

“Who is God Calling Us to Serve?”

A Mission Study for Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church
Submitted to Committee on Ministry
October 10, 2017

Summary: “Who is God Calling Us to Serve?”

The past five years at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church have been punctuated by somewhat self-inflicted turmoil. We have experienced three interim pastors and one installed pastor who, for all intents and purposes, was an unintentional interim pastor. In the midst of all this, we launched an extremely ambitious Deo Gloria capital campaign to fund our impressive new organ and beautifully remodeled sanctuary and narthex. We have been helped tremendously through this difficult time by three dedicated retired pastors, Reverend Dr. Fred Schulz, Reverend Dr. Lou Thompson, and Reverend Dr. Bob Bohl, who so ably stabilized and guided our congregation as our bridge interim in 2014.

When Reverend Bob Sheldon arrived as our interim pastor at the end of 2016, he impressed upon Session the fact that we had yet to go through the appropriate studies and self-reflections as a church that were needed in advance of calling a new pastor. Session enthusiastically embraced Reverend Sheldon’s new direction for Vanderbilt. First, a Session Covenant, outlining Session’s commitment to each other and to the congregation, was approved (**see attached Attachment A**). Next, Session outlined eight “Benchmarks” that needed to be addressed, including the development of all of the necessary materials that will be needed by a future Pastor Nominating Committee (**see Attachment B**). It was with a new sense of direction and vitality that Session addressed each of the Benchmarks. Session has either taken the necessary action or laid the groundwork for future action to accomplish all of the Benchmarks.

Based on our history and the time, thought, and prayer spent during our extended interim period discerning what kind of church God is calling us to be, we have concluded that we will continue to be a “Big Tent” church, open to and respectful of people with a diversity of views and beliefs. After studying our area, which is detailed below, we have decided that God would like us to invite all people to join us to worship and serve but also to focus on the growth areas of the recently retired professional/executives and middle income families with younger children.

Over a period of many months, Session has studied and discussed the question of “Who is God Calling Us to Serve?” from a number of perspectives:

Biblical Perspectives

Four of the Biblical Perspectives stood out during Session’s study and discussion:

1. Blessing to be a Blessing – God has blessed us that we might share that blessing with others and not keep it to ourselves.
2. Build, Support, and Pray - God has placed us in a larger community to serve God within that community.
3. Abide and Bear Fruit – Bearing God’s fruit means staying connected to God.
4. Building Up the Body of Christ - In order to serve the people God is calling us to serve, we need all of the gifts God has given to us.

See Attachment C (Some Biblical Perspectives)

Theological Perspectives

Session also explored the theological themes that impact our shared ministry. We agreed that there is one overriding, non-negotiable belief shared by all Presbyterians: “**Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.**” This is what draws us and keeps us together.

While we respect a large spectrum of views, we realize that we have five major beliefs upon which we can all agree:

1. Sovereignty of God
2. Sinfulness of All Humanity
3. Salvation by Grace Through Faith
4. Call to Witness and Service
5. Church is God’s Witness to the World

Our history and our future is that Vanderbilt is a “Big Tent” church, in which everyone is welcomed and included. We accept that it may be a challenge to live out in our polarizing society, but we embrace the challenge.

See Attachment D (Theological Perspectives)

See Attachment E (Concluding Perspectives)

Practical Perspectives

With the assistance of Presbytery, Session examined the practical implications of reaching out and serving our community. Based on the information from MISSIONINSITE and other resources, we recognize that we are a growing community with projections for continued growth, and that the two fastest growing groups within our community have attracted our focus:

1. Recently retired professional/executives
2. Middle income families with younger children

Session committed time, talents and resources to serve all of our neighbors, with a special focus upon these two segments. As a way to support this effort, samplings of current and future planned activities are outlined:

Current Activities

- Concert series and other musical events
- Adult studies that are publicized in the community
- Community based mission programs, i.e. Mission Peniel, Habitat for Humanity, etc.
- Special children/family activities, i.e. Trunk or Treat, Advent Festival, Vanderbilt Learning Center, etc.

Future Planned Activities

- Theological forums to be publicized in the community
- Programs for young, working families
- Community education programs, i.e. Medicare, Financial Planning, etc.
- Additional mission efforts
- Some of our future planning will naturally be explored with our new pastor.

See Attachment F (Population Facts and Trends)

See Attachment G (Practical Perspectives)

Concluding Summary

As a Session, we have affirmed the following regarding our shared future:

- That we are a “Big Tent” church, in which all people are welcomed and respected.
- That we are all sinful humans who not always have the forever-true answers.
- That we will not always agree – this is a given in all families and communities.
- That we will respect differing opinions and work to agree whenever possible
- That love will be our greatest aim, as a response to and witness to God’s love.

With the guidance of Reverend Sheldon, Session has worked diligently to position our church for an exciting future. We are confident that potential pastoral candidates will assess Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church, not so much for what we’ve experienced in the past five years, but for what the bright future holds.

SESSION COVENANT

Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church
Naples, Florida
Approved February 28, 2017

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”
(Ephesians 4:1-6)

As members of this Session, we have been called by God through the voice of this congregation to serve the people of God with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. Therefore, we bind ourselves together with bonds of honesty, support and encouragement.

As leaders called to model the Body of Christ, we will:

1. Maintain a community and climate of worship so that the central question is not “What is the group consensus?” but “What is the leading of Christ in our midst?”
2. Be intentional in developing relationships with one another and engaging in conversation and ongoing study together in order to build and maintain Christian community and foster trust.
3. Gather good data and basic factual information, identifying alternatives and possibilities. Keep all possible options open in order that creativity may contribute to the process.
4. Lay aside all biases and blocks to the Holy Spirit, leaving the outcome to God’s direction, being willing to consider new ideas, and being obedient to the results.
5. Spend time in reflection and prayer, listening for God’s intimations of the future and hints of God’s direction, relying on scripture, listening, and deep engagement with Christ and each other.
6. Share with the community what one has seen, heard, or felt in the reflection time and speak from our personal experiences related to the subject.
7. Act in a spirit of love and humility, honoring the truth that God works through each member of the body. Be aware God may be speaking through another person, and remember that no one possesses all of God’s truth.
8. Listen attentively and with respect and openness to our sisters and brothers, believing that all desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ. Focus on ideas instead of questioning motives, intelligence, or integrity.
9. Wait for God’s timing. Continue to ask God for direction during the waiting. Speaking with a united voice depends on waiting long enough to receive a common sense of leading.
10. Lead by example, by sharing our faith and resources to further the church’s ministry through:
 - a. Regular attendance and participation in Worship
 - b. Intentional involvement in a Christian Education program
 - c. Consistent Stewardship through pledges and contributions
 - d. Joyful engagement in the Fellowship Activities with our members
 - e. Ongoing participation in the Mission Outreach of our church
11. Use our leadership roles to empower and encourage others, so that our members may experience the joy of serving and that God’s ministry will be done. We recognize that it is our

responsibility to work with our committees and groups to provide clarity of roles, resources for their work, and directions in selecting priorities.

12. Maintain confidentiality within the group, sharing only “public” information in ways that build up the Body of Christ.

Furthermore we agree:

1. Committees and boards are authorized and responsible for their particular areas of ministry as described in their job descriptions. They do not need additional permission to fulfill their duties.
2. Committees and boards are authorized to spend their line items—budgeted, designated and restricted—and do not need additional permission from the session. If a committee/board requires funding beyond its budget, it may submit a request to the session, detailing its rationale and design. Because budget allotments are made based on each committee/board’s plan, a request will be examined for its consistency with the church’s long-range plans.
3. Session meetings generally will last no more than 90 minutes.
4. We will allot time in each meeting for ongoing training/reflection/dreaming—this provides the opportunity for the Session to set both the vision and the direction of the church, while committees may labor together to “make it happen.”
5. Written reports from each committee will be submitted to the clerk by noon on the Tuesday before Session meeting, so that an agenda can be made and all materials distributed electronically the Thursday prior to session meeting, and will be read by all session members prior to meeting.
6. Written reports are not ministry minutes or summaries, but will follow the templet divided into:
 - a. Action Items—issues requiring session approval by formal vote
 - b. Discussion Items—occasions that a ministry team requests feedback from the session, which the session will provide without a formal decision or vote. In most cases, “major items” will be presented for discussion at least one month prior to action.
 - c. Information Items—actions the ministry team has taken as authorized by session; these items will be noted, but not mentioned unless (1) a session member has a question or (2) the reporting elder would like to highlight something.
7. Teaching Elders are authorized to approve and perform baptisms, weddings, funerals, communions and other duties included in their ministries, under the guidance of session policies, reporting as “information” such activities at each session meeting.
8. We will speak as a governing body. While we may disagree during our discussion, our voted decision will be considered the official position/decision of the session, and we will not undermine this decision by conversations within the congregation. We work and stand together.
9. We will speak the truth in love to each other, knowing that sometimes this may hurt another’s feeling; we agree that it is better to be honest than agreeable.
10. We will support one another in our shared ministry, encouraging and assisting whenever possible. Because the church has called us to lead them, we consider our responsibilities to be a sacred trust, and will thank God regularly for the opportunity to serve our community and our God.
11. At this time in our lives, we each agree to fulfill these responsibilities. If a member of our session should have a change in personal circumstance which no longer allows him/her to fulfill these responsibilities in a timely manner, the member may resign from the session with absolute appreciation for ministry provided.
12. We are a team that trusts each member, holds each other accountable, and works together for the shared ministry of our church. Thanks be to God for this opportunity to serve!

Here we hold ourselves and each other accountable to this covenant, and the policies and/or agreements we make together. We commit ourselves to one another, this congregation and the God we serve together.

Progress Report on Interim Benchmarks

**A Report from Session
Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church
Updated September 28, 2017**

We have been working hard. At the beginning of this interim period, Session identified eight issues, or benchmarks, that would be explored and addressed before we begin the search for our next pastor. The expectation was not that we would solve them all prior to the search—some may take several years to fully complete. Rather, Session’s intention is to address them—and figure out where to take action and where to make plans for future action. This information will greatly assist the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) in their conversations with pastoral candidates.

Session is nearing the end of its work on these benchmarks, and is pleased to provide a report on our progress. The eight issues—and our progress on each—are:

1. Develop and implement an engaging ministry model to attract, enlist, equip and encourage new members and other volunteers to fulfill their God-given ministry, with particular attention to our projected image in the community.

Progress: Our Transition Team of Session completed the descriptive phase of the Mission Study, utilizing the resources of the MissionInsite to obtain the demographic reports, as well as the descriptive information on the values of our neighbors. The information gleaned in these reports offered very few surprises about the area surrounding the church or the wider area in which our church family lives. As a part of the process for this study, the congregation was given an opportunity to participate in small group gatherings, with over 200 participants who discussed our congregation’s strengths and challenges, as well as our shared future. The Transition Team shared the results of these discussions with Session and has written a final report which was approved by Session. This information will be shared with the PNC.

Session also moved forward in the Prescriptive Phase, exploring the question, “Who is God calling us to serve?” from biblical, theological and practical perspectives. Following months of discussion, deliberation and decision, Session discerned that Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church will continue its legacy of being a “Big Tent Church,” in which everyone—regardless of social, economic, racial, political position—will be welcome and respected. While all peoples are invited and welcome, two particular groups we feel led to attract and serve are: (1) our retired neighbors, and (2) younger families with smaller children. Particular attention will be focused on creating opportunities to serve these two groups.

Session also worked to create more and better ways to enhance an atmosphere to encourage our church family to be balanced believers, as a way to engage every church family member in the larger life of ministry. The five areas of emphasis are: worship, education, stewardship, fellowship and mission. Each church officer commits to being involved in each of these five areas of ministry. Every member is encouraged to join our officers and engage and participate in all five of these areas.

- 2. Develop and implement an updated congregational care model (deacons, volunteer visitation teams, pastoral ministries, etc.) that will be in place and operational to provide care for all of our members and community.**

Progress: Session authorized our Assistant Pastor, Rex Childs, to assist in initiating a new, positive, proactive ministry involving our Deacons, Stephen Ministers and a group of volunteers with a passion and skills for caring for our members. After extensive planning and coordination, the new Congregational Care model was launched in June of 2017. The Deacons embraced their new roles as proactive care providers, and the visitation group began caring for those in special need. The Stephen Ministers stepped up their ministry, as well, providing weekly care through prayer following each worship service, and ongoing care for members who benefit from longer-term relationships. This ministry will enhance greatly our ability to care for all of our church family in meaningful ways.

- 3. Develop and implement an enhanced organizational model (ministry teams, project teams, etc.) that is in place and operational to expand and enhance our organization and encourage increased member involvement.**

Progress: Several committees have begun to create new opportunities for members to engage in the ministry of our church. We adopted and are implementing the Shared Leadership Model, in which every ministry team and ministry of the church is encouraged create mission statement/ministry checklists, in an effort to involve all members into the life of the VPC and the ministry of Christ. This model organizes our ministry into smaller pieces, affording more people entry into service. Session and our teams, with the assistance of the Transition Team, are creating the necessary materials. If you desire to engage in a ministry of the church, please contact a session member, and we will work gladly with you to find a place.

- 4. Organize and equip our church ministry staff to resource the above models, allowing time for the adjustments to be made in ways that are both financially sustainable and ministry-based.**

Progress: Personnel Oversight Team and Session have worked together to develop a staff team that resources our church's ministry within the present/projected financial situation. Our Personnel Oversight Team will continue its work to enhance and evaluate the most effective and efficient ways to source and staff the church's vital missions in order to provide leadership for all areas. We want to thank our staff for their dedicated service to VPC and to Jesus Christ.

- 5. Examine and explore options for our worship services, including worship times and content in an effort to increase and enhance participation in worship.**

Progress: After extensive conversations with members and groups that span several months, Session voted to establish our Sunday Worship Schedule to have one worship service at 9:30am—every Sunday of the year—and another worship service at 11:00am during the winter season. This decision was made in an effort to provide a complete worship experience for all participants, and to provide adequate time for educating our children and youth (during 9:30am worship), and adults (before, during, and/or after 9:30am worship) as part of our balanced Sunday experience. The new schedule began on October 22, 2017.

6. Develop plans and timelines for updating our buildings and grounds to provide warm, inviting, flexible, multi-use spaces for present and future ministry.

Progress: Most of this year was used completing our sanctuary renovation—Deo Gloria—which now provides our church family with space for worship that is both beautiful and useful. Our new Lively-Fulcher organ is even more powerful in appearance and music than we hoped! Session applauds the many members who have worked tirelessly to provide this amazing worship experience, as well as those who have share financial support to make this renovation possible. Building and Grounds Ministry Team is also working on creating and updating spaces within the rest of our facilities that will complement our ministries to congregation and community for many years to come.

7. Develop a comprehensive approach to funding our shared ministry, including a balanced budget and initiating new teams to assist in annual, special and planned giving. This will provide financial support for the above models and show financial stability/sustainability.

Progress: Budget and Finance Oversight Team and Session have worked together to provide information that is transparent and easily understood, so that members can make informed decisions about their stewardship through our church. This year, Session approved a completely balanced budget, and is developing another balanced budget for next year. Last winter's annual campaign was entitled, "*Guided by Gratitude...Forward by Faith,*" to remind and encourage all members to give gratefully and generously. The campaign was more successful than we hoped—with an average per-pledge increase of ten percent and reaching our financial goal. The Budget and Finance Oversight Team has begun a multi-year budgeting strategy, working with Session's other ministry teams to assess their projected needs for ministry. We all seek to provide additional opportunities for members to gratefully and generously support God's mission in our midst.

8. Develop and begin implementing an updated communications/marketing/growth plan—including revised materials and new website (also instrumental in pastoral search).

Progress: Transition Team developed the layout and materials for an updated website, including the materials needed for the search for our next pastor. Each is complete and ready for the congregation's—and PNC's—use. Information continues to flow electronically and through social media, as well as more traditional means, in an effort to better communicate the opportunities for service through our church family. Ministry Teams are regularly reminded to personally contact members and invite them to serve in new ways. Members are encouraged to contact a Session member—or even attend a Session meeting!

We are finalizing our efforts on these issues now—prior to the election of the Pastor Nominating Committee—because experience shows that doing so will enable us to attract a more accomplished pastor, and that we will have a better chance of enjoying that pastor for a longer time.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any member of Session, which includes our pastors. Having completed these benchmarks, Session is moving forward thoughtfully and prayerfully to lead the VPC as God directs us.

On behalf of the Session of the Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church, we thank each of you for your ongoing support through the years and during this interim period. Our church is blessed by God in many ways. Filled with energy and joy, we are growing during the interim period, and preparing for and looking forward to our next installed Pastor. Please pray for our church as we continue the process and seek our next pastor. VPC will continue to be a great place to serve for a long time to come!

A Final Note: We invite all members of our church family to join together in praying daily for our Pastor Nominating Committee. Please select a particular time—for example, 2:00pm—to pray each day, using your own words or the following prayer:

Eternal and All-Loving God, giver of every good gift, accept our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We ask you this day to look graciously on this your church, and upon our Pastor Nominating Committee, to guide the minds and hearts of these dear brothers and sisters who we dedicate to your care, as they seek—and find—our next Pastor. Guide them that we all may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people, and equip us for our ministries. Above all, we thank for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life, in whose name we pray. Amen.

God bless you, one and all.

The Session of the Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

*“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.
By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.”*

--John13:34-35 (A guiding scripture for Session during their deliberations and decisions)

Who is God Calling Us to Serve?
Some Biblical Perspectives
May 23, 2017

Dear Elder: Please note the highlighted question on your page and find your “partner” in the room. After introducing yourselves, review your scripture and question, and prepare a two-minute response for the whole group. We will be timing your answers—so be precise and concise!

“Blessed to Be a Blessing”

Genesis 12:1-4

“Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.”

Question: When God called Abram (Abraham) to go into a new country, Abram is promised that he would be “blessed...so that (he) would be a blessing.” How would you describe “blessed to be a blessing” in modern terms and/or images?

Extra Credit: What is the retirement age for being one of God’s people?

“A Kingdom of Priests”

Exodus 19:2b-6

“There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Question: When God called Moses up the mountain to give the ten commandments, God first reminded him of the people’s deliverance as well as the new covenant. If being God’s people means to be a “kingdom of priests,” what is our role in helping people relate with God?

“Build, Support and Pray”

Jeremiah 29:4-7

“⁴Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Question: During this time when God’s people were exiles in a strange and foreign land, they had to grapple with many difficult questions of adapting to a new situation. What does it mean for today’s Christians to “seek the welfare of the city...and pray to the Lord on its behalf?”

“Laborers in God’s Fields”

Matthew 9:36-38

“³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Question: In Jesus’ day, these types of laborers were common and easily understood. What is a modern image for “the laborers in the field?”

“Go, Teach and Make Disciples”

Matthew 28:18-20

“¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Question: No one group can go into “all nations.” What part of the world is God calling us into in order to teach and make disciples?

“Serve as Jesus Served”

Mark 10:43-45

“⁴³But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Question: How can we as elders model this sense of service Jesus describes?

“Abide and Bear Fruit”

John 15:1-11

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

Question: Producing “good fruit” requires staying connected to God. By what attributes/measures would God consider a “fruitful” church?

“Building Up the Body of Christ”

Ephesians 4:7, 11-12

“⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift....¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

Question: Paul describes God’s church as different people do different jobs for the common good of the whole. List three ways we as a session can “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ.”

Extra Credit: How many gifts/jobs must an elder have in order to “worthy” of their calling?

Who is God Calling Us to Serve?

Some Theological Perspectives

June 27, 2017

“Presbyterian Theology”

Doctrine/Teaching	Implications/Applications	Sample Scriptures
Sovereignty of God	God is at work in the lives of us and others We serve God’s plan—not other way around	John 3:16-17 Mark 10:42-45
Sinfulness of All Humanity	No human is perfect/holds all truth Judge others humbly/do not condemn	Romans 3:9-12 Luke 6:37-42
Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior	This is the essential—the rest is negotiable Based on what God did—not what we do	Ephesians 2:8-10 Philippians 2:1-11
Call to Witness and Service	Begin with God’s message Relate to people’s needs—where they are Growth is by-product of faithfulness	Luke 10:1-12, 17-19 Matthew 28:18-20
Church is God’s Witness to World	We are called to be one as Trinity is one How we act reflects on God and church	John 17:20-21 Galatians 3:25-29

A “Big Tent” Church

- History and Legacy of Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church—a “Big Tent” church
- Everyone is welcome and included—conservatives, liberals, and everyone in between
- Makes us a “true” Presbyterian church—
- Consistent with our theology—“Reformed and Always Willing to be Reformed”
- Challenging to live out in our polarized society

“Peace, Unity and Purity”—Conservative/Liberal Complementarity

- Seeking “peace, unity and purity” has been a part of the church’s struggle from inception
- Each is has a valued foundation and valuable contribution
- Different combinations of emphases develop different outcomes
- Consensus has been that we must work together, with God’s help, to fulfill all three in God’s community as a sign of God’s kingdom in heaven and on earth

Extra Credit: Five Foundations of Morality (*The Righteous Mind*, J. Haidt, pp. 124-154)

1. Care/Harm
 2. Fairness/Cheating
 3. Loyalty/Betrayal
 4. Authority/Subversion
 5. Sanctity/Degradation
- “Liberal” tends to emphasize Care and Fairness
 - “Conservative” tends to emphasize Authority and Sanctity
 - Both value Loyalty
 - Organizations need all five to be balanced, healthy and fruitful

Theological Questions for Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

1. Does God desire VPC to be a “Big Tent” church?
2. Are we willing to work together to follow and embody God’s desires?

A Concluding Word from Jesus (John 13:34-35)

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Theological Scriptures

John 3:16-17

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Mark 10:42-45

⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Romans 3:9-12

⁹ What then? Are we any better off?^[a] No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, ¹⁰ as it is written:

“There is no one who is righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one.”

Luke 6:37-42

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

³⁹ He also told them a parable: “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s^[a] eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ⁴² Or how can you say to your neighbor, ^[b] ‘Friend, ^[c] let me take out the speck in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s^[d] eye.

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Philippians 2:1-11

2 If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was^[a] in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,⁸ he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Luke 10:1-12, 17-19

¹⁰After this the Lord appointed seventy* others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborer’s into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’* ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’* ¹²I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

¹⁷The seventy* returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ ¹⁸He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’^[a]

John 17:20-21

²⁰‘I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us,^[a] so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Galatians 3:25-29

²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring,^[a] heirs according to the promise.

“Who is God Calling Us to Serve: Living in a Big Tent”

Some Concluding Perspectives

September 26, 2017

The One Non-Negotiable: “Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.”

1. This is the one Presbyterian essential and is non-negotiable for any Presbyterian
2. Our life of faith is grounded upon what God has done in Jesus Christ
3. Fulfillment of what God began before creation and continues unto the end of time
4. Not based on our behavior and/or beliefs
5. *“God did it. That settles it!”*

The Majors: Important but Still Negotiable

1. Sovereignty of God
2. Sinfulness of All Humanity
3. Salvation by Grace Through Faith
4. Call to Witness and Service
5. Church is God’s Witness to World

The Minors: Important and Definitely Debatable

1. Doctrinal positions on other beliefs
2. Political positions based on beliefs
3. Political actions based on beliefs

A “Big Tent” Church

1. History and Legacy of Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church—a “Big Tent” church
2. Everyone is welcome and included—conservatives, liberals, and everyone in between
3. Makes us a “true” Presbyterian church—ties us to history and future
4. Consistent with our theology—“Reformed and Always Willing to be Reformed”
5. Challenging to live out in our polarized society
6. Living in a Big Tent is still living together!

What Will Session Affirm in our Shared Future?

1. We affirm that we are a “big tent” church, in which all people are welcome and respected
2. We affirm that we all are sinful humans who not always have the forever-true answers
3. We affirm that we will not always agree—this is a given in all families and communities
4. We affirm that we will respect differing opinions and work to agree whenever possible
5. We affirm that love will be our greatest aim, as a response to and a witness to God’s love

What Will Session Allow in our Shared Future?

1. We will represent the broad spectrum of belief in the larger church and our congregation
2. We will provide forums for people to explore, express, and debate differing positions
3. We will allow any outward-oriented communication that acknowledges and celebrates that VPC is a “big tent church,” affirming our unity in Christ and diversity of positions
4. We will allow members to take political action based on their beliefs with the understanding that they represent themselves and not the totality of the congregation
5. We will allow political statements to be made through our church/community media, with session approval, so as to insure positions are not misinterpreted to represent the whole congregation

6. We will allow all members of VPC church family to be welcomed, respected and loved

Concluding—for now—Questions for Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church

1. Does God desire VPC to be a “Big Tent” church? YES!
2. Are we willing to work together to follow and embody God’s desires? YES!

A Concluding Word from Jesus (John 13:34-35)

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

“The People God Has Placed Around Us”

**MissionInsite Summary
Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church
August 22, 2017**

Population Facts and Trends

- Projected to grow from 410K now to 479K by 2027, mostly the result of net migration
- Average age has increased from 44 in 2007 to 48 by 2017, it will slightly decline to 47 by 2027
- The largest portion of the population is over 65 (32%), the second largest segment is the 35 to 54 group (21%)
- Married people make up 57% of the population, never married are second being 23% of the population
- College educated people are 34% of the people, high school graduates are 27%
- Family households are 69%, single person households are 26%
- 95.5% of the people are above the poverty level
- The population is 58% white, 26% Hispanic
- 58% are employed in white collar jobs, 41% in blue collar jobs

Who is God Calling Us to Serve?

Some Practical Perspectives

August 22, 2017

Questions to Consider While Learning About Our Community

- 1. Is God calling us at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church to serve other people beyond our church family? (*Trick question, friends: the answer's yes!*)**

- 2. What makes our community unique among most communities, i.e. age, income, etc.?**

- 3. Given our size and present situation, we are not able to serve everyone, to “be everything to everybody.” Based on the information presented, what *two* groups of people would be good prospects for us to attempt to serve?**

- 4. Without more information, it would be difficult to know exactly the types of ministries/programs that might attract those people God is calling us to serve. What might be some “directions” we could examine and explore to seek some “directions” in how to serve them?**

- 5. Knowing our members as we do, what kinds of ministries/emphases/programs might motivate us to reach out and serve our neighbors?**

- 6. Is God at work in the lives of those we seek to serve, even as God is at work in our lives to empower to serve them? (*Another trick question: the answer is yes!*)**