Preface

In the Presbyterian Church (USA), a congregation planning to call a new pastor must first conduct a Mission Study. This time of self-study and reflection helps a church to prepare for its next season of ministry, embrace a new beginning, and calling a new installed pastor.

The Mission Study Team was appointed by the Session to embark on study of discovery that would enable St. Mark to embrace a new beginning, and assist in the ensuing search for an installed pastor. The Mission Study Team was asked to involve the congregation in answering fundamental questions of identity and purpose.

The insights we have distilled from our study are compiled in this report. Our goal in the following pages is to paint a clear picture of where we have been, where we are today, and where God is leading us into the future. It is our hope that the Mission Study Report will help St. Mark gain clarity about its core values; recognize its context for ministry and how it affects current and future possibilities for growth; and identify hopes and dreams for the future that the Session and a new installed pastor can develop into a unified vision for ministry.

We would like to thank the many congregants who attended the Congregational Conversations and responded to the Congregational Surveys. The thoughtful, honest responses allowed this study to be informative and enlightening. A special thank you to Joyce Blackwell for her knowledge and assistance in formulating our survey data. We would also like to thank Rev. Jim Poinsett for his leadership and encouragement throughout this process.

We hope that the Session, the St. Mark congregation, and the future Pastor Nominating Committee, will use this Mission Study Report as a reference for building on the many gifts of St. Mark as we look to the new thing God will do in our next 50 years of ministry. We believe we have a strong community of faith at St. Mark willing to grow in our service to Christ, and look forward to continuing our journey of faith.

In Christ,

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Introduction

The St. Mark Mission Team was assembled in December 2015 and began meeting in January 2016. Over the last few months we have met and worked dutifully to create and implement tools in which to gather input from the congregants. From the responses provided, the Mission Study Team hoped to gain clarity about the core values that shape us as a community of faith (who are we? what are our priorities? what is our purpose?); and, identify hopes and dreams for the future (what leadership and pastoral characteristics will enable us to flourish as a church).

St. Mark members were invited to come together for two congregational conversations held on Sunday afternoon, April 3rd and Tuesday evening, April 5th. The discussions offered during these meetings were composed of open-ended collective questions. In an atmosphere of love, acceptance and faith, people were encouraged to actively listen to one another concerning the positive and negative experiences each had shared at St. Mark. In addition to these larger conversations, small meetings were held with Bible study groups, small groups, and committees. A suggestion box was stationed in the Narthex to allow people to answer these same questions in the privacy of their own homes and on their own time frame. The Mission Study Team also created and executed two in-depth electronic surveys that were emailed to all congregants. These surveys were also made available via paper copy for those not wishing to answer online. The previous St. Mark Mission Study Report conducted in 2005 and community demographic research was also consulted. Guided by prayer, the congregants of St. Mark shared many heartfelt remembrances, proud accomplishments, common strengths, and the painful admittance of deficiencies. We pray that this opportunity for group introspection will allow St. Mark to now move forward with a spirit filled vision of a promising future.

St. Mark and Community History and Demographics

St. Mark Presbyterian Church PC(USA) is located in the city of Ballwin, St. Louis County, Missouri. Ballwin, like many communities in West St. Louis County, was founded in the first half of the 19th Century, but experienced the population growth and establishment of infrastructure that defines it today during the 1960’s and 70’s. In its 54-year presence in and service to the community, it has been led by three head pastors- Rev. Mr. Robert

Figure 1. Ballwin is considered to be a Second Ring western St. Louis suburb, reflecting a later phase of metropolitan expansion than Inner Ring suburbs such as Kirkwood and Webster Groves.

According to A History of St. Mark Presbyterian Church, published during the 50th anniversary of its founding, when Mayer Roucher Mayer began Phase II of the Claymont Subdivision in West St. Louis County, they set aside acreage for a Bath and Tennis Club, a school, and two churches. On October 31, 1960, the Board of Church Extension, United Presbyterian Church voted to recommend to the Elijah Parrish Presbytery the purchase of 10.77 acres in Claymont from Mayer Roucher Mayer at a cost of $65,000. A manse was purchased in the subdivision on July 25th, 1961, and the name St. Mark United Presbyterian Church was chosen. The covenant requesting organization of the St. Mark United Presbyterian Church was signed by 92 people, and the official Service of Organization was May 27, 1962. Members began with the families in Claymont and adjoining subdivisions, and all were invited to join.
Church growth was reflected in the construction of the first church building at 601 Claymont Drive (the church met in rented space at a school initially) and saw the congregation grow to more than 400. This initial phase of construction included a sanctuary, offices, and classrooms to be used for both Christian Education and the Claymont Preschool.

In the decades that followed the church underwent five building programs which included two sanctuaries. During this period the congregation tripled in size.

Figure 2. The five main phases of construction at St. Mark have been the original sanctuary, classrooms and office (1) completed in 1965, the second sanctuary and addition classroom space (2) finished in 1974, the Great Hall, additional office and classroom space (3) dedicated in 1981, the current sanctuary and lower-level classrooms (4) completed in 1990, and the current church office and storage areas (5) finished in 1998.
Figure 3. The original Sanctuary, constructed in 1965, is now known as Fellowship Hall. It serves a variety of needs at St. Mark, including an Adult Education classroom, an indoor play area for the Claymont Preschool, and the meeting place for Saturday Evening Worship.

Figure 4. The second sanctuary, completed in 1974 is now the Narthex, and serves multiple uses for congregational projects and gatherings.
Figure 5. Gleason Hall, dedicated in 1981 as “The Great Hall” and renamed in honor of Pastor Howard Gleason, is used for many different congregational activities ranging from congregational meals to Red Cross blood drives.

Figure 6. The sanctuary, dedicated on February 25, 1990, is a beautiful sacred space focused on the Cross and chancel window.
Since its founding in 1962 St. Mark Presbyterian has brought together generations of dedicated members who have discerned and made real God’s will as a congregation in worship, fellowship, and education, through groups such as the Deacons, Children’s and Youth Ministries, Stephen Ministries, and Presbyterian Women, to name a few. St. Mark has made a difference in the lives of those in the larger community through the support of outreach and service programs including Lafayette Industries, Businesspersons Between Jobs, Boy Scout Troop 631, and Claymont Preschool. It has produced and sponsored mission and relief projects both domestic and internationally with physical, financial, and spiritual support. “Love God, Love People, and Reach Out” was the motto adopted early in the church’s history, and it remains so to this day.
The 2015 Church Report for St. Mark to PC(USA) (Appendix A) provides a succinct picture of the current congregation:

- 676 active members, (388 female, 288 male)
- 246 are over the age of 65 (156 female, 108 male)
- 148 are 56-65 (79 female, 69 male)
- 75 are 46-55 (47 female, 28 male)
- 92 are 26-45 (57 female, 35 male)
- 97 are under 25 (49 female, 48 male)
- 61% are 56 and older
- Membership gains for 2015 were 29, losses 39
- Of the 676 active members, 662 are White, 12 are Asian, 1 is African American, and 1 is Hispanic
- The annual budget (excluding Claymont Preschool) is $877,000
- Endowment $389,000
- No debt.

Trends for the years 2003-2013 are provided in the Tabular Report of the Statistical Snapshot for St. Mark provided by Research Services at PC(USA) (Appendix B) and are further illustrated and given context in the All Statistics Report (Appendix C.)

While both of these reports show a steady decline in membership over the time period, they also show growth in areas such as membership financial contributions.

Two demographic studies were conducted for this report, the PC(USA) Demographics looked at the population living within a 5-mile radius of St. Mark (Appendix D) and the MissionInsite QuickInsite report addressing those living within a 10-mile radius (Appendix E.) It is worth noting that though most current St. Mark members live within these distances of the church, there are many who live outside of this distance.

According to the 10-mile radius report, using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Synergos Technologies, Inc., Experian, and DecisionInsite/MissionInsite:

- Little population change is expected in the next 10 years
- A “moderate decline” is expected in school age children over the next 10 years
• Compared to the rest of the state, “somewhat more” of these children are likely to live in two-parent households
• Adult education attainment is “very high”
• Community racial/ethnic diversity is considered “homogenous”
• Median family income is “significantly greater” than the rest of the state
• Poverty is “significantly lower” than the state average
• Occupations are considered to be somewhat white collar (79.6%)
• The largest racial/ethnic group is white (86.7%)
• Religiosity is considered “somewhat low”

The 5-mile radius report, using U. S. Census Bureau date from 98 Block Groups in the selected area, reflecting a similar image of the residents:

• A higher age than national averages for 35 and up, but lower than average for 18-34
• A higher number than the national average for households with children present, but a lower number of single parent households
• A higher number than the national average for individual houses, but a lower number for houses built after 1999 and rental houses
• Lower population growth rate than the national average
• Average household income of greater than $120,000
• 85.8% of the population is White, 6.8% Asian, 3.0% Black, 2.7% Hispanic, and 1.8% Other
There is additional information for use to understanding the people who live near St. Mark, but it can safely be summarized as a stable community in growth, education, and income. Though there have been some changes in the racial/ethnic makeup of the area in the last few years, it reflects a much more homogenous white population than most communities in the region.

Other sources of information useful in understanding the neighborhood and local resources of St. Mark include the Parkway and Rockwood public school systems, and the municipality of Ballwin and the neighboring towns of Chesterfield, Manchester, Ellisville, Winchester, and Town and Country.

Values That Shape Us

When the Mission Study Team analyzed the data, four significant values emerged: traditional, friendly, caring, and active. These four values seem to shape the identity of St. Mark Presbyterian Church. They are woven into the history of St. Mark and are still felt very strongly by its members today.

Traditional:

One of the strongest values to emerge from the data collected was the sense of “tradition” that St. Mark congregants feel and enjoy. This is not a progressive or new age church. This is a church that has a long history of traditional worship. At previous points more contemporary services have been tried, but those have not been well received. The more “traditional” service of St. Mark is defined as having a prescribed order of worship, typically used week in and week out. In the survey, congregants described this “traditional” service as “similar to the one I grew up with”, “use of hymnal, organ, choir, use Bible or text with sermon references”, “like churches were 20-30 years ago”, “organ playing familiar hymnals, in a service which is always the same”.

St. Mark is a “program-sized” church, defined as 150-300 people attending worship each week. Currently three worship services are held each week at 5:00pm on Saturday and then 8:30am and 10:30am services on Sunday.
The 10:30am Sunday service is the most widely attended service. This service generally includes chancel choir, congregational singing with organ/piano accompaniment, responsive liturgy, passing of the offering plate, monthly communion typically served with passed trays. The preaching pastor delivers a sermon, which is the center of the worship service. Young children are called up for a special “time with children” segment of the service and then are directed to their age specific Sunday school classes. Special rituals in the life of the church such as the Sacrament of Baptism, Confirmation Sunday, new member recognition are observed during this service. Members of the congregation participate in leading this service as choir members, bell ringers, sharing the peace of Christ, liturgist, sound/light technical operators and ushers. Ushers, Deacons and Ruling Elders help with the offering collection and serving of communion. Typical attendance at this service is approximately 250 people.

The 8:30am Sunday service is a much smaller worship group with average attendance of approximately 80 people. This service follows generally the same order of worship listed above, but without the choir or “time for children.” The focus of this worship service is the sermon and The Lord’s Supper, which is offered weekly by Intinction.

A modified service is also offered on Saturday evening at 5:00pm. While the order of worship is very much the same as the other two services, it is considered more informal. The pastor does not wear a robe and congregants are generally dressed in a casual style. There is no choir and congregational song comes from the hymnal and is accompanied by piano. There is no “time for children” or childcare offered at this service. Average attendance at this service is around 35 people.

The survey data showed that 80% of congregants were “satisfied/very satisfied” with worship and another 14% had no strong feeling one way or another. Only 6% were “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the worship service. When asked in the first Congregational Survey #1 “which do you personally value the most?” the answer “traditional” was the second most popular answer with 45%. The only thing valued more was the “sermon” which garnered 62%.

The Mission Study Team found that members of St. Mark embrace and value this service structure because of the sense of history, familiarity, and tradition. The congregation may well also value “tradition” as it mirrors their theological understandings. The
surveys showed that 49% of respondents believe that “the Bible is the inspired Word of God and its basic moral and religious teachings are clear and true, even if it reflects some human error,” which is a very traditional approach to biblical interpretation. Additionally, another 40% agreed that “the Bible is the record of many different people’s response to God and because of this, people and churches must interpret the Bible’s basic teachings for itself.” While this could be identified as difference of opinion, one could also come to the conclusion that a high value is placed on biblically based sermons that are thought provoking and challenging, regardless of the congregation’s individual biblical interpretation. This is in line with the Reformed understanding of worship, which is centered around proclamation of the Word.

That “traditional” is a value of St. Mark is not surprising in that it reflects the make-up of the congregation: 59% of respondents have been attending 20+ years, and nearly 88% claim to attend worship services 2+ times per month.

**Friendly:**

St. Mark is a friendly place – cultivating our relationship with God as we cultivate our relationships with each other. The heart of our church is found in its people.

As the Mission Study Team waded through the Congregational Conversations and survey results, another strong value to emerge is “friendliness”. This congregation has a very strong sense that they are friendly and feel very proud of this attribute.

Common responses to the question of “what made you join St. Mark?” were: “friendliness”, “friendly feeling I received when first visiting”, “sincere friendliness” and “welcoming atmosphere upon visiting”. St. Mark views itself as a friendly congregation and believes everyone has a welcome place to help in God’s work. People have the opportunity to join small groups, various committees, youth activities and mission work to continue fellowship. Additionally, before the 8:30am and 10:30am Sunday worship services, members are encouraged to share in coffee and donuts in the Narthex as they greet and visit with one another.

In looking at the survey results, 50% of people said they stay at St. Mark because of the friends they have made and 79% were “satisfied/very satisfied” with fellowship opportunities. Only 4% expressed dissatisfaction with the fellowship or friendly nature
of St. Mark. Overwhelmingly, the relational ties developed through St. Mark’s groups have led to a strong feeling of friendliness and fellowship among its congregants. This “friendly” feeling has been a significant contributor to why people continue membership at this church.

St. Mark’s location seems to be a major influence in people’s initial decision to visit/attend: 66% of survey respondents cited “location” as the primary reason to visit St. Mark. Church location in proximity to where people live is more than just a matter of convenience – it is a matter of being a source of friendship and fellowship. Intentional visitor follow-up and new member assimilation is critically important to accentuate St. Mark’s value of being “friendly.”

Caring:

Our faith calls us to be known by our actions as well as our convictions – serving generously with our time, talents, and treasures. “Caring” is a value that St. Mark members hold in high regard.

In St. Mark’s current mission statement, it is stated that “Relying on the Holy Spirit, we create a caring community through worship that inspires, learning that leads to responsible living and service that meets the needs of others”. This aspect of the mission statement highlights how important St. Mark feels about caring for its congregants and the larger community.

As stated in John 16:33, “In this world you will have trouble.” Tough times hit everyone; one never knows what will happen or when. When difficult times befall a person, family or community, St. Mark sees itself as a “network of God’s helpers” and reaches out to provide care. Repeatedly in the congregational conversations it was emphasized how proud our members were of St. Mark’s caring nature and willingness to help others. When asked in the survey what “you personally value the most” about St. Mark, 44% said “care for one another,” behind “preaching/sermons,” and slightly behind “traditional worship,” but more than double the next closest response.

St. Mark demonstrates its commitment to caring through its numerous committees and groups. Some of these groups are:
**Stephen Ministries:** This is an active ministry in St. Mark composed of a group of well-trained lay people who counsel individuals that have problems or issues they would like to discuss. The Stephen Minister meets privately to listen, to support and to help individuals find answers for themselves. Additionally, they provide prayer shawls and follow up support for those experiencing grief. They bring God’s blessings, comfort and loving encouragement on behalf of St. Mark.

**Care Giving Committee/ Deacon support groups:** These groups provide care to St. Mark individuals that are ill or homebound by providing meals, home visits, cards or even just a phone call to check in. They also help provide transportation to St. Mark for elderly or disabled congregants, support at funeral receptions, and making sure the sanctuary and alter flowers are appropriately placed each week.

**Prayer Team:** An important part of the caring ministry of St. Mark is this group of faithful Christians who gather weekly, praying specifically for each name given to them. People are lifted to God in prayer for healing and will be prayed for until their situation is resolved.

**Pastoral Associate:** The Pastoral Associate is dedicated to facilitating congregational care, member care ministries, and programs, especially with older adults.

A few examples of St. Mark’s connection and care for the larger community is shown by the numerous outreach support groups they help and/or host each year. Lafayette Industries and Businesspersons Between Jobs (both started at St. Mark), Isaiah 58 Ministries, Board of Religious Organizations (BRO), Operation School Box, Stephen Ministry facilitated community Cancer Support Group, Boy Scouts, Overeaters Anonymous, Ala-non, Red Cross blood drives, and The Bridge Outreach bread sales. This congregation has also sent relief groups to Houma, MS and Joplin, Mo following the horrible natural disasters in these areas.

“God’s people, caring for God’s people, as they have been taught to do by Jesus” was an idea expressed repeatedly in the conversations at St. Mark. Without doubt, “caring” is a value widely recognized and embraced by the congregation and is a vital aspect of St. Mark’s identity.
Active:

The fourth value that was recognized through the survey and intentional conversations was “active.” St. Mark understands itself as being an “active” church: nurturing spirituality and strengthening relationships through its many activities.

Many felt that St. Mark was “a very active, vibrant community of believers doing lots of good work through small groups.” Throughout the year church members will be found working, planning, playing, studying, preparing and decorating in and around the church because of the wide range of activities offered here. Members have numerous opportunities to stay involved through small groups, committee work, various ministries and social activities planned on a regular basis. Some, but not all of these groups are listed below.

Music ministries: Allows members to participate in leading worship as bell ringers, choir members and soloists.

Fellowship Committee: Helps to plan and organize numerous church wide activities throughout the year. One of the biggest events is the “Giving Thanks Dinner” held just before Thanksgiving. This annual lunch is very well attended and hosted over 250 people last year alone.

Worship Committee: Helps work with pastors and music staff to provide meaningful, uplifting worship services, especially surrounding holidays or special rituals in the life of the church.

Mission Committee: Helps support and facilitate mission work throughout the United States and around the world.

Women’ Circles: Various groups of women that meet outside of church for socialization and book study.

Presbyterian Women: This is an organization for women within our church. They enjoy fellowship, Bible study and supporting local, national and international mission work.

Men’s Fellowship: Meets monthly to provide fellowship and breakfast for the men of St. Mark.
Youth Ministry: Middle and high school youth meet weekly for fellowship and Bible study. High school students generally travel to one mission trip and one spiritual conference a year. This ministry is supported by the Director of Youth Ministries and overseen by the Associate Pastor.

Children’s Ministries: This ministry helps provide fellowship for children 5th grade and younger, along with their families. They plan numerous church events for the children of St. Mark and also the surrounding community. This ministry is supported by the Children’s Ministry Coordinator and overseen by the Associate Pastor.

Spinnakers and Go Getters: These groups are for older individuals in the congregation that are looking for fellowship and opportunities to get out and about.

Ministry of Motion: Meets weekly at the church to help provide individuals with exercise as a way to stay healthy and active through yoga and chair exercise, and the promotion of events for runners and walkers in the church.

Red Tent: An Associate Pastor led group of women that meet 6-7 times a year for Bible study.

The Attic, Basement and Closet (ABC) sale and the Christmas Boutique are both major events in the life of St. Mark. These fundraisers get members involved in the setup, running and clean-up of these community events held at the church. Typically, 100-150 members will participate.

Rarely does one enter St. Mark and not find meetings, activities or groups busy inside. Whether the activity is generated from spiritual, fellowship or care giving opportunities, the church is a busy center of action for its members and the community.

St. Mark Presbyterian Church is a traditional, friendly church – cultivating our relationship with God as we cultivate our relationships with each other. We believe in caring for and supporting one another, and deepening our faith through the active use of our time, talents, and treasures.
Hopes for the Future

As noted above, St. Mark is a program size church. In a healthy program size church, clergy are still central, but the role of pastor shifts; while there may be several staff members, both ordained and non-ordained, active lay leadership is vital. It is important that the Senior Pastor/Head of Staff, other pastors, staff, and church leaders are very clear about the vision for ministry and their particular roles. The Senior Pastor/Head of Staff’s primary role, beyond preaching and teaching, is one of motivator and trust builder – helping people arrive at consensus.

Based upon the feedback of the Congregational Conversations and the results of the Congregational Surveys, St. Mark wants its next Senior Pastor/Head of Staff to be a strong preacher and able teacher; to be a relational person; to display a genuine, authentic, lived spirituality; and to be an involved participant in church and community life.

Preaching and teaching are the pervasive desires among congregants. As discussed earlier, there are a wide variety of approaches to biblical interpretation among the congregation at St. Mark. The survey did show that 60% of the respondents “Strongly Agree/Agree” that the “Bible has answers for all the basic questions of life,” which indicates the Bible is held in high regard regardless of the approach to interpretation. A noted contradiction in the survey results was a desire for sermons to address “guidance on contemporary issues facing families and/or individuals” and a reluctance to have “politics” in the pulpit. A possible reason for this contradiction is a sign that people do want to know how to think through tricky political issues from a biblical and faith perspective without trying to influence a particular outcome. One may draw the conclusion that St. Mark congregants desire a preacher/teacher that can help them “think theologically about important issues” in ways that are accessible to everyone and allow for interaction.

A complimentary trait that St. Mark congregants expressed was that of a relational person to be their pastor. It seems important for congregants to feel known by the senior pastor, even if there are other ordained clergy or program directors with whom they regularly interact. This desire may be related to the majority age of the congregation, people in the older demographics have more of a desire to be “known” by
the pastor than other age groups. But this is also consistent with the expressed values of St. Mark that this is a church that nurtures spirituality by cultivating relationships through friendship and fellowship. A relational person will generate conversation and facilitate communication to build trust, help people arrive at consensus, and motivate congregants to follow through on projects and ideas.

St. Mark members expect the next Senior Pastor/Head of Staff to demonstrate leadership by helping shape a vision for the future ministry of the church and to competently lead and manage the business of the church. Areas for emphasis include: communicating a vision for ministry and providing direction; ensuring the budget reflects the values and priorities of the church’s vision for ministry; managing staff to align their gifts and talents with the vision for ministry and ensuring they are focused on the fulfillment of the vision. The next Senior Pastor/Head of Staff needs to be dedicated to the vision for ministry and have strong supervisory skills, holding staff and volunteers accountable in non-threatening ways. She/he should have the skills to communicate a vision for ministry, equip the congregation to fulfill the vision, and implement an ongoing evaluation process to ensure the ministry goals are being met.

The third expressed desire for the next Senior Pastor/Head of Staff is that the person be “spiritually healthy and growing.” In the second congregational survey, 60% of respondents claim to spend at least a “few times a week” in prayer, meditation, Bible reading, etc. In addition to preaching and teaching, there seems to be a desire for the next pastor to nurture, guide, and encourage these devotional activities in the congregation, at the very least by example.

The congregation indicated a desire for a leader who is committed to fostering relationships in the Ballwin area. The next Senior Pastor/Head of Staff should become well-known in the community. With these connections, the pastor can explore community needs that the church can address through its ministry.

**Opportunities for the Future**

The Mission Study Team has had the rare opportunity to review the thoughts, attitudes, and experiences of the St. Mark congregation by studying and analyzing the responses from the Congregational Conversations and the two Congregational Surveys. By analyzing these responses, the Mission Study Team hoped to identify consistent themes
that have emerged. Some of these themes represent aspects of our life together that have worked well and should be celebrated. Other themes represent aspects of our life that have not worked so well or remain unresolved, and might need to change.

What follows is a summary of the most significant themes that appear throughout the conversations and surveys. These themes provide opportunities that the Session, and the congregation, can explore in developing a unified vision of ministry for St. Mark in the future. These opportunities are framed in terms of the values expressed through the research: *traditional, friendly, caring, active*.

**Vision for Ministry**

As St. Mark continues to define values like *traditional, friendly, caring, and active*, it appears these may also mean preservation, conservation, safekeeping, guarding. While the expressed values are meaningful and woven into the identity of St. Mark, they also reveal, with some exceptions, an inward focus. In the future, the focus should expand outward, not inward; external, not internal; serving, not being served.

This will involve the development of a coherent, unifying vision for ministry, along with a candid realization of St. Mark’s context for ministry. The congregation seems to achieve homeostasis through “soft silos.” Each group in the congregation has a ministry, a duty, a function, which seems to bring fulfillment, purpose, and meaning. As long as each group is able to perform their ministries and functions, everyone seems to be happy. However, there appears to be little unity of purpose, little pulling together unless it has something to do with preserving the arrangement or the institution. With the exception of some events, such as the ABC Sale and the Christmas Boutique, which work across the congregation’s groups or silos, many groups do their own thing. Developing a unifying vision and purpose for ministry will require collaboration among church leaders and groups, rather than a competition; compromise rather than accommodation and avoidance; soliciting new ideas or expressions rather than replicating what’s been done before.

**Growth**

Increasing growth in membership and attendance is an area of great concern to the St. Mark congregation. When assessing the prospects for future growth, one must be
realistic about the demographic make-up of the congregation, as well as its willingness or capacity to change. One must also be realistic about the demographic make-up of the Claymont/Ballwin area.

In summary, St. Mark is a 676-member church with an average weekly attendance of 289. Of those active members, 61% are aged 56 and older, 11% are aged 46-55 and 14% are aged 26-45 and 14% are aged 25 or under. The congregation is comprised of 98% white, 1% Asian, < 1% African American and <1% Hispanic. The Claymont/Ballwin area (U.S. Census Bureau 5-mile radius from the church) surrounding St. Mark is generally homogenous and is comprised of 86% white, 6.8% Asian, 3% black, and 2.7% Hispanic.

St. Mark is surrounded by subdivisions that were primarily developed in the 1950’s and 1960’s. St. Mark is home to the Claymont Preschool, and the Claymont Elementary School is in the surrounding subdivision. While the surrounding subdivisions are slowly transitioning to younger families, “empty nesters” and older populations are still highly concentrated. Median family income is significantly higher than the rest of the state, while poverty is significantly lower. Married couples make up 80 percent of the households with children. The school age population is expected to moderately decline over the next 10 years and religiosity in this area is considered lower than in other areas of the state.

Due to these demographic realities, it is unrealistic for St. Mark to expect the same rapid growth it experienced in its past. In no way does this mean that church growth is not a valid objective. It simply means that church growth could be realized in numerous ways, and that St. Mark may need to reconsider how growth is defined and measured.

The materials analyzed and evaluated have helped identify three possible areas of emphasis that are opportunities for growth: focus on the Neighborhood/Community, Third Age Adults, and Young Families with School Age Children.

**Neighborhood/Community**

Throughout the research, we found that St. Mark thrives on relationships. Relationships not only attract new people to St. Mark, but are the primary reason that people stay. Most respondents describe St. Mark as friendly, accepting, and having a family feel. Yet there seems to be some hesitancy to intentionally reach out to people we do not know (43% of survey respondents have not personally invited anyone to visit or join St. Mark
in the past year). The demographics of the Claymont/Ballwin are strikingly similar to the demographics of the St. Mark Church. 58 percent of the Claymont/Ballwin population is made up of people in the Third Age (empty nesters, roughly 55-70) and in retirement; that age group makes up 61 percent of the St. Mark congregation. 26 percent of the Claymont/Ballwin population is made up of Young Families with school age children; that age group makes up 28 percent of the St. Mark congregation. This seems to indicate that both age groups in this area would find St. Mark appealing in that they would be surrounded by peers. There should be an intentional focus on inviting people from the neighborhood and the immediate community and a well-designed program of visitor follow-up and new member assimilation.

Along these lines, there should be consideration given to how St. Mark utilizes the building. Perhaps St. Mark might start thinking of its building as community center as well as a church, which would encourage the church to look outward as well as inviting others in. A strategic plan to develop the building as a community center, as well as a church, would allow St. Mark to become the center for the subdivision to meet and play, meeting not only the religious and spiritual needs of the Claymont/Ballwin area, but the social needs as well.

The level of religiosity in the Claymont/Ballwin area is “somewhat low.” Only 22 percent of the population feels it is “important to attend religious services” and only 15 percent of people feel that “my faith is really important to me.” This suggests an unchurched population who will not simply come to church services or events because they are offered. They will however join a yoga class, groups like BBJ or cancer support, occasional “free neighborhood meals,” etc. In these circles, faith is caught, not taught. The clergy and program directors could support or be present with these groups through brief devotionals or prayers, and convey the faith in ways that are not “preachy” but as regular folks who are doing life together. This may become an opportunity to share faith through connection and serving the needs of the surrounding community.

If such an opportunity would be considered, there would need to be significant financial investment to upgrade the facilities and expand technology throughout the building.
It is easy to stay within the walls of the church and make assumptions about the lives of the people in the broader community. It is more difficult to actually build relationships with community residents and grow in understanding their needs.

**Third Age Adults**

In the Claymont/Ballwin area there is and will remain a large population of older adults in what is known as the “Third Age” (roughly 55-70), and to a lesser degree of those in elderhood. This age group is already a large contingent (61%) of the St. Mark congregation, though there is only one part-time staff person dedicated to this segment of the membership. There seems to be an opportunity for St. Mark with this prominent age group. St. Mark could easily become the church where older adults are valued, understood, and appreciated. A ministry centered on Third Age Adults could help them redefine their life as the intense child rearing years conclude and they begin to approach or enter retirement age.

The Third Age is also known as the “Age of Usefulness.” Retired professional people are ready and willing to use their expertise to help the community. The possibilities are limited only by individual needs, skills, and interest. There could be all kinds of activities for Third Age and Senior Adults, including mission opportunities such as tutoring neighborhood children, if such a program were to be created. A ministry like this would keep Third Age and Senior Adults active and involved, while providing them with a sense meaning, purpose, and fulfillment.

**Young Families with School Age Children**

Another opportunity for St. Mark ministry seems to be young families with school age children (26% of the Claymont/Ballwin population). Currently, St. Mark has three full time staff dedicated to ministering and serving families with school age children, which make up 28 percent of the membership. The Claymont Preschool is a magnet for young families with preschoolers, and as long as the Parkway and Rockwood School Districts are desirable, young families will strive to live in the Claymont/Ballwin neighborhood to be close to Claymont Elementary and Westridge Elementary Schools. Though it should be noted, in the 10-year future, this area is forecast to have a “moderate decline” in the population of school age children.
There may be an opportunity to engage the parents of Claymont Preschool and Claymont Elementary School students. Again, the “somewhat low” religiosity of the area means one has to assume an unchurched population who may be indifferent to church services or events beyond the preschool. However, they may be interested -- a coffee house for mothers of students, tutoring service, yoga classes or something similar, anything to initiate regular contact and interaction. The clergy and staff directors could support or be present with these groups through brief interactions – conveying the faith through relationships built as regular folks doing stuff together. Of course, any type of program like this must be built around serving the needs of those it intends to reach, not necessarily the needs of the church.

**Hands On Mission**

Deuteronomy 15:11 says, “For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’” Part of the current mission statement for St. Mark states “we create a caring community through worship that inspires, learning that leads to responsible living and service that meets the needs of others.” When asked if they felt like they participated in helping fulfill this mission, 62 percent of respondents “Strongly Agreed/Agreed.” However, when later questioned about what could be done better to achieve St. Mark’s mission, “more outreach” and “hands on community work” resonated quite loudly.

The people of St. Mark feel blessed in many ways. They live in a community with a significantly higher median family income, little crime or poverty, and belong to a church that is strong, caring and dedicated to helping others. These factors help provide for an inherent sense of faithfulness to mission. While no one denies the help St. Mark provides through its current works, congregants have expressed an eagerness to do more “hands on” work as well as check writing; as a more authentic expression of their faith and to make more of an impact on their immediate community. Some conversation responses reminisced about and longed for, a return to the days when St. Mark was well known and respected throughout the community as God’s mission workers. Most expressed that more mission in our immediate community should be a priority, and just as important was the desire for the “hands on experience” enjoyed on previous trips like Joplin, Missouri or Houma, Mississippi.
Conclusion

The Mission Study Team has worked over the last several months, collecting, listening and discerning feedback from the congregation of St. Mark Presbyterian Church. We hope that the conclusions expressed in these findings will not only be used by the PNC to help focus on the future Senior Pastor/Head of Staff’s gifts for ministry, but also used as a starting point to foster positive conversations throughout the church that will develop into a unified vision for ministry in St. Mark’s next 50 years. New pastoral leadership, good organization and communication along with an outward focus can offer boundless expanded opportunities for St. Mark to do God’s work. “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” Philippians 4:13.

However, most importantly should be the acceptance of St. Mark’s identity. Embrace the wisdom and strength that come from knowing who you are and seek to create a unified mission for the church based on these values and gifts. Engage current congregants, young families, Third Age and Older Adults, Claymont Preschool and Claymont Elementary, and entities from the Claymont/Ballwin area for help discerning how St. Mark’s strengths could find meaningful ministry in the community and within its own walls. With God’s love and faithfulness, St. Mark can continue the mission motto sited early in its history of “love God, love people, and reach out”.


Appendices

Appendix A. 2015 Church Report for St. Mark (PCUSA)

Appendix B. Statistical Snapshot for St. Mark (PCUSA)

Appendix C. All Statistics Report (PCUSA)

Appendix D. 5 Mile Radius Demographic Report (PCUSA)

Appendix E. 10 Mile Radius Demographic Report (MissionInsight QuickInsight)

Appendix F. Congregational Survey #1

Appendix G. Congregational Survey #1 Open-ended Responses

Appendix H. Congregational Survey #2

Appendix I. Congregational Survey #2 Open-ended Responses

Download these materials via the following URL:

Or they may be requested from the Church Office.