

**Final Report to the Session  
of Christ Memorial Presbyterian Church  
of the findings of the  
Visioning Process**



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## **Summary**

The members of the Ad Hoc Visioning Committee accepted this opportunity to lead our congregation in a process to discern our true gifts and define opportunities for further service in the name of and modeled by Jesus Christ.

The committee acknowledged the impact of the process utilized by the recent three capital campaigns to energize our congregation around a shared purpose and sought to bring elements of that process to our work. As a result, many members of our congregation stepped in to lead conversations involving input from a broad cross-section of our congregation.

We are pleased to submit this report that concludes with a definition of our congregation's greatest gifts that when utilized bring us the greatest joy. In addition, we provide the Pastor and the Session with two recommendations for new ministries along with the rationale for these recommendations and specific step.

## Objectives

Recognizing that Christ Memorial Presbyterian Church has three established and successful ministry drivers (worship, LOGOS and Christian preschool), the committee members set out to obtain input from members and friends of the congregation to define additional ministry drivers to allow us to expand our ministries following the model set by Jesus Christ.

The committee's specific objectives are outlined below.

1. Determine where God is calling our congregation to serve our neighbors.

Energized by three successful capital campaigns to expand and enhance our facility to meet our congregation's stated objective of expanding our ministries, we needed to determine where God is calling us to serve our neighbors.

2. Engage the congregation.

The capital campaigns provided an opportunity for members and friends of our congregation to play an active role in the campaigns but the pandemic years that followed left some people disconnected and isolated. An intentional effort would be made to create opportunities for meaningful conversations to occur in a variety of settings.

3. Make recommendations for new ministry drivers.

Following the completion of the building and a return to in-person participation in the life of the church, our congregation is anxious to expand our ministries. Upon completion of conversations, the committee would analyze the data and provide recommendations for new ministries in a full report to Pastor Hoffman and the Session.

## Theological Basis

“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.”  
(*Frederick Buechner, Wishful Thinking, 1993*)

This quote by the late, great theologian, preacher, and author Frederick Buchner became, in time, the guiding principle for the work of the Ad Hoc Visioning Committee as we met to discuss and design the process by which we would seek to determine our recommendation for the session for the way forward for CMPC.

Of course, the “you” in the quote is plural (collective) for us as a church. We may (and do) have myriad ways in which CMPC makes us glad as individuals (see the data portion of the report for specifics) and we may (and do) *each* identify myriad ways in which the world hungers and have particular concern for those needs. To find every place where our gladness and the world’s needs collide and direct our energies there would spread us and our impact far too thin.

And so, through the process we designed and led the congregation through these last months, we have striven to narrow that list down to one or two intersections of where our collective heart is glad in a way that addresses (or at least can address) a deep hunger in the world. This report presents exactly that—what we believe our collective “call” is at this time in the life of Christ Memorial Presbyterian Church: the place where our communal gladness meets the world’s deep hunger.

Further, in our more recent conversations we have noted that each of us is in a different place on our faith journey and in our relationship with the church. The data from the first phase of the process highlights how much we all enjoy being with one another and being a part of this faith community. For some, being a part of CMPC, worshipping, spending time with others in fellowship, is enough at this time. For others, there is a desire to engage more, deeper and in particular, to put faith into action beyond these walls. And, of course, there is a whole world of others, out “there” who are not part of CMPC, but who might be (to one degree or another) in the future.

And so, we are also guided here, as our work draws to a close, to observe that Jesus’ own life and ministry offers a movement that could serve as a guide in the living out of the vision in the near and long-term future. Specifically, we note that, in his own ministry, Christ had a three-part movement when it came to relating to others and instilling a deeper love and faith in them.

First, Jesus met people where they are.

Second, Jesus invited people to follow.

Third, Jesus sent people to serve.

This was true for the 12. It was true for Zacchaeus. It was true for the woman caught in adultery. It was true for those he healed. It was true (even after his death and resurrection) for the Apostle Paul.

And, we believe, it is true still. For us.

That, as we seek to discern God’s will for us and for the future of CMPC we, too, are called to join Christ in this movement. Christ has met us where we are. Christ has invited us to follow. Christ has sent us to serve others.

Even more, we are now called to follow Christ's example by meeting others where they are (not simply expecting them to come to/find us), by inviting them to follow, and by encouraging them to serve (leading, of course, by example). It is beautiful, really, how cyclical the pattern is ultimately.

These have been the theological principles and epiphanies that have guided our work as a committee, and we commend them for further use by the leadership of the church.

## **Process**

During the Session meeting on March 21, 2022, Pastor Hoffman announced the formation of a six-member Ad Hoc Visioning Committee to join him in a visioning process to discern “who we are at CMPC and who we want to be”. With the guidance of the Reverend Jennifer Barchi (Associate for Church and Leadership, Presbytery of Baltimore), the members of the committee prepared to lead the congregation through a visioning/strategic planning process to identify one or two new ministry drivers for the congregation.

### Assessment Phase

Initially, the committee conversed about the purpose of this committee and reflected on the congregation’s decision to renovate the building to allow for expansion of ministries, the results of the three capital campaigns, and current ministries.

The committee devoted time to discussing the congregation’s positive response and broad participation in each of the capital campaigns. It was decided that the work of the committee should incorporate the same elements in this process to ensure similar levels of input and engagement from the congregation.

### Design Phase

The committee mapped out a process that would allow for a wide range of initial input followed by further conversations to react to and build upon the initial ideas. The following components would make up the process.

1. Conduct individual listening sessions.

Call and equip a group of “listeners” to attempt to meet with all households in the congregation. Request the “listeners” ask a standard set of questions during each session, record their responses, and enter the responses in an online form.

The committee will review all the responses and categorize them into a set of themes.

2. Conduct small group listening sessions.

Invite the group of listeners to meet with small groups and committees that are already formed in the congregation.

3. Conduct Two Town Hall Meetings

Invite all members of the congregation to attend a town hall meeting to continue the discussions from the individual and group listening sessions.

By vote of the attendees, narrow the themes down to two and ask members to continue the conversation for each theme by answering a set of questions and sharing them with the larger group.

#### 4. Analyze Data and Prepare a Final Report for the Session

The committee members would meet to review all the data and present all the findings to the Session prior to the annual retreat. In addition, members of the committee will attend part of the leadership retreat to address questions.

#### Implementation Phase

##### 1. Conduct individual listening sessions.

In the Fall of 2022, listeners contacted members of their assigned households to schedule in-person meetings when possible and Zoom meetings as needed to discuss and record the answers for the five questions.

- What makes your heart glad at CMPC?
- Who are our neighbors at CMPC, and how can we better engage them?
- What need/problem in our community and/or beyond, should we lean into/help solve, and why?
- What new or revitalized ministry would you like to see at CMPC?
- What, if anything else, would you like to share?

Each listener recorded the responses and entered the responses in an online form.

Twenty listeners conducted meetings with members of eighty-five households.

The committee members analyzed the responses and determined that four particular themes emerged more than others.

- Hunger/food insecurity
- Mental health/feelings of isolation
- Homelessness
- Racial Justice

##### 2. Conduct small group sessions.

In early 2023, members of the committee contacted groups within CMPC to further discuss, clarify, and refine the data collected during the individual listening sessions by presenting the four themes.

The listeners asked the following questions.

- Why is it Important?
- Who (other churches, organizations, agencies, etc.) is already engaged in this issue that we should learn from and/or partner with?
- Do you have any ideas for possible programs or activities in which CMPC could engage to address either or both?

Five listeners conducted listening sessions with six small groups.



### 3. Conduct Two Town Hall Meetings

The committee conducted two Town Hall Meetings in late February 2023, in which all members were invited and encouraged to attend for the purpose of reacting and building off the feedback of those participating individual and small group listening sessions. The first town hall was held following a Sunday worship service the second on a Monday evening via Zoom.

A facilitator presented the four themes that represented the data collected in the individual and small group discussions and called for a vote to narrow down the list to two areas for the congregation to pursue as new ministry drivers. The attendees participated in small group discussions on the following topics of food insecurity/ hunger and mental health/isolation and then shared their ideas with the larger group. The small groups discussed the following questions for each topic.

- Why is this important?
- Resources we might partner with
- Ideas for assistance

Nearly fifty people participated in the two town hall sessions.

### 4. Analyze Data and Prepare a Final Report for the Session (this report)

Throughout the process, the committee reviewed the data as it became available.

In addition to the committee's internal analysis and at Jennifer Barchi's recommendation, we engaged a graduate student to perform an objective review of the data from the individual listening sessions.

A fuller presentation of the collected data can be found in the appendices.

## **Conclusions**

Following prayerful discernment and analysis of the congregation's responses throughout the process, the committee believes that God is calling our congregation to utilize its deepest gladness, our ability to welcome and care for one another, to address two pressing needs in our local community: food insecurity/hunger and isolation.

We ask Pastor Hoffman and the Session to review and carefully consider the following two recommendations which each include the rationale and specific recommendations.

### **Recommendation Number 1: Establish a ministry to relieve food insecurity and hunger in the local community.**

#### Rationale:

Throughout the process, the concerns about food insecurity received more mention than any other topic. While homelessness was mentioned at the same rate as food insecurity in the individual listening sessions, the topic of food insecurity became more dominant as we progressed to the town hall meetings where individuals were able to interact and exchange ideas with others.

Individuals that interact with the youth in the community, primarily through the school system, shared that there is a great need even in Howard County, regularly listed as one of the richest counties in the country. Children cannot learn if they are coming to school hungry. An oft mentioned aspect of this possible ministry is that it is where we could make tangible contributions; for other problems considered it was much more difficult to see a path to meaningful activity.

While the congregation is currently engaged in aspects of food ministry by providing meals for the cold weather shelter, supporting food drives and providing meals to the Grassroots Day Resource Center, the congregation communicated to the committee that more help is urgently needed and that this congregation has the capacity to do more.

#### Specific Recommendations:

1. Identify members of the congregation to establish a ministry to engage with the local community to address this need.
2. Establish the food ministry as an independent entity accountable to and reporting directly to the mission committee.
3. Task the food ministry with developing activities that will engage and equip a wide cross-section of our congregation in a variety of ways to engage everyone's unique time, treasures and talents inside our new facility and onsite in the local community.
4. Foster relationships with local entities already engaged in food security issues.
5. Identify gaps in the local community's programs that address food insecurity to create a unique niche for this congregation.

6. Educate the congregation on the issues of food security and equip individuals for service in the community.
7. Seek opportunities to educate members of the congregations on related societal issues that can lead to food insecurity and hunger and become barriers to addressing this issue.

**Recommendation # 2: Establish a ministry to create intentional efforts to care for one another and welcome others.**

Rationale:

Members of our congregation overwhelmingly responded to the first question, “What brings you joy about our congregation?” with answers that indicated they feel welcome, and they love being together, love being in community with each other, and want to bring more people into our community to experience this tremendous gift.

Through the work of many areas of the congregation and in particular, the work of our CARE group in recent years, the congregation increased our engagement in caring behaviors and activities. Informally, members support each other in a variety of ways. During the pandemic years, caring behaviors and activities continued and, in some cases, took on new forms. Members often mention how they valued this ministry and appreciate the physical or virtual contacts through the mail, phone, or internet.

While the congregation is currently engaged in many caring behaviors and activities, it is clear that we have capacity to do so much more and there are tremendous unmet needs in our congregation and local community. We simply must do more.

*NOTE: Because mental health issues are very complicated, especially for non-professionals, much of the focus centered around the issue of Isolation which is a much more tangible/realistic outreach for our congregation. There was a feeling that care for mental health issues is best left to experts who can provide therapy, medication, treatment, etc.*

Specific Recommendations:

1. Identify members of the congregation to establish a ministry to establish and administer specific programs to care for one another and welcome others in addition to existing programs.
2. Re-establish monthly home visits to administer communion to those who cannot attend worship in person.
3. Broaden the methods of communication to alert members of the congregation and members of our local community to new and emerging ministries and ways to participate in the life of the church.
4. Establish an intentional visitation program. (Consider engaging an individual who has come forward with a passion for implementing a program with the stated goal of “To be missionaries of God’s love by reaching out to others in need of companionship,” starting within the congregation and exploring ways to expand beyond our walls).

5. Connect with more members of our local community by allowing outside groups to use our facility.
6. Explore engagement with established organizations that provide transportation and meals for members of our local community.
7. Re-establish social activities that focus on underserved members of our congregation.

In closing, the members of the committee are grateful for the opportunity to lead this visioning process and look forward to further discussion.

## APPENDIX

### DATA

#### Data Summarized from the Individual Listening Sessions

\*\* Further data and analysis from the individual listening sessions can be found in the appendix that follows.

#### Question 1: What makes your heart glad at CMPC?

- Members of the congregation easily identified sources of gladness. Collectively, the 84 respondents identified 200 sources of gladness, the most of any question.
- The greatest source of satisfaction for the congregation is overwhelmingly the sense of community they feel at CMPC which received twice as many mentions (59) than any other single response.
- Other sources of satisfaction gaining substantial numbers of mentions were:
  - Worship & Music (26)
  - Pastor & Sermons (25)
  - LOGOS (23)
  - Youth/Children Programs (20)
  - Mission/Service (16).

#### Question 2: Who are our “neighbors”, and how can we better engage with them?

Respondents cited a broad range of neighbors including people in the local neighborhood, Howard County, and other countries.

#### Question 3: How can we better engage our neighbors?

- This question caused a significant amount of uncertainty. Fourteen respondents either refused to answer or explicitly said they did not know for sure when giving other answers.
- Respondents overwhelmingly interpreted this question in terms of increasing church outreach to ultimately increase church attendance. This focus may reflect how the listening campaign and this question specifically was presented to respondents.
- Eighty-one responses, the most by far, can be categorized as a desire to increase outreach. These include:
  - Outreach Events (28)
  - Outreach Campaigns/Talk about CMPC with others (21)
  - Improve Marketing (20)
  - New Signage (8)
  - Promote Diversity within Congregation.

The second most frequent suggestion related to ministry expansion, which gained 38 mentions. These include:

- Continue/increase ongoing ministries (18)
- Proactively Reach Out to Those in Need (12)
- New Ministry (6)

- Pray for Others (2).
- The third area gaining a significant number of responses was building relationships, with 31 mentions. These consisted of:
  - Partner with other Churches/Nonprofit organizations (10)
  - Reach out to Community Stakeholders (10)
  - Open Building to New Partners (9)
  - Create Partner Organization/Community Center (2)

Question 4: What need/problem in our community and/or beyond do you think we should lean into/help solve, and why?

This question produced a wide range of responses. That said, there was a pronounced dual focus on addressing food insecurity (23) and housing insecurity (23). Indeed, these topics were often mentioned together.

Receiving roughly half as many responses were three specific areas, as follows:

- Church culture/ministry (13)
- Mental health (12)
- Support for other organizations (12).

Other suggested areas of focus include elderly and caregivers (9), youth (8), gun violence (8); expand CMPC's missions (7), discuss difficult topics (7), racial reconciliation (6), and education/literacy.

**Data Summarized from the Small Group Conversations**

Question 1: Why is it Important?

1. Hunger/food insecurity

- Essential for learning – teachers see the need every day at school,
- It is something that we can impact as a church,
- Free lunches at school during COVID have been curtailed,
- We are blessed to live in an affluent area, but there is need in Howard County,
- Jesus commanded us to care for others.

2. Mental health/feelings of isolation

- Older people in the community are prone to isolation, depression, cut off from socialization.
- CMPC offers opportunities for connection (LOGOS, GIFT, CARE Groups) within the church – can this be made more accessible within the local community?
- Are there ways to better publicize what we offer and do?
- Many young people today seem alienated from the church and seem lost – can we connect?

3. Racial Justice

- These are societal issues that impact us and our community every day
- Building a relationship with a predominantly black church could help us understand their needs and provide support.

Question 2: Who (other churches, organizations, agencies, etc.) is already engaged in this issue that we should learn from and/or partner with?

1. Hunger/food insecurity

- Howard County Office of Children & Families
- Howard County Department of Community Resources and Services
- Community Actions Council of Howard County (operates the HoCo Food Bank)
- Grassroots
- Maryland Food Bank
- Meals on Wheels
- Food Drives for Howard County
- Laurel Food Pantry, FISH

2. Mental health/feelings of isolation

- Howard County Dept of Community Resources & Services
- Senior Centers
- NAMI
- Members of our own congregation leading conversations, book readings, musical outreach,
- The Village in Howard County (private organization for those who are aging in place)

3. Race relations

- Opportunities to partner with churches of color – build a relationship, exchange information and support one another
- Kathy Koch, soon to be a member of CMPC, authored a book on the subject “Injustices of the World.”

Question 3: Do you have any ideas for possible programs or activities in which CMPC could engage to address either or both?

1. Hunger/food insecurity

- RISE Against Hunger – meal packing event
- Regular mission/service
- Meals for Grassroots
- Mission committee is constantly looking for ideas and activities in which the congregation can become involved in the areas of homelessness and food insecurity. Ongoing.
- The Church has a plan in place to support those who may need a ride or meals.

2. Mental health/feelings of isolation

3. Race relations

- CMPC invited members to participate in a series of Zoom meetings during COVID to learn more about race relations.

## Data Summarized from the Town Hall Meetings

### Topic One: Hunger/Food Insecurity

#### Question 1: Why is this important?

- In a country and a local community which has great wealth, there is no reason people should go hungry,
- Hunger is linked to poverty and income inequality, and food is expensive,
- Learning is impacted if children are going hungry; our teachers see this every day,
- This seems to be an area where we can impact the health and well-being of our community directly,
- There are gaps needing to be filled, i.e., children lacking access to nutritional meals during the summer when school is not in session; SNAP benefits are being curtailed with COVID in the rearview mirror,
- The Bible teaches us to feed the hungry.

#### Question 2: Resources we might partner with:

- Howard County Food Bank / Maryland Food Bank
- Grassroots/Day Resource Center on Route 1
- Food Pantry / Laurel Advocacy & Referral Services
- Columbia Community Care (food distribution)
- Meals on Wheels
- RISE Against Hunger
- Roving Radish (discounted meals to those in need)
- Directly with individual school

#### Question 3: Ideas for assistance:

- Find gaps in the current food assistance programs and find ways to “fit in.”
- Educate ourselves about root issues of hunger in our community, show film “A Place at the Table” which describes 3 families who have food insecurity; invite a speaker,
- Use the new kitchen to assist with cooking/delivering meals – possibly host free meals in our kitchen/fellowship hall,
- Donate money, time, and food to local organizations (see above list).
- Continue or expand our work with the Cold Weather Shelter/Grassroots, and provide meals,
- Identify other churches working in this area and partner with them (e.g., St. Johns and New Hope, etc.),
- Provide transportation for those who need a ride to and from food banks/pantries,
- Teach nutrition classes,
- Expand our existing food donations to organizations.



## Topic Two: Mental Health/Isolation

### Question 1: Why is this important?

- We have a congregation with many people who are extremely gifted in making people feel welcome.
- Many people have not fully recovered from the negative social impacts of COVID and the resulting feelings of isolation,
- Concerns about mental health/isolation affect people of all ages.

### Question 2: Resources We Might Partner With

- Bright View seniors' residence on Martin Road, where some of our members live
- Neighbor Ride

### Question 3: Ideas for Assistance:

- Establish a Visitation Program, getting our congregation outside of the building, to spread the message of Christ and show God's love in a meaningful way,
- Visit our members at Bright View and get to know others there who could use help/companionship,
- Restart home visitation for communion.
- Identify shut-ins who would benefit from visitation and/or assistance,
- Continue emphasis on the CARE Group, and possibly expand with additional volunteers,
- Provide opportunities for youth to connect outside of Wednesday night. There are currently no other opportunities for youth to connect on Sunday morning outside of worship service, involve youth as greeters, junior ushers,
- Revisit the idea of a prison ministry,
- Provide transportation for church members who lack their own transportation; Neighbor Ride as a resource; provide a system to partner volunteer drivers with those who need a ride,
- Offer more church social activities (e.g., GIFT events, church bowling league, BINGO, polka night, dinner groups (homogenous or intergenerational), trips to Sight & Sound), etc.
- Expand musical activities (host concerts, occasional praise band during worship, etc.).