

**EASTCHESTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH'S
MISSION STUDY REPORT**

“More than we can ask or imagine”

July 1, 2016

MORE THAN WE CAN ASK OR IMAGINE –

Ephesians 3:14-21

What is it that God wants the Eastchester Presbyterian Church (EPC) Family to Be in This Time and Place?

INTRODUCTION

In May 2014, the Rev. Perry Wooten retired after faithfully serving the EPC for 27 years. After a lengthy search for an interim pastor, in April 2015, the Session called the Rev. Phil Tom to serve as Interim Pastor. Rev. Tom began serving EPC in June 2015. The Mission Study Team was organized during the summer of 2015. The members of the team are Nathaniel Christian, Pearl Harrison, Yvonne Wynter, Errol Smith, Sonia Nelson, Kassandra Jessamy and Geraldine White. Nathaniel Christian and Geraldine White agreed to serve as Co-Moderators. The members of our team reflected the demographic makeup of our membership. Due to her work commitment, Kassandra stepped down from the Mission Study Team in December 2015. Rev. Phil Tom served as the resource staff to the Mission Study Team.

In October 2015 the Mission Study Team began the process of collecting information to discern what it is that God wants the EPC Family to be in this time and place. The Mission Study Team began its work by reviewing EPC's membership, worship attendance, and financial information for the last five years, 2010-2014. The team discussed EPC's history and the most significant changes that have taken place during the last five years. We discussed the demographic information about EPC's neighborhood that was provided in The ExecutiveInsite Report from the Presbyterian Church USA. The team conducted five listening sessions with members of the congregation from November 2015 to January 2016. Two of our listening sessions were set up specifically for youth and young adult members. A paper survey of the questions used for the listening sessions was distributed every Sunday during the month of December 2015.

Congregation members were encouraged to complete and to submit the survey form if they were unable to attend a listening session. Phone calls were made to our homebound members so that we could get their responses to the survey questions. Finally, we visited or made phone calls to a number of key community leaders seeking their feedback about how they perceived EPC's role and engagement with the community, and what they considered were the major issues impacting our community.

The information we received from The ExecutiveInsite Report, the five listening sessions, the completed survey forms that were submitted, and the conversations we had with our members and community leaders have significantly guided and shaped our mission study discernment process and report. We are grateful for all who participated in this process. We regard this report not as a final document but as a work in progress, guided by the Holy Spirit.

OUR HISTORY

The following are excerpts from the opening entry in the first minute book of the Church:

"In the spring of 1930, the Church Extension Committee of the Presbytery of New York decided to make a survey of a territory in the Bronx...with a view of establishing a Presbyterian Church in the community. Mr. Floyd McGuire of the Biblical Seminary in New York was invited to make the survey and start a Sunday School and Church if conditions were favorable. He began his work June 1, 1930 with an attendance of 47 scholars. The first worship service of the Church was held October 5, 1930 with Mr. Floyd E McGuire as minister in charge."

On June 7, 1931, the congregation was formally organized as the Eastchester Road Presbyterian Church with 84 charter members. In October 1932, the Church moved from Eastchester Road to 1343 Gun Hill Road and became known as the Eastchester Community Presbyterian Church. In October 1936 the Church was incorporated as Eastchester Presbyterian Church. On May 31, 1942 the first worship service was held at the Church's present location in the Sunday school room downstairs. The following Sunday, June 7, 1942 the first communion service was held in the new sanctuary.

The first pastor was the Reverend Floyd McGuire who organized the Church. He remained until December 1939. The next pastor was the Reverend Richmond Arnold Fewlass who began March 1, 1940 and remained until October 7, 1949. On May 21, 1950, the Reverend Roy Millard Farrell was called to be the pastor where he remained for 37 years and retired as active pastor on June 30, 1987; he was Minister Emeritus of EPC until his death in 1998.

During the 1950's the congregation continued growing and it became necessary to eventually institute two Sunday morning worship services, at 9:00 a.m. and at 11:00 a.m. Another reason for instituting a 9:00 a.m. worship service was due to our growing Sunday school and the convenience of parents attending a worship service while their children attend Sunday school. By the late 1980's, attendance at the 9:00 a.m. service was greater than the 11:00 a.m. service.

During the 1960's through the 1970's the changing demographics of the surrounding neighborhood led to a change in the demographics of the congregation. Then, as now, EPC welcomed all who want to worship the Lord and serve His Church. After serving as Stated Supply (from 1988 through February 1990), in 1990 the Reverend J. Perry Wootten was called to be the pastor, and was installed on March 4, 1990. Since that time, the church has expanded its outreach ministries and initiated programs that foster spiritual growth. It soon became apparent that EPC's pastoral needs were increasing so rapidly that Pastor Wootten needed assistance.

In 1997, Commissioned Lay Pastor Carlton Knight was called to provide additional leadership so that EPC might fulfill its mission. During this period, he attended theological seminary and, after ordination, he was called as Associate Pastor at EPC. Pastor Knight focused on ministering to the sick, leading in-depth Bible studies, and initiating evangelistic activities. In addition, he ably assisted Pastor Wootten in the pulpit.

In the early 1990's, it became clear that EPC needed a larger worship space to accommodate the congregation whose attendance was divided, by necessity, between two services, one at 9 a.m.

and the other at 11 a.m. We also needed additional space to accommodate the increased activities of EPC's organizations, community outreach and the daily after school program. We broke ground for the new building in April 1998; on Palm Sunday 1999, we began to use the Fellowship Hall in our new building for Sunday morning worship, switching from two services (at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.) to a single service at 10 a.m. The dedication service for the new sanctuary was held on Sunday, November 21, 1999. In 1999, we instituted a Sunday evening evangelical service led by Pastor Carlton Knight.

After 27 years of service, Pastor Wootten retired in May 2014. The search for an interim pastor was begun. The Rev. Phil Tom accepted the church's invitation to serve as interim Senior Pastor, as of June 1, 2015.

The Lord has blessed EPC with fine leadership, growing membership, a strong church school, and the continued commitment of its members. We pray that this Church will continue to serve God in this corner of the Bronx and to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ by word and action for many years to come. Based on our history and God's manifold blessings, we have unwavering faith that EPC will continue to grow in its commitment to doing God's will and fulfilling our mission.

OUR COMMUNITY

EPC is located in the Baychester Neighborhood. The ExecutiveInsite Report shows that the 2015 population within a one-mile radius around EPC is 105,633. The 2020 projection would see the area grow by 1,247 to a total population of 106,880. The population of Households and Family Households will continue to increase. The racial/ethnic population of neighborhood continues to be predominantly African American and Black (58%) with Hispanic and Latino community being the second largest racial/ethnic population (27%). The number of school aged children (5 to 9 years) will increase by 3.9% while middle and high school youth will decline by 1.8% and 2.1% in the next five years. The median age of our neighbors is 37 years. Of the households with children under 18, married couples' households are increasing while single parent households are decreasing. Our neighborhood consists of predominantly low-income blue collar working class families. The estimated per capita income in 2015 was \$25,484.

In our conversations with community leaders, the number one issue that was raised is the increasing number of acts of violence in our neighborhood, including youth violence and domestic violence. Several leaders encouraged EPC to become more involved with the 47th Police Precinct and the 47th Precinct Community Council. EPC had been more involved in past years with the 47th Precinct Community Council. In 2015, EPC hosted a Community Council meeting and supported the 47th Police Precinct Christmas toy drive. Pastor Knight regularly attends the 47th Precinct Clergy Coalition.

OUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our membership in 2015 was 308. EPC's membership peaked in 2008 when it had just over 400 members. Since then, EPC's membership has experienced a continual decline. Our congregation also continues to grow older. Two-thirds of our members are over the age of 46 and one-third are over the age of 65. We praise God that during the past year, ten new members joined our church family including three young families. Our worship attendance has remained strong. In 2015, we had an average weekly worship attendance of 285 for our two worship services.

EPC's congregation is predominately black. Our members' diverse ethnic backgrounds include African Americans, people of Caribbean background, mostly Jamaican, and some from various African countries. The majority of our members live in the Bronx.

OUR MISSION AND MINISTRIES

The EPC Family recites its Mission Statement every Sunday during our 10 a.m. worship service. Our Mission Statement is as follows:

We believe

- that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and the way of salvation;
- that Holy Scripture is the triune God's revealed Word, the Church's only infallible rule of faith and life;
- that God's people are called to holiness in all aspects of life;
- that it is the privilege and obligation of all Christians to share this faith with all people by word and deed.

The EPC Family seeks to fulfill its mission statement through worship, education and service.

Worship

EPC holds two worship services on Sunday morning. Our 8:00 a.m. worship service is a more contemporary and informal service, organized and led by our 8:00 a.m. worship team. Its attendance has been growing during the past few years.

Our 10:00 a.m. worship service is a more traditional service. It is enhanced by our excellent music staff, Chancel Choir, Children's Choir, Bell Choir, Praise Dancers, Drama Ministry and lay worship leaders.

Since 1999, EPC had hosted a third worship service on Sunday evening. It was called the Evangelistic Service. The service was dropped in March 2016 due to declining attendance.

Special worship services are held Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Thanksgiving Eve, Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. EPC also hosts two Revival Services in September.

Education

EPC conducts a variety of educational ministries. On Sunday morning, we have a vibrant Christian education ministry for children from kindergarten to middle school age, and an adult Bible study class. Our high school youth participate in our Sunday morning education ministry serving as teacher or teacher assistant to the younger children.

During the week, we have adult Bible study groups meeting on Monday, Wednesday, and Sunday nights and a men's Bible study group that meets on Saturday morning. EPC also has five active home Bible study groups. A prayer group meets every Friday evening.

Grace Gatherings are held several times a year. Presentations are on a variety of biblical topics. EPC has an annual fall retreat. Classes about What It Means to Be a Presbyterian are offered for new members and interested persons. A leadership training session is provided annually for new officers and interested members.

Youth from EPC and the community are involved with the Christian Youth Development (CYD) that meets every Friday night. The youth are involved in bible study, fellowship activities and mission projects.

EPC members have been deeply involved with the Tres Dias Community since 1989. Members participate in Tres Dias weekend educational retreats that "bring Christians to a closer more personal walk with their Lord, Jesus Christ and encourage them to Christian leadership and Apostolic Action in their environments."

Service

EPC members are engaged in a variety of ways in serving our members and community –

Farrell Learning and Enrichment Center (FLEC) provides an after-school program for 35+ elementary age children during the school year.

FLEC Vacation Bible Camp provides a six-week educational, cultural and recreational program for elementary age children during the months of July and August.

Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) host several meetings during the week.

Mom's Kitchen provides a hot meal for our neighbors every Thursday evening.

Our Deacons operate a food pantry for the community.

Boy Scout Troop 748 meets every Friday evening.

The Philemon Ministry provides support for families who have relatives who are incarcerated. This ministry is affiliated with the national Prison Fellowship Ministry.

Members of EPC are involved with the New York City chapter of Kairos Outside, an ecumenical ministry. Kairos Outside ministers with women, men and youth whose lives have been impacted by incarceration.

The Scholarship Committee provides a PSAT/SAT class for middle and high school youth, from January – May every year. This class is open to students from Eastchester Church and the community.

We have an active Presbyterian Women’s Association that supports local and international mission projects.

EPC partners with several health organizations to provide an annual community health fair.

OUR LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION

EPC family is served by two full-time pastors, Pastor Phil Tom, Interim Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor Carlton Knight. Our part-time staff include a Choir Director, Organist, Administrator/Bookkeeper, Building Maintenance, and Director and staff for FLEC, our after-school ministry.

We are ably led by our Session (12 members), Deacons Board (12) and Board of Trustees (15). EPC is blessed to have a large number of its members leading and/or supporting its mission activities and community life. We are working to decrease the number of committees by combining or eliminating some of the functions of these committees.

OUR ASSETS

EPC’s building is in relatively good shape. Our sanctuary and social hall were built in 1999. We recently had to replace the cross and dome on top of the sanctuary roof. These items had been moved from the roof of the former sanctuary to the new sanctuary when it was built. We have the normal maintenance issues with the “new” building along with the older part of the building but nothing that has required a major financial outlay.

EPC’s finances are currently facing some challenges. Our budget has increased from \$489,979 in 2012 to \$526,963 in 2016 (see attached 2016 budget). Our proposed pledge income for 2016 is \$375,000. Our pledged income has gradually decreased due to the decline in our membership. The Session and Finance Committee are working to discern how we can increase our income and reduce our expenses in order to address the proposed deficit in our 2016 budget. EPC has a reserve fund. The balance of the reserve fund at the end of 2015 was \$465,265.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM OUR LISTENING SESSIONS

We listened to our church family by hosting five listening sessions, receiving completed written survey forms and making phone calls or visits with our homebound members. We asked our members to respond to the following questions:

1. How many years have you been a member of EPC?
2. What are your hopes and dreams for our church family?
3. What do you consider are the strengths of our church family?
4. What do you consider are the weaknesses of our church family?
5. What are congregational and community challenges facing our church family?
6. What ministries should be continued, changed, dropped or added?
7. How do you feel about our congregation's future – excited, hopeful, not sure, not hopeful?
8. Other comments.

Overall, we heard from members who have been involved with EPC for over 40 years to less than 10 years. We heard a wide range of responses to our questions. Please see the attached document for a sampling of the responses we received.

The major responses we received were that EPC needs to:

- 1) Do more outreach with our community;
- 2) Develop ministries to keep our youth and young adult members engaged and active with our church family;
- 3) Develop ministries to reach out and to connect with youth, young adults and families in our neighborhood;
- 4) Continue to grow our membership and ministries.

The majority of our members who responded are excited and hopeful about EPC's future.

WHAT IS IT THAT GOD WANTS THE EASTCHESTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FAMILY TO BE IN THIS TIME AND PLACE?

During the last nine months, we have gained a great deal of insight about our church family and our community. We have listened to our members and key community leaders and we have reviewed the latest demographic information about our community. We have discussed and prayerfully discerned where God may be leading our church family in moving forward in its life and mission.

Our church family is blessed in many ways. We are blessed with a church family that is spirit-filled and spirit-led, with an average weekly worshipping attendance of 285 for our two worship services, and have added ten new members during the past twelve months. Our church family is addressing some financial challenges, but we are still blessed with significant financial

support and resources. We are blessed with talented staff and lay leadership and in the multiple ways our church family serves our members and neighbors. We are blessed that our community is growing and that our church family has a great opportunity to grow its mission and membership.

During the next 3-5 years, it is imperative that our church family focus on the following mission priorities:

- Expand our congregational outreach and evangelism ministries with our neighbors and community.
- Build a healthy financial foundation to support the life and mission of our church family for the long-term.
- Build new community partnerships to expand our presence in our community, e.g., schools, other churches, community agencies.
- Engage more of our members to become involved in the life and ministries of our church family.
- Develop ministries to serve youth, young adults and young families in our neighborhood, e.g., worship, praise dance, family ministries.
- Develop ministries to retain our youth, young adults and young family members.
- Explore how we can integrate some forms of contemporary worship into our 10:00 a.m. worship service or develop a contemporary worship service (in addition to our 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. worship services).

We believe that our new Senior Pastor will have a wonderful and fulfilling pastoral ministry in serving with our church family and community.

What skills and experiences should our new Senior Pastor have?

- Be open to new ideas and cultures.
- Experience in working with diverse groups of people.
- Good listening and bridge building skills.
- Experience in working with a congregation to develop and to implement a community outreach ministry.
- Experience working with contemporary worship services.
- Experience in growing a congregation, spiritually and numerically.
- A collegial working style, a team spirit, an open mind, and a sense of humor.

The EPC Family looks forward to working with its new Senior Pastor so that we continue to grow in spirit and in numbers. We also seek to grow in ministries involving our members and neighbors, while continuing to praise and to glorify God.