought into the fold quickly.

## **6.3 TRANSFORM OUR LAY MINISTRY STRUCTURES**

### **6.3.1 Prepare Lay Ministry Descriptions**

As a prelude to any structural changes, and as an aid to our engagement efforts, ask each chair (or a working group assigned to this process) to prepare a short document that describes, succinctly, the current operational lay ministry, giving the primary responsibilities, dominant tasks, and major coordinating mechanisms that support its purpose. Give these documents to members willing to serve on lay ministries, as well as to new members, and make them available generally in the office and on the website.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The descriptions already present in the annual budget document contain the outline of this kind of material – a starting point would be to reformat what is available there and make the descriptive material comparable across lay ministries.

### **6.3.2 Go Beyond Financial Budgeting to Include Time Assessments/Projections**

It is clear that the total metabolism of the church as a living organism depends on the contribution of time, skill, gifts of passion and commitment, and money from its members. At present, our budget process only encompasses money. A full understanding of what is necessary for the church to fulfill its mission requires an understanding of all the necessary commitments to accomplish the work of the ministries.

Most lay ministry members seemed comfortable with the current financial budgeting process. As part of an examination of lay ministries, we recommend also asking these groups to do a task analysis of the nature of the task, the amount of volunteer time (above that of staff time) needed for each of their major activities (enumerated both in numbers of persons and approximate hours of time per week, or month, or season).

This can be done by the same people that now submit budget recommendations, presumably the lay ministry chairs and the individual staff members. Or it can be done by a working group whose members sit down with each chair and compile the data in such a way that the measures are roughly commensurate. How these various input requests are assembled into a final coordinated assessment of resources required to carry out the work of the church, may require some thought by Session. But, whatever the particular mechanics of preparation, this enterprise is best regarded as an extension of existing practice so as to encompass the true needs of the program.

### **6.3.3 Explore and Revise Lay Ministry Features**

Experiment, for a period of time, with various dimensions of lay ministry formulation and composition, including time horizons for activities, terms of office for chairs and members, times and forms of meetings, combining some existing lay ministries, even job descriptions of Session Liaisons and staff input. A certain amount of flexibility in the term of service for Session and lay ministry volunteers from three years to two years, with both voluntary expansion to a third year without reappointment, or reduction to one year without explanation. During an experimental period, some persons may wish to serve on ministry teams. These will offer opportunities structured differently than current lay ministry work.

The first step in considering restructuring Lay Ministries is for Session to carefully review the results of the time and funding assessment process referred to above. This process has the advantage of addressing our current work as it is, starting with an open-minded assessment, allowing that many of our activities are good, and functional. They can and will remain and be blessed – although more transparent to all—while others can benefit from imagination, vision and possibly innovation, letting go of one action in order to introduce something responsive to the current need and capacity. Innovation can emerge from creative, Spirit-led assessment if there is a clear direction/vision and committed people and resources available with which to imagine a different or better way to accomplish the task.

This will require identifying the specifically noted activities and key tasks that lay members take on, either via the lay ministry structure or other means. Select members of Session could be assigned to review the evaluation with this assessment in mind, scrutinize it, deconstruct it, analyze it and write it up. From that list of tasks, decisions



can be made as to whether tasks/activities are ongoing (such as named programs) or time limited.

During the careful assessment phase other ideas for activities and service may well surface, which will open the door for further consideration about with how we might best carry them out. This would be a way of introducing what is missing from the program or could be carried out in a new way.

- Information can be used by Lay Ministries to describe their programs through all church media – in introductory brochures, with an added bulletin board in the Gathering Space or Marquee, web site, Constant Contact mailings, BHX, LCD screen, etc. Easily available activities can be advertised as a “Help Wanted” or Opportunities List, useful for current and new members alike. The immediately available description of church activities to choose from can be shared with all new members, creating important on-ramps to engagement.
- The time commitment for conducting this task analysis is probably significant (three to six months) and will require almost full time attention to it.
- Data can be used also to create organization charts of the existing activities.
- Another step is to identify several programs – such as Fellowship Hour, Single themed Adult Education series, and Angel Gift Tree holiday activities – for immediate trial for a new way of implementing it, and a team to carry it forward.<sup>7</sup>
- Recommend immediately that lay ministry chairs work closely with session members through this transition. This will connect session more closely to the work of the lay ministries as a transformation is envisioned
- Small Groups will likely identify new, more user-friendly and time limited tasks that will create a new foundation of participation.

One experiment – moving all lay ministry meetings to a Sunday after church once a month – was seriously considered by the task force as a way of making access to governance structures easier. But digging deeper, both in talking to our own members who would be affected by the change and to members and pastor at St. Mark who has tried this “Spirit Sunday” approach when all church committees meet after luncheon, it is only a sustainable solution if the children are meaningfully engaged and eager to participate. Babysitting is not sufficient. Activities which teach, provide mission activities which are fun and engaging, allow children to bond in ways that are different – and hopefully free – from the school and sports pressures available in their daily lives will require funding, planning, full integration into the ongoing programs at the church. So the success of the Family Ministry is crucial to the success of the lay ministry/ministry teams meetings if moved to Sunday.

#### **6.3.4 Clarify Session and Lay Ministry Coordination**

During the period that this evaluation and strategic planning process is underway, a

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to Appendix for ideas on engaging alternate ways to conduct Fellowship Hour as an example of possibilities.

possible connecting mechanism between Lay Ministries and Session would be to set up specific communication responsibilities for Session liaisons to lay ministries. Session member liaisons would be responsible for writing up and reporting on the above deconstruction/breakdown of activities for that lay ministry and for expectations in aligning the activities of that ministry to the emerging vision in the strategic plan. This would ensure effective communication by the Session liaisons during the active phase of streamlining/restructuring lay ministries.

### **6.3.5 Form Ministry Teams as Our Members and Session See Opportunities**

In the past, session members served as chairs of lay ministries. This ensured clear communication and permitted efficient coordination, but it also put a heavy burden on Session members. This task force initially recommended that this arrangement be reinstated. But given the time pressures that all church members are feeling (due to the responsibilities of modern daily life, whether family, economic, social, or spiritual), reinstating this arrangement as a solution to the communication and coordination conundrum does not seem as attractive a solution. Upon careful consideration, placing chairs on Session actually would commit the congregation to maintaining the fixed “Committee” structure that current characterizes the Lay Ministries precisely at a time when we are proposing possible innovation and a move away from the current maintenance functions of lay ministries to a more nimble, responsive structure, to increase engagement, possibly a ‘ministry teams’ approach. To involve sitting or immediate past Session members in the time-and-funding assessment process engages the visioning group (Session) members in the-day-to-day sufficiently to prepare them intimately for the re-visioning (or visioning) process inherent in conducting a strategic plan.

We suggest also that the Nominating Committee members be very well briefed about the strategic planning process that Session is considering – with an eye toward recruiting persons who are suited to, excited by and perhaps experienced in carrying out such an undertaking.

## **7 SUMMARY**

In the course conducting its review, the Vitality Task Force found that most of the obstacles to full engagement were matters of programs and initiatives not functioning as originally intended, and no longer carrying the meaning they had in the past. This disconnect can feel oppressive to members, especially to those who would like to participate. Our approach was to begin looking for a means by which our church could become more flexible, nimble and organic, starting from where we are.

In this situation, which some might describe as a crisis, it seems to us, after discernment and extensive focus and exchange, that a new vision will emerge from continuing to listen to our members, honoring what works well, responding to opportunities, and expecting our Session to be bold enough to act in areas where we need to catapult into the future.

Part of our process was giving thought and prayer to a redesign of how the church might respond to the needs we uncovered, possibly going back to the blueprint of how the early church functioned in an environment where it competed with many secular

forces in society and had few if any supports from the wider society. Society is changing rapidly and the church must change. We at Bradley Hills have not changed our basic operations in decades. It is time we did so.

We hope to look back at this process and see that this is what opened us to hope, compassion, and meaning, and empowered us to adapt creatively to live as Jesus taught us. Just as the early church modeled in a world where even though early Christians were one option among many in a secular world, they carried a distinctive, life saving and spirit-filled message for all.

We conclude by suggesting that the biblical story, of Martha complaining about Mary's spending time anointing Jesus while Mary needed help with the food preparation, may be instructive. It is true that Jesus supported Mary in this case, and also reminded his followers on a different occasion that "man does not live by bread alone." But does not a careful reading, of all the scriptures, lead to a persuasion that our central task is not simply to choose the spiritual over the material – but to balance both? We hope the above suggestions, for improving the balance of our collective activities, both material and spiritual, will be helpful as the Session moves to adjust the vessel that is our congregation to the winds of the Spirit in shaping our future life together.