

First Presbyterian Church of Olney

Mission Study Review

September 2008

Mission Review Committee

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Mission Statement

The cornerstone of our existence is to proclaim the Gospel that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again to bring eternal life to all that truly believe. We seek to accomplish our purpose through worship, evangelism, and service to our members, neighbors, and the world-at-large.

We are a caring, loving, and inclusive community of faith. Everyone who seeks to grow in the Christian life and learn more about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is welcome into our fellowship. We will treat our members, staff, and visitors with the respect they are due as the children of God. As members of the Presbyterian Church (USA), we worship in the reformed tradition of the greater church. Our theology is grounded in the Bible, the inspired Word of God, and in the Book of Confessions. We strive to create a worship environment that is centered on the Cross and meets the needs of a diverse congregation comprised of all ages, cultures, and traditions.

Where We've Been

History

The First Presbyterian Church of Olney was organized December 5, 1898. It was chartered through the Philadelphia Presbytery three years later on December 12, 1901. Almost immediately, it was realized that various organizations were needed such as Ruling Elders, Board of Trustees, and Sabbath School with departments for all age groups, Ladies Aid Society, Olney Missionary Foundation, Christian Endeavor, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. All these groups were formed by dedicated Christian individuals who served God faithfully for many years.

Church meetings were held in rented rooms in the neighborhood until a plot of ground was donated at the northeast corner of Tabor Road and Third Street. Soon after, a plain frame building was erected where church services and Sunday School were held. This eventually evolved into a manse in 1921 and our current Church and Sunday School buildings which were dedicated October 17, 1926.

The Rev. William Henry Wells was the founding pastor and served the church from 1898 until his death in 1932. The Rev. Harvey Klaer followed in 1932 and served until retirement in 1947. At that time, Rev. Frederick S. Vogenitz, Associate Pastor, was called as Senior Minister and served until 1971. The Rev. James C. Caraher served as pastor from 1972 until his retirement in 1987. The Rev. Bruce A. Becker was called to serve from 1989 until 2008. Throughout the years, the church has continually raised men and women to go into ministry both as missionaries and ministers with the numbers totaling more than 150.

Where We Are

The First Presbyterian Church of Olney is a caring community of believers which exists to spread the good news of Jesus in Olney, Philadelphia, and the world. This is evidenced by our many outreach efforts. Some of our local outreach projects include Vacation Bible School, Community Day, Pentecost in the Streets, Emergency Food Cupboard, community luncheons and suppers, weekly basketball outreach, and support of Teen Challenge of Philadelphia. Some of our national and international outreach efforts have included mission projects in the Congo and Honduras, Operation Christmas Child, and Soldiers Angels. We also have missionaries around the world who are supported through the Olney Missionary Foundation.

Our church family is led by a dedicated group of men and women who serve as elders, trustees, and deacons. Other staff members such as our church secretary, youth director, acting director of music, organist, and sextons work tirelessly day after day to meet the various needs of the church.

Music is a vital part of the services at Olney Pres. There are a variety of ways that people of every age can participate in praise and worship through music. These include Chancel Choir, Praise Team, Youth Ensemble/Choir Chimes, and Joyful Noise.

Though our congregation is small, we are a diverse group that welcomes newcomers with open arms and loving hearts. We encourage participation in various programs and ministries throughout the church. There is something for everyone from youth to seniors. Sunday morning

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worship offers practical Biblical teaching in a blended service of traditional and contemporary worship. Sunday school classes are held weekly for all ages from nursery through adults.

Our Women's Association is very active in local and worldwide outreach. Presbyterian Women Circle groups meet regularly for Bible Study and fellowship. The women also hold annual events such as a Fall Supper, Spring Banquet and Spring Tea.

The men's activities have included Promise Keeper's Breakfasts and Bible Studies.

There are many opportunities for activities, outreach, fellowship, and Bible study for junior high and high school youth under the direction of our youth director. A weekly youth group is held as well as a variety of monthly outings such as movies, dinners, go-Karts, and snow tubing. Our youth have participated in a number of outreach and community service projects such as The 30 Hour Famine and visits to nursing homes as well as retreats and mission trips.

First Presbyterian Church of Olney has many gatherings for the entire family as well which include the Annual Sunday School Picnic, Game Night, and neighborhood Christmas caroling. Social gatherings for adults include activities such as square dancing, theater and museum outings, and pot-luck suppers as well as an annual retreat to Lodore.

First Presbyterian Church of Olney has a Prayer Chain Ministry which enables us to promptly communicate prayer requests to each other via telephone call or email.

Our church web site, www.FPCOlney.org, contains a lot of information about our church programs, beliefs, upcoming activities, weekly sermons, and even photos and videos. We also have a secure section that provides prayer chain information, a member directory, and online viewing of The Olney Image, which is our monthly newsletter. Our church library has an extensive collection of books, videos, DVDs, and magazines which are available for anyone to use.

The School District of Philadelphia uses our church building during the school year to hold classes for the Morrison School. This assists by providing us with much needed revenue and also provides a Christ-centered environment for the children in the neighborhood.

Several Bible believing churches use our facilities for their weekly or monthly worship services.

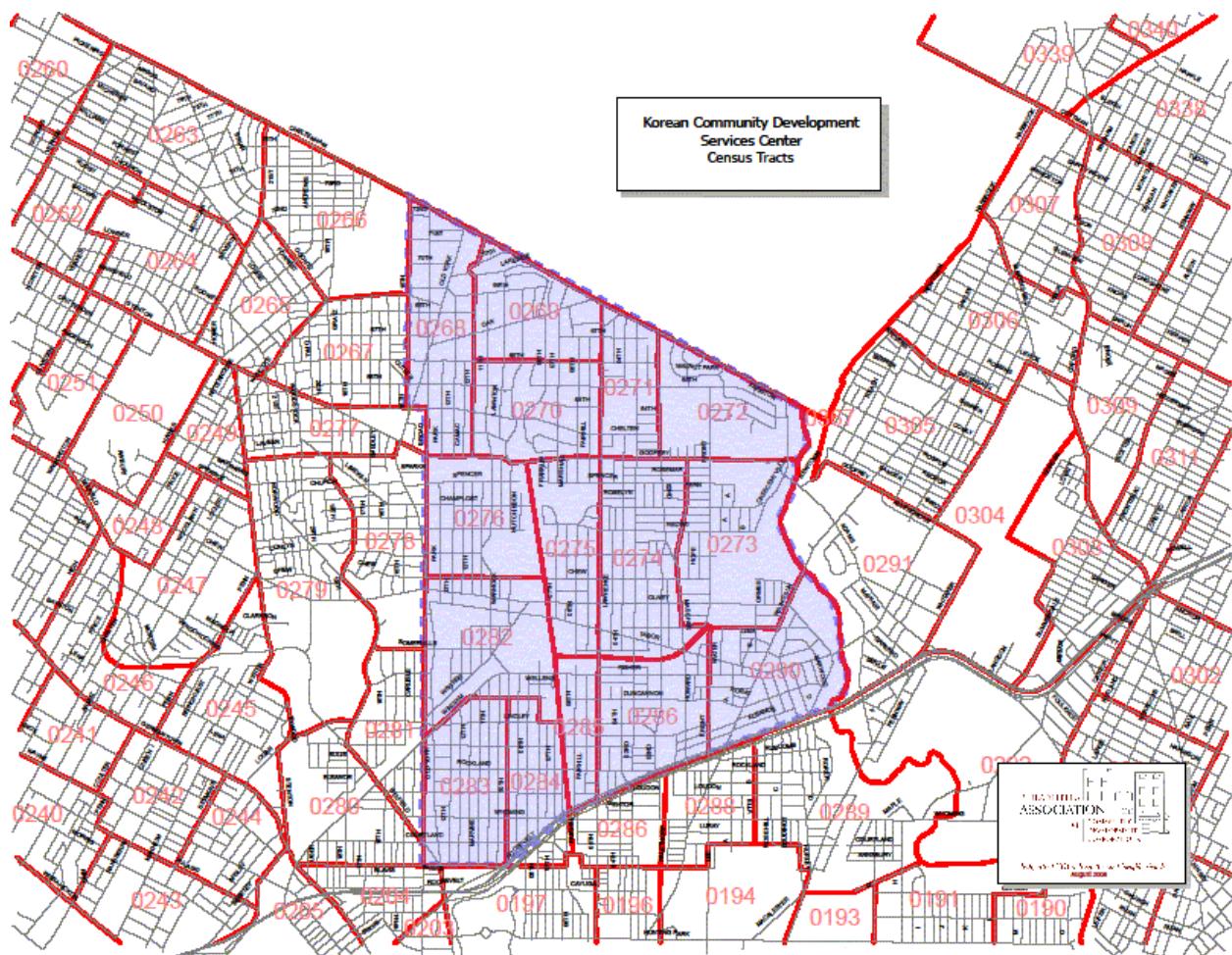
Where We Minister

Olney is a neighborhood in the far north central area of Philadelphia. It is one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the city. Although it is an urban environment with vast stretches of row and twin homes, it is also home to Fisher Park with its twenty-three acres of woodland, and borders on Tookany Park with a meandering creek forming the boundary with Cheltenham Township. In the 2000 census data shown below the economic and ethnic diversity of the community is apparent.

Census Tract	Boundaries	Population	Minority	Non-Hispanic White	American Indian	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	Hispanic
270	Godfrey - 66th Ave; 12th - 5th	2452	79.61%	500	0	115	1687	106
271	Godfrey - Cheltenham; 5th - 2nd	2438	80.31%	480	4	517	1130	246
272	Godfrey - Cheltenham Ave; 2nd - Tookany Creek;	4567	86.29%	626	6	358	3182	299
273	Tabor - Godfrey; Mascher - Tookany Creek	6000	77.4%	1337	14	1163	2515	920
274	Somerville - Godfrey; 5th - Mascher	10479	82.78%	1804	24	2114	4296	1840
275	Somerville - Godfrey; RR - 5th	4823	83.14%	813	8	663	2675	519

Census Tract	Boundaries	estimated 2008 median income	Housing Units	Owner-occupied	% owner occupied
270	Godfrey - 66th Ave; 12th - 5th	73,189.00	960	529	55.10
271	Godfrey - Cheltenham; 5th - 2nd	55,386.00	966	702	72.67
272	Godfrey - Cheltenham Ave; 2nd - Tookany Creek;	52,628.00	1925	1186	61.61
273	Tabor - Godfrey; Mascher - Tookany Creek	Not available	2146	1495	69.66
274	Somerville - Godfrey; 5th - Mascher	46,090.00	3611	2339	64.77
275	Somerville - Godfrey; RR - 5th	46,915.00	1685	1228	72.87

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Although the neighborhood is primarily residential, there is an eight block long commercial corridor anchored by a branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia and containing over 200 stores, retail and professional establishments. There is also a newer shopping plaza with a Shop-Rite supermarket, a post office and other retail stores at the eastern edge of the community. Public transportation is available within walking distance of virtually every block of the community.

There are many public, private and parochial schools in the community including Olney High, a general public high school and Cardinal Dougherty High, a coed Roman Catholic high school.

Over the past ten to fifteen years the many mainline protestant churches in the community have sold or rented their buildings to independent or ethnic congregations. First Presbyterian Church

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of Olney is one of the few mainline protestant churches still ministering to the community. Several store-front churches meet in our community reaching out to those who are reluctant to worship in a formal setting.

Where We're Going

The challenges facing our congregation are not unlike those of many urban churches today, with membership in decline, revenues tested by the demands of the expenses of operating the facilities and programs, and the challenge of raising the level of neighborhood involvement. We have been encouraged, however, in light of recent community outreach activities, by the increased attendance of local families and are hopeful for the future.

The physical facilities are generally in good condition, particularly considering the age of the buildings. This is evidence of the dedication and effort of the Board of Trustees. Recently, a Manse Renovation project was completed, at the cost of approximately \$88,000, creating a beautiful home with a modern kitchen, three remodeled bathrooms and an outside porch with insulated windows. The heating and cooling systems in the main church building are new within the last eight years and are functioning very well. Since there is not an overriding area requiring immediate attention, our most challenging situation for the facilities is just to have sufficient funds to handle day to day maintenance with enough remaining for capital improvements.

Although congregational giving has remained relatively stable recently, given a reduced membership, additional sources of revenue, such as payments from the School District of Philadelphia for its lease, and from the Endowment Fund, have been necessary to help meet the budget. Increased congregational support for both the Current Expense Fund and the Building Maintenance Fund is the obvious financial challenge. Growth in attendance and membership would be advantageous in achieving this goal. Our church membership and stewardship history may be accessed at www.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report/JBHMRN7/all_statistics.jsp#top

The paramount challenge is in the area of church growth. The demographics of the membership are not those of the Olney neighborhood. It appears that, in spite of significant efforts, it is difficult making the church seem relevant and attractive to those in the neighborhood, at least to the point of their significant involvement.

What We Value

Our Core Beliefs

We value the free gift of salvation made available to everyone through a belief and trust in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord. An outgrowth of our salvation is that we are challenged to live a life that mirrors the life of Jesus revealed to us through the Scriptures. We value Scripture as the inspired Word of God, teaching us about the triune God and His people. We also value Scripture as it provides us with a roadmap for leading a life pleasing to Him. We value the Holy Spirit as the guide for us in our daily lives, in our decision making, and in our interactions with all people.

We are a family of believers who value each other and all of God's creation. Our church family values friendship, worship, preaching, teaching and community with one another and with those we meet for the first time. We also value the gifts and talents given to one another, and how God uses individual gifts to create a family of believers in order to carry out His will for the church. As Presbyterians, we value the theology found in the Holy Bible, the Book of Confessions and the Creeds of the church.

We value the discipleship of all people and hope to have the opportunity to speak the truth of Jesus and His Salvation in our neighborhood and throughout the world. We value people of all cultures as images-bearers of the Almighty God. We value and support the Great Commission to go into the world and preach the Gospel. We act on this belief through programs in the community and through our support of missionary efforts around the globe.

Mission Study Survey

A Mission Study survey was distributed to church members and attendees through a variety of mediums. The purpose of the survey was to gather information related to the church life and work. Approximately 50% of those who attend weekly participated.

Survey results show respondents participate at Olney Pres due to their dedication to sharing Jesus Christ's love and dedication to the church and to each other. Most feel their participation is also due to fellowship, and the love and concern felt among church members. Strengths identified amplify the reasons people choose to participate. They include a friendly and prayerful

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atmosphere that includes fellowship with others and an extension of warmth to those in the community. Survey results show an appreciation of the warm and loving reception that new visitors and members experience. There is a profound feeling that there is a solemn dedication to sharing Jesus Christ's love with all who attend and with the community at large.

A large number of respondents to the Mission Study survey of church members and non-member attendees indicated that a lack of membership of the Olney neighborhood, and declining attendance is a weakness in the church currently. There are few young families although the summer VBS program is very well attended.

Pastoral Leadership

Our survey indicated the congregation's desire for a pastor who will possess a strong belief and adherence to Biblical principles. Congregants are prayerful that God will provide a minister who has a love of Jesus Christ, will preach Jesus Christ and demonstrate Christ's love to the church and the surrounding community.

Challenges and Expectations

Lay Leadership:

Our laity is a dedicated but small group of women and men who, in addition to serving on the three boards, also participate as Sunday School teachers, officers in Presbyterian Women, sing in the choir, and staff committees. We need to grow new leaders to meet the future and its associated opportunities.

Youth Ministry:

Our current challenge is to continue to bring young people from the community into our fellowship so that we can both minister to their needs and grow our programs. Our current experience has shown that initially we get good responses; however, we have difficulty sustaining attendance.

Congregational Development:

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Congregational development is a major goal and an active effort to grow our membership is a priority. Our current situation is stable and we are working to grow the membership. Our next minister must be an active participant in the development and execution of our evangelism, community outreach and stewardship efforts.

We believe fervently that our future resides with an increased participation from the residents of the neighborhood. As a congregation we strive to be inclusive and provide programs and opportunities that will both invite and keep the attention of the neighborhood residents and bring them into membership and, ultimately, leadership positions. An informal survey, conducted through contacts and conversations with Olney residents, indicates that we need to be more intentional in our outreach and follow-up. We need to revise our current model and create a more vibrant approach, one that more appropriately communicates with the residents of today's Olney.

We believe that the current state of flat growth is related to: the poor image of the mainline protestant church; the convenience of non-denominational churches whose leadership is responsible for all aspects of ministry; a lack of leadership from our former pastor in following up on attendees of our outreach programs. We want to move from being a church with a mission to a vibrant congregation whose life is shaped by what God wants us to be in Christ Jesus.

Pastor:

Our expectations of the next minister are: to preach sermons that challenge the congregation spiritually, speaking to us where we live and provide inspiration for the week ahead; to have compassion and provide pastoral care to the membership through home and hospital visitation, minister to members and non-members alike during times of family crisis in addition to times of joy; to provide for and lead in corporate worship and the sacraments; to have strong administrative and organizational skills and be willing to work with the laity and staff to make the decisions necessary to effectively witness in our neighborhood and then to follow-up to ensure that those decisions are carried out.

The minister we are seeking will be able to address the growth opportunities of: growing new leaders to meet the future needs; growing our membership through increased participation from the neighborhood residents; and bringing young people from the community into our fellowship.