

concordpresbyterian

Mission Study Report

October 30, 2023

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I. Introduction by the outgoing (retiring) Pastor

Welcome to Concord Presbyterian Church! You are about to read a Mission Study that is both informative and inspiring. In the introduction to their 2018 Mission Study, the interim pastor at the time wrote this: *“This church is not waiting for a new pastor to come in order to listen for God’s leading and to move in new and exciting directions. They are looking for a pastor with vision who will walk alongside them in work that is already underway.”* Those words really caught my attention! And after more than four years of serving alongside the Concord family I can say from firsthand experience that this was a completely accurate description of the congregation’s attitude at the time and continues to be true to this day, as they look toward the season following my retirement.

As the session faced the challenge of preparing for the congregation calling its next pastor, the process for the transition has been shaped by several important decisions, all endorsed by the presbytery’s Commission on Ministers and Congregations (COMC): (1) Concord could begin its work on a new Mission Study *before my departure*; (2) that work would be facilitated by myself as well as a by a presbytery liaison trained in the *Vital Congregations* process; (3) the group undertaking that work, which we called the Transition Team, would consist of the current members of session as well as persons who were part of writing the 2018 Study and willing to join the current process; (4) because of the comprehensive and insightful work done for the 2018 Study, that document could serve as the foundation for this revised Study, incorporating the Transition Team’s current discernments, as well as updated statistical and financial data.

The Transition Team met twice a month from April through October, with some meetings being the first and biggest item on the docket of monthly session meetings and other meetings being stand-alone, dealing solely with Transition Team work. What you are reading is the result of that team’s hard work and dedication.

One thing I want to emphasize is how Concord navigated the challenges of the pandemic. That crisis stretched and stressed this congregation as it did every congregation. But I can say with gratitude and wonder that by the grace of God the Concord family not only survived that harrowing season; they found ways to grow and thrive during that time—as I hope is clear from what you will read here. The congregation was never divided by the experience but came together with *energy, intelligence, imagination and love*. From the initial days of the pandemic, there was never a doubt that keeping our distance from one another was the right thing to do *and the loving thing to do*. Under stress, Concord’s DNA of deep caring for one another showed up in big ways, including embracing the paradox of closing our doors for a season and keeping our distance from each other—out of love. The creative energy of Concord, its leaders and staff, came through in a quick pivot to recording and posting online videos of worship services, then moving to purchase equipment and recruit volunteers to provide livestream of the services when we returned to in-person worship. Only after making this change did we realize that members who’d been unable to attend worship for years were now able to participate by connecting online.

We also recognize that while this new option offers another entry point into the life of the congregation, it also provides an alternative that is more convenient than making the time and effort to travel to the corner of Fairfax and Foulk to be with others in person. What this new reality means for the life of Concord, and how to be a true community of God's people in such a time, are questions the congregation and its leaders are just now beginning to examine. Concord's next pastor needs to be ready and willing to join them in this journey of discernment and discovery.

As you read the pages that follow, I pray the information here will be helpful as you discern where the Lord is leading you in your ministry among God's people.

In Christ,

Steve Clark

Pastor, Concord Presbyterian Church

October 2023

II. Mission Initiative

NOTE: the information on pages 4-8 of the Mission Initiative is from the work completed in 2018 and continues to apply to Concord Presbyterian Church.

A. Purpose and approach to the 2018 mission Initiative

Initiative Purpose: Discern God's yearning for Concord and propose a missional direction and priorities for the congregation consistent with the leadership of the Holy Spirit and Concord's gifts.

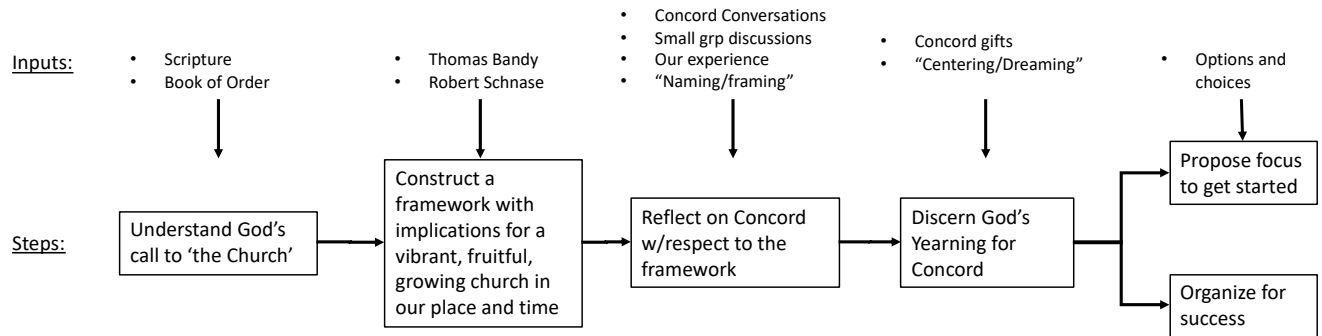
Who and When:

- Nine of us met 2 hrs, once a week for 12 weeks in March-May 2018
- Rev. Elizabeth Lyman, Carly Twilley, Liz Rowe, John Barineau, Kay Jewett, Sally Coulson, Raven & Steve Studer, Al Lund

How: We started each meeting with a short worship and were guided in the process by the book, Listen for God's Leading: A workbook for Corporate Discernment by Valerie K. Isenhower and Judith A. Todd, Upper Room Books. It was useful as it:

- Refocused us on God's call and guidance of the Holy Spirit
- Helped us let go of preconceived ideas/past, personal issues
- Encouraged patience to listen to each other
- Provided a common terminology for the team

Initiative Road Map:



B. God's Mission and a collaborative ministry framework

God's Mission:

In order to ground ourselves on the biblical basis of the church, we studied several scripture passages and the summary of God's call to the church as interpreted in the Presbyterian Book of Order. The following is what we called God's 'Big Picture' for the church.

"The triune God creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people, bringing the Good News to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord's favor upon all creation. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God and calling all people to discipleship in Christ." Presbyterian Book of Order (2017-2019. F-1.01)

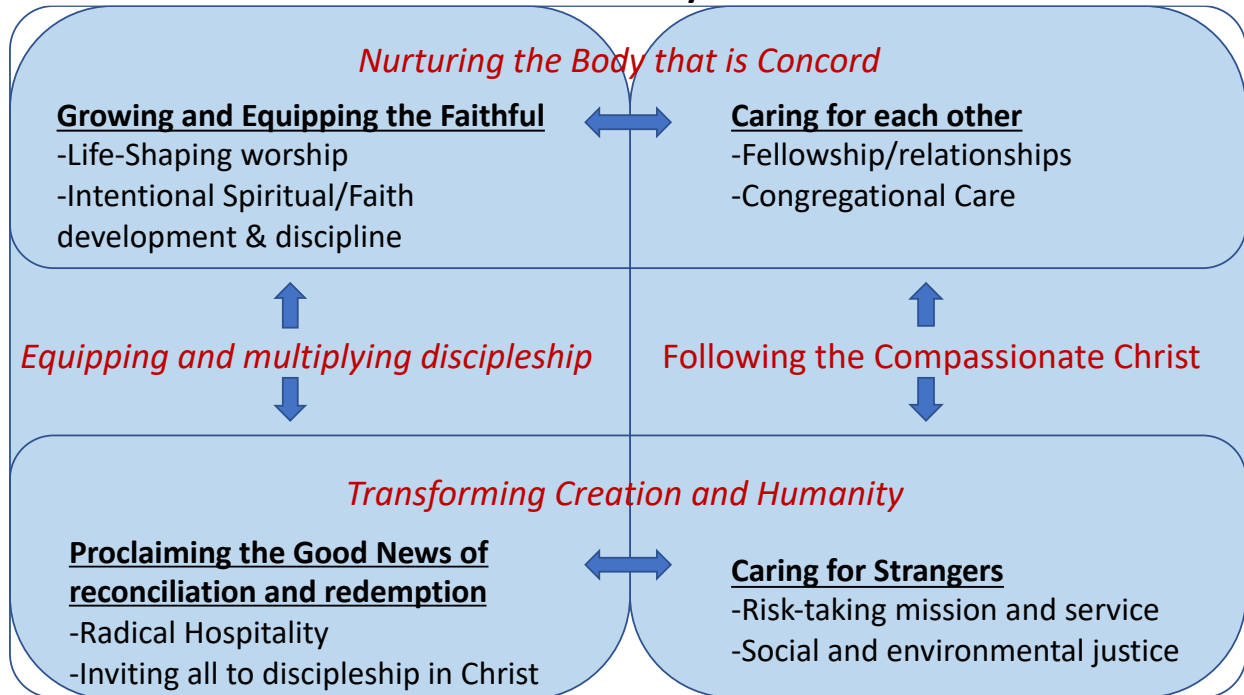
From this and other passages it is clear that the church is to 1) reach out and minister to all people in need and 2) help transform creation and humanity by proclaiming the good news and inviting all to discipleship. The emphasis is on an outward focus on others rather than an internal focus on congregations.

Definition of a vibrant, fruitful, growing Church:

We studied two reference books by respected consultants on the characteristics and practices of successful and growing churches in 21st century North America: *95 Questions to Shape the Future of Your Church*, Thomas G. Bandy, Abingdon Press and *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Robert Schnase, Abingdon Press. These two authors present perspectives on translating God's "Big Picture" Mission into approaches that seem to be working in our post-secular society today.

Based on these texts we constructed a composite Collaborative Ministry Framework for a vibrant, fruitful and growing church to use as a reference for assessing where we are at Concord versus this ideal and to stimulate our thinking on the possibilities for our future.

Collaborative Ministry Framework



In this framework, the ministry of the church is broken down into four, key elements within which we placed the characteristics and practices of fruitful congregations.

Life-shaping worship refers to worship that is pragmatic and purposeful. Not just about praising God, but about doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with the Lord. The objective is inspiration, motivating faithful people to do the right thing, live more Christ-like, and share the joy. ‘Good worship’ is any worship design that accomplishes that. Congregations with life-shaping worship come to worship with open hearts, expecting something important to happen to them today rather than coming with an attitude of evaluating the quality of the elements of the service.

Intentional spiritual and faith formation and development involves high-quality learning opportunities specifically designed to nurture the development of faith in all congregants no matter where they are in their faith journey. It takes advantage of mentors, bible study, and hands-on service. It is not about gaining biblical knowledge so much as cultivating in us the ‘fruits of the Spirit’ of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These spiritual qualities are relational and we only learn them in the presence of others.

Worship and faith development together are about developing the spiritual basis and motivation for Christian discipleship over time and thus equips the faithful for the work of God’s mission.

Caring for each other through fellowship and congregational care builds and solidifies the church community and develops a familial intimacy which is required for sharing our lives in Christ. It creates the personal support and camaraderie required to be effective in carrying out God's mission.

We note that these top two boxes, Growing and Equipping the Faithful and Caring for Each Other, are mostly internally focused on the congregation and serve to nurture the faith community so that it can be an effective force for God's purpose. We also observe that this internal focus on church community and faith development, while essential, does not by itself advance God's 'Big Picture' mission of ministering to all in need and transforming the world. For that, we must embrace the ideas in the bottom two boxes.

Risk-taking mission and service flows naturally and inescapably from the teachings of Jesus Christ. Ordinary Christian service (ushering, serving communion, serving on a board, etc.) is about making ourselves useful and building the Body of Christ. Mission turns service outward reminding congregations that Christ's compassion, grace, mercy, and love extend to the entire world. Mission changes the lives of recipients as they get to experience God's love and grace through the volunteers. Hands-on mission changes the lives of volunteers, altering attitudes and assumptions about strangers. Risk-Taking Mission steps into greater uncertainty, a higher possibility of discomfort, resistance, or sacrifice. People naturally love those that love them. The stretch of discipleship is to love those for whom it is not automatic, easy, common, or accepted, to love those that do not look like us, think like us, or live like us and to express respect, compassion, and mercy to those we do not know and who may never repay us in kind. Schnase asserts that Risk-Taking Mission is one of the fundamental activities of church life that is so critical that failure to practice it in some form results in a deterioration of the church's vitality and ability to make disciples of Jesus Christ! No matter how well you care for the congregation, turn inward with time and resources and spiritual vitality wanes.

Radical Hospitality is more than being friendly and welcoming. It comes from a restlessness, calling, and a responsibility to pray, plan and work to invite others. It focuses more on the stranger than on the congregation. It is achieved when members offer the utmost of themselves, their creativity, their abilities, and their energy to offer the gracious invitation and reception of Christ to others. Radical hospitality looks at every aspect of congregational life through the eyes of a stranger and seeks to adjust attitudes, practices, and values to make every interaction with a stranger a demonstration of God's love and acceptance.

Proclaiming the good news and inviting all to discipleship in Christ meets with special challenges in our culture. Media advertising is not very effective. Door-to-door visitation is unwelcome, people are wary of others. Successful invitations to discipleship extend the church attitude of radical hospitality to designing programs that speak to the life issues of the community and ministry opportunities that appeal to strangers. Creating acquaintances between church members and strangers in which church members model Christ's love and acceptance can afford opportunities for meaningful conversations. Growing and deploying laity to interact with seekers is not easy or automatic but requires spiritual discipline and a commitment to personal mission.

So, the bottom two boxes on the framework are externally focused and directly linked to God's 'Big Picture' mission. It may also be helpful to notice that the left two boxes have a shared theme of equipping and multiplying disciples. Bandy talks about activities focused on integrating these two areas as a 'discipling process'. Likewise, the right two boxes share a common theme of following the Compassionate Christ. Loving and caring for members and strangers gives church members the opportunity to practice Christ-like compassion, which further cultivates in us the fruits of the spirit and matures our faith.

Finally, we have observed, that as helpful as this framework is in dissecting church ministry into its elements for organizing our discussions, the power of the church is best revealed when we begin to see how the elements and their individual purposes and practices are integrated into ministerial themes that link, for example, worship and spiritual development with mission, or mission with hospitality and inviting. It seems clear that this requires that Christians work together to be successful and thus we named this model of a vibrant, fruitful church the "Collaborative Ministry Framework".

<< The remaining sections of this document are updated with discernment from 2023 >>

C. God's yearning for Concord and the collaborative ministry framework

Given our new understanding of a vibrant, fruitful church illustrated by the Collaborative Ministry Framework, we endeavored to discern God's Yearning for Concord by answering five questions. We then did an informal assessment of Concord's strengths, challenges, and opportunities mapped onto the framework. The detailed results are shown below, but overall, Concord has some of the desired characteristics and practices in place. In some cases, we have lost the thread of why we do certain things, getting focused on tasks and activities rather than our purpose, and therefore fail to inspire or maximize our effectiveness. In some cases, small changes or focus could make a big difference. And in some areas, it may require further our development to better carry out God's Mission.

Life Changing Worship

God, what is your yearning for Concord in Worship? We sense that through worship, God yearns for Concord members to abide in Jesus and to feel alive, motivated, and inspired to carry out God's mission of redemption, reconciliation, and caring for others. We are urged to include all, designing worship opportunities for people that experience the Holy Spirit in different ways and that speak to the hearts and minds of people where they are right now.

Current Strengths and Activities	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspirational, scripture-based preaching • Worship Service that is well-coordinated, high-quality, consistent with strong connection between sermon, music, liturgy and children’s sermon • Creative variations in musical styles, dance, and interpretations that support the message. • Music – strong choir, special guests, range of music genres • Lay leadership opportunities • Friendly & welcoming to all in worship, including people with special needs, LGBTQ+ people, and others regardless of life circumstance. • Children’s presence and involvement are highly valued, and their visibility enriches worship for others. • Occasional sharing of personal faith journey • Use of livestream and other technology to make worship more accessible to shut-ins and to reach the un-churched. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add more active, participatory, and fresh experiences that prevent worship from becoming routine. • Reassess the details of worship and greeting to assist strangers unfamiliar with our services to feel included and supported, starting their very first week. • Expand worship opportunities to different places, times, and styles while retaining elements of fellowship. • Encourage more to participate as lay leaders in services such as liturgist, greeter, etc. • Explore additional ways to provide music and arts in worship including augmenting the choir. • Visit other churches to explore different worship ideas. • Learn how to identify the people on our online only community and address their needs. • Add signage and guidance in the Narthex to welcome and help introduce visitors to the service and the church.

Spiritual and Faith Formation and Development

God, what is your yearning for Concord in spiritual formation? We sense our Creator yearns to cultivate in us the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In order to do that, God yearns for us to re-establish Spiritual formation and growth as a priority for Concord. We are urged to lose some of our shyness or self-consciousness in sharing our spiritual lives with each other to provide mutual support for spiritual formation and growth of all.

Current Strengths and Activities	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Christian Education - JAM (Jesus and Me) sessions for youth during worship • Vacation Bible School that includes the Concord Preschool • Youth group that incorporates youth from the community, mission projects and annual mission trips, participation as counselors for VBS • Bible study (Mug & Muffin) for church members and Cokesbury (senior living) • One women’s circle and one book group • Seasonal materials that provide spiritual discipline and practices • Sharing faith stories during worship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a group of members willing to mentor newcomers/seekers. • Develop opportunities outside of worship for a range of people that focuses on Christian basics, including alternative formats (i.e. Safe Share group, Spiritual Meditation, yoga, labyrinth, dinners, retreats, etc.). • Investigate collaborative opportunities with other churches. • Emphasize spiritual growth as part of mission and activities. • Share faith stories on a regular basis.

Caring for Each Other (internal)

God, what is your yearning for Concord in Caring for each other? We sense that The Holy Spirit yearns for us to be present and to care for each other in body and spirit, to genuinely appreciate and value each individual in our church family by recognizing the divine among the human flaws and frailties in each person, seeing the goodness first, and being quick to forgive. We think this is already a Concord strength, but there is always room for growth.

Current Strengths and Activities	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member visitation, transportation, meals, flower delivery • Prayer shawls • Ongoing, regular fellowship events (i.e. Homecoming and Advent Fest, hayride, Christmas caroling, fellowship after worship, chili cook-off/chocolate challenge). • Concord Concert Series and reception • Dedicated and active people on boards and committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discern need of members and youth. • Reassess building access by people living with disabilities and work with Physical Plant to design corrective action as appropriate. • Create more fellowship opportunities through small groups and intergenerational events. • Review fellowship opportunities across the wide range of church activities and assess the balance of opportunities for different ages, personal schedules, and physical abilities. • Promote routine service activities (ushering, serving communion, choir, serving on a board or ministry activity, etc.) as acts of caring for our church community. • Restart and strengthen home communion. • Restart memorial receptions.

Caring for Strangers (external)

God, what is your yearning for Concord in caring for strangers? We sense that God yearns for us to be a visible expression of Christ’s love, a beacon shining light into dark places. We think Our Redeemer yearns for Concord to reignite the excitement for outreach and social justice that is Concord’s heritage, to strengthen the Concord community through worshipful work, and thus to experience the joy of selflessness and to appreciate the gift of our abundant lives.

Current Strengths and Activities	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong, ongoing mission work: Emanuel Dining Room meals, support of Seaman’s center, fleece blanket ministry, scholarship program, blessing bags etc. • Support through the Deacon’s Fund for community needs as managed by Friendship House • Volunteer work (youth group and adults) at Friendship House Clothing Bank • Joint community activities such as outdoor family movie nights, Halloween celebrations, Blessing Box (providing shelf stable food to the immediate community), diaper and clothing drives, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discern needs of local community with aim of discovering partners, new service projects, mission opportunities including adult mission trips, platforms for social and environmental issues, etc. • Design mission opportunities for people of different ages, skills, physical abilities, and work schedules • Plug Concord into mission activities initiated by other churches and organizations. • Share more personal mission experiences with the congregation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for refugee family from Afghanistan • Commitment to embracing and integrating people from the LGBTQ+ community and those of differing abilities into the full life of the church. • Focus on mission during worship by offering 'Minute for Mission' updates and information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice radical hospitality and inviting others to discipleship thus transforming 'philanthropy' into 'mission.' • Explore additional ways for Concord to communicate with the community and partner with them on projects and programs. • Expand the use of Concord's building by community groups, including updating the building and grounds use policies and fee schedules. • Invite the community to more of Concord's family activities. • Be more assertive about communicating our commitment to welcoming and affirming LGBTQ+ people and people with special needs, e.g. website, social media, and other communications. • Work to help our congregation look like our community - consider Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in everything we do. • Be intentional about selecting initiatives that are both challenging and practical in the use of human resources. • Signage in the church of the mission work of the church, and Concord's mission statement. • Improve external communications to show the outreach of Concord.
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Inviting All to Discipleship

God, what is your yearning for Concord in inviting others to discipleship? We sense that Christ yearns for us to extend the fruits of the Spirit to others through an increasing confidence in reaching out to the unchurched so that they may discover their need for God's grace and the love of Christ by experiencing it from us.

Current Strengths and Activities	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concord is known for its friendliness and welcoming nature. • We partner with Preschool on Vacation Bible School. • Church Staff (Pastor and Director of Children's and Youth Ministries) have weekly leadership roles in selected preschool program activities. • Livestream worship services reach non-members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use community interactions to foster relationships that lead to meaningful conversations. • Increase promotion, hospitality and inviting components of Concord Concert Series and Concord's events. • Engage people, listen to them, help them feel accepted, respected, connected, needed, involved, loved. • Equip members in inviting ('we have a service/activity coming up that I think might interest you'). • Formalize worship visitor follow up.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassess the details of worship and greeting to assist strangers unfamiliar with our services feel included and supported starting their very first week. • Share our Christian motivations with external partners of mission projects.
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Notes:

- Life-changing worship is about motivating people to go DO...starts from the pulpit
- Holy Indifference - If we only focus on what WE want...Do we miss what GOD wants? how does that serve others?
- Intellectually we know we WANT to be inclusive/diverse...but what are we missing? How do we serve the STRANGER in addition to the member?
- How do we become a MISSION-DRIVEN church as opposed to a MAINTENANCE-DRIVEN church?
- The church is looking to have a balance between being good financial stewards and willing to take risks for mission purposes.
- Our history is of being mission-driven, but we need to revitalize our leadership in that area.

Concord as a gazebo metaphor

Based on our reflections about Concord, we did an exercise aimed at helping us further describe who we are and aspire to be as a congregation. We did an exercise challenging us to come up with a guiding metaphor of Concord. After much discussion and exchange of ideas, we settled on the image of a gazebo.



Here are our thoughts, based on what we value. Concord is like a gazebo because:

- We seek to be open, transparent, and accessible, providing shelter and support for people of all abilities, identities, and perspectives, without judgment.

- We seek to understand and serve the needs of the community.
- We aspire to show God's love and joy through music, fellowship, fun, and flexible worship, supporting all on their spiritual journeys.

D. God's yearning and our vision for Concord

This prayerful discernment also reconfirmed our commitment to our Vision Statement which was first approved by session in 1998. Throughout the years, this statement has been reviewed and studied. We have reaffirmed it each time, including now. It states:

As Concord Presbyterian Church, we commit ourselves to be a Christ-centered people of God. By the Grace of God and energized by the Holy Spirit . . .

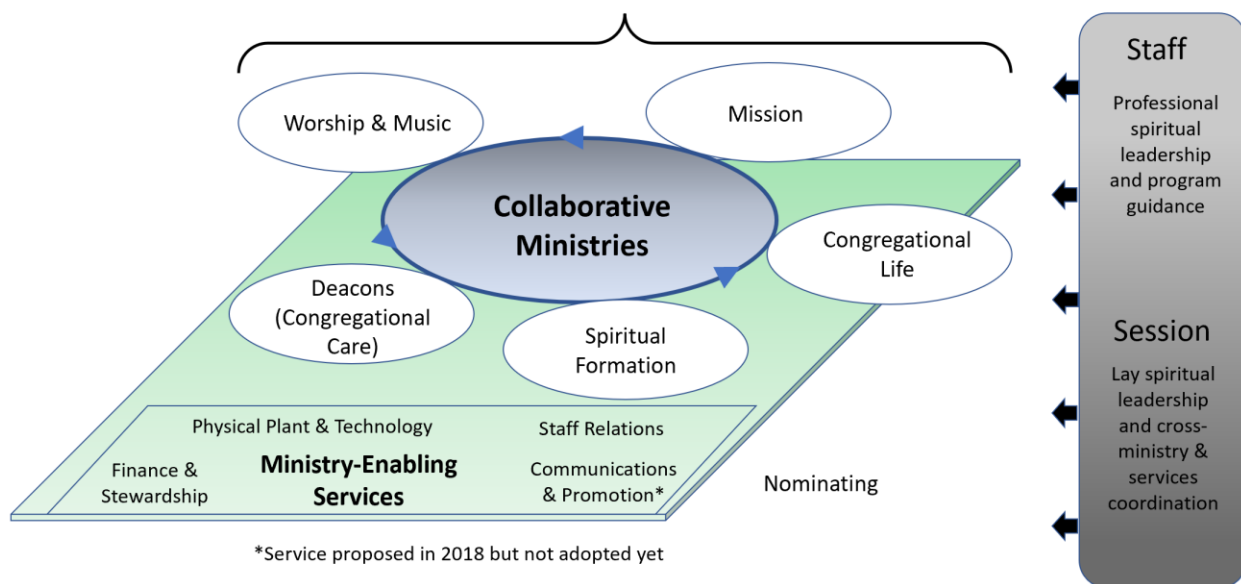
- *We Will Feed the spiritual and intellectual hunger of God's people.*
- *We Will Build a church family that welcomes, embraces, and loves all people, excluding no one from full involvement in the life of the church.*
- *We Will Serve the world around us, sharing in the concerns and struggles of its people.*
- *We Will Respond to God's goodness with celebration!*

E. Plan for moving forward with "Concord Collaborative Ministries."

With our new understanding of Concord's strengths, God's yearnings for Concord, and a list of possible actions we could take to respond to those yearnings, we considered how we could organize our efforts to be more effective. From that exercise we make six recommendations which are described below and illustrated in the following diagram. While they were adopted in 2018, they are in various states of further implementation.

Organizing for Concord Collaborative Ministries

Collaborative Ministry Characteristics: Life-Shaping Worship, Intentional Spiritual Formation, Fellowship, Care for Others, Risk-Taking Mission, Radical Hospitality, Inviting Others to Discipleship



1. Organize our efforts around “Concord Collaborative Ministries”. Since 2018 we have organized our efforts into five ministries: Worship & Music, Spiritual Formation, Deacons (Congregational Care), Congregational Life, and Mission. The concept is that each ministry will have lead responsibility for a subset of the overall Concord ministry, but planning, scheduling, and implementation of certain key initiatives will require inputs and cooperation across ministries, thus the notion of ‘Collaborative Ministries’. As one small example, consider the Advent festival. That would involve partnering of Worship (how do we intentionally coordinate this event with the seasonal worship message of Advent?), Spiritual Formation (what elements of this event create opportunities for spiritual and faith development for children and adults?), and Congregational Life (how do we use hospitality and fellowship with this event to have fun and build intergenerational relationships?). “Collaborative Ministries”, then, are a consequence of an initiative sponsored by one ministry but supported by the others in order to build in as many of the characteristics of a vibrant, fruitful church as practical into each initiative. Joint annual planning and calendaring by Session will allow each ministry to understand its part in the key events throughout the year.
2. Recognize the support role of “ministry-enabling services”. We recognize that several of our committees are not directly involved in planning and implementing Concord ministries, but instead provide essential services that enable all ministries. They include finance and stewardship, physical plant and technology, staff relations, and a new one, communications and promotion proposed in 2018 but not yet adopted. We propose that we formally differentiate the role of communications from the collaborative ministries. We envision that the Collaborative Ministries and the services will work together to define and fulfill the needs of the ministries for facilities, staff, money, communications, and technology. A committee of the congregation, nominating, is neither a ministry nor an enabling service. Rather we view it as a specialized function as defined in the Presbyterian Book of Order.
3. Continue the role of session as spiritual leadership and cross-ministry coordination. We recommend further developing and strengthening the spiritual leadership role of elders. In addition, in this design, Session becomes the vital cog in collaborative ministries, helping make the connections between partnered ministries and enabling services on initiatives and taking responsibility for the effectiveness of Concord’s overall ministry.
4. Continue the role of staff as professional spiritual leadership and program development. While we do not anticipate a fundamental change in the role of our staff members, new ways of working are required with the collaborative ministries, services, and session. We envision that as our ministries develop and strengthen with lay leadership and participation, staff will be able to devote more energy to ministry enhancements and innovations.

6. Continue support of Concord Preschool & Childcare as an outreach partnership to the community. While the Preschool daily operations are largely independent from the church ministry, it is Concord's largest and most visible outreach initiative serving about 100 families, 125 students, and approximately 35 staff. Together the Church and the Preschool share financial support of the facilities, administrative responsibilities (an elder is a member of the Preschool Board) and the preschool receives support from the church staff. In this design Mission and Congregational Life ministries have responsibilities for identifying mission and fellowship opportunities to build relationships with and support the preschool staff and families.
7. Formalize the planning and execution of communications inside and outside the church. In 2018 we envisioned a ministry-enabling service called 'communication and promotion'. While we have made a few improvements in our communications (more use of weekly newsletter, livestreaming, updates on screens in sanctuary and an electronic sign to share messages), significant opportunities remain to be pursued. We recommend a more formal approach to communications resulting in a more strategic understanding of our communication needs, staffing (amateur or professional), a communications plan and process, and better use of our website and social media to reach the community. We also intend to hire a contractor to keep the website and Facebook up to date, and to develop and implement strategies for communication beyond the congregation.

To be clear, our perception of God's yearning for us is driving our need for organizational change. Of these six organizational recommendations, we see the continued evolution toward Concord Collaborative Ministries as the key to successfully shifting our ministry priorities.

F. The pastor we seek to join this ministry

Our recent shift to Concord Collaborative Ministries and Enabling Services is still new for us and will require continued ordained and lay leadership for us to realize our potential for revitalizing the church. We seek a pastor who is excited about joining this ministry who is prepared to use worship, spiritual formation, and congregational care to inspire and equip the faithful for external mission and inviting others to Christian discipleship.

We want a pastor who genuinely strives to act out of faithfulness to Christ and love for God's people, and with whom we can build a caring relationship. Other specific pastoral gifts we seek include:

- Spiritual leader: We seek a skillful preacher and creative worship leader who is theologically sound and thoughtful while helping us engage our imaginations and relate scripture to our lives. We want to be comforted and challenged and are not looking for easy answers or dogmas. We think an articulate and expressive style is important for effective and inspirational communication.

- Pastoral care: The pastor works with the Deacons and the current Parish Associate to provide a visible presence in pastoral care through home and health facility visits and home communion for the elderly, infirm, and troubled.
- Community building: We seek a pastor who listens well, provides guidance, encourages and develops lay leadership to build on Concord strengths, including a missional vision for greater engagement with the larger community. We look for a team leader who knows when to lead and when to follow and likely to be effective bringing people together and working with Session and Staff.
- Strong Moderator of Session. Our new collaborative ministry framework requires someone who is open to this model of Session-based leadership and collaborative ministry. We expect that there will need to be changes along the way. We seek someone who is comfortable with ongoing change and can help the congregation through it.
- Other personal characteristics a mix of which would describe a strong candidate
 - Warm, approachable, empathetic, authentic—speaks from the heart
 - Good sense of humor, energetic
 - Creative, combination of new ideas and tradition, forward looking
 - Open minded, encouraging, willing to try some new things
 - Ability to relate to different groups, different age groups including children
 - Ability to lead staff through ongoing changes

III. Concord in 2023

A. Membership

In October 2023, Concord's membership was 154. While we seek to be a diverse community, we are mostly white with 3 African American, 2 Hispanic and 1 Asian American members. Over 40% of the congregation is over 70 years of age. The congregation is relatively affluent and well educated. Our latest survey of the congregation was in 2012 but the general trends remain the same. At that time the median household income was \$83,000, 38% had a bachelor's degree and 30% had a masters or doctorate.

B. Concord leadership

Church Boards and committees:

Session (9 Ruling Elders)

Concord Collaborative Ministries:

Worship & Music

Spiritual Formation

Mission & Congregational Life

Deacons (Congregational Care) (9 Deacons)

Ministry-Enabling Services

Finance and Stewardship

Physical Plant & Technology

Staff Relations

Preschool Board—Composed of a Session elder, Preschool Administrative Staff, teachers, parents and church representatives.

Staff: Concord’s staff consists of: One full-time Pastor, Minister of Music (30 hours), Director of Children and Youth Ministries and Youth Music (35 hours), Office Manager (30 hours), and a Facilities Manager (20 hours) and organist/accompanist. Housekeeping is performed by a contract cleaning service.

For the past several years Concord has contracted with a Parish Associate for pastoral care and to fill in for some Sundays or other commitments when the pastor is away.

C. Ministries

1. Worship

“Welcoming”, “warm”, “friendly”, “loving” – these words describe the essence of Concord’s Sunday worship service and the congregation itself. Concord follows a traditional order of worship. See Appendix A for sample worship bulletins. We are serious in our faith but not formal. Laughter and applause are often heard within the service; it is loving, not disrespectful. Youth are welcome at Concord, and their direct participation in the service is a priority. Children serve as acolytes, ushers, greeters, liturgists, and bring the elements to the Communion table as part of the service. They also come forward for the weekly Wondering Time (children’s sermon).

Entering the narthex before the 10:00AM service, one hears friendly conversations and laughter from those present. A musical prelude signals the beginning of the service, followed by announcements. The Pastor shares joys and concerns during the service. Scripture readings and the sermon are central parts of our worship service. Hymns, anthems, and other music complement and reinforce the scripture lessons and sermon.

In worship, music is both an experience of God’s presence and an expression of faith and praise. Concord’s music, primarily traditional in style, includes hymns, anthems, and instrumental music from a wide spectrum of musical genres, including classical, gospel, and contemporary. The music staff members are classically trained professionals who sing and play piano, organ, and percussion instruments. The music director leads a choir of twenty voices, coaches soloists and instrumentalists, and designs other musical and theatrical programs throughout the year. A children’s/youth choir occasionally participates in worship. Throughout the year, professional and local budding musicians and Concord members share their musical gifts during worship.

Worship is celebrated, appreciated, and encouraged in additional ways.

- At Christmastime, the community at large is invited to join the choir to perform selected portions of Handel’s Messiah and other seasonal music.
- Special Advent liturgy, Christmas Eve service with staged drama involving children and youth of all ages.
- Reaffirmation of our baptismal vows on Baptism of the Lord’s Sunday.

- Gospel Sunday with music from a variety of gospel genres. Youth Sunday, usually in March, planned and conducted by the children and youth of Concord.
- Ash Wednesday featuring “drive-through” imposition of ashes.
- Maundy Thursday service combines Holy Communion with a Tenebrae service.
- Palm Sunday and Easter feature special choir music and professional instrumentalists.
- High school graduation, Vacation Bible School and the Youth Mission Trip are also highlighted in worship services.
- Dance, visual arts, dramatic reading, and other multi-sensory and meditative activities are programmed into worship. Reflective programming and practices for group and personal use during the week are integral components for extending worship.
- Thematic worship, based on external resources such as Sanctified Art and Worship Design Studio, provides creative input and structure for staff and parishioners.

See Appendix B for worship attendance.

2. Spiritual Formation

Sundays: Concord is committed to education for our children and adults, although in recent years, numbers in attendance have been dwindling. JAM (Jesus and me) sessions are held during the worship hour. Children sit with their families until Wondering Time (children’s sermon) and then go to JAM. There is also a “soft-space” option in the back of the sanctuary with a large rug and quiet toys for families with small children that would like to remain in worship. Confirmation classes are held when there is a viable group.

Two adults are scheduled with every JAM session, and typically one of the volunteers is a parent. This helps to increase the participation of parents in the program. All teachers and volunteers undergo a background check and are required to take part in Concord’s Child Protection Policy to work with children.

Each year Spiritual Formation organizes a Youth Sunday in which all the classes lead the worship service and deliver the sermon.

Vacation Bible School: Held one week during the summer, it is attended by community, preschool, and Concord children. In 2023, it was held in partnership with Concord Preschool. Over 80 children, and their adult and youth leaders learned about God through drama, music, games, and art.

Youth: Concord Presbyterian Youth Group is open to youth in grades 6-12 who may, or may not, be members of Concord Presbyterian Church. The group meets a few times a month for fellowship, outreach, and service projects. This year six youth and four adults traveled to Montreat where they deepened their faith and relationships with one another while supporting the community. In past years there have also been mission trips to repair homes in areas that have been hit hard by the economy and/or natural disaster.

Throughout the year, youth build fellowship and raise money for these trips by holding fundraisers that are intergenerational and create community. Some of them include the Advent-fest, Chili and Soup Cook-Off, Chocolate Challenge, car washes and hotdog/bake sales.

The youth group also does local outreach, sometimes in collaboration with other groups including:

- Baking and delivering apple pies to members who need a visit.
- Seaman's Center: Concord Youth support a church-wide project to assemble Christmas gift boxes to donate to the Port of Wilmington for seamen who are a long way from home.
- Friendship House: youth and adults volunteer at the FH Clothing Bank to sort and select clothes. Other projects include working on the outside lawns/gardens of their houses.

Other events are purely for fellowship such as bowling, movies, lock-ins, fishing, and rock climbing. In addition, there are family events scheduled throughout the year including a hayride, and movie nights. Concord Preschool and Fairfax families are intentionally invited to attend as a way to include our community.

Adult Education: Mug & Muffin Bible Study meets Wednesday mornings: a group of 6-10 led by the pastor discusses the text for the following Sunday via Zoom. The pastor leads a similar study for Cokesbury Village (a retirement community). Occasional short term sessions are offered in person or online (e.g. Writings of Dietrich Bonhoffer and C.S. Lewis and Racism in America). A monthly Book Group meets in the home of a parishioner focusing on where faith is found in a variety of short stories and books. A women's circle meets monthly for Bible Study and fellowship.

3. Deacons (Congregational Care)

As a result of the 2018 Mission Initiative, the Deacons have adopted the scripture from Matthew 11: 28 – 30 as their charge: "Live as examples of Jesus." From the times of the New Testament and John Calvin, the office of Deacon has been that of service to those in need. Currently the Pastor Associate is the staff liaison with the Deacons.

Each Deacon is encouraged to be the "arms" of the church, in other words, to reach out to those at Concord who are ill, shut in or experiencing difficulties. This is done either by phone call, written note or personal visit. If the congregant is unable to attend worship, the deacon is encouraged to personally reaffirm that prayers are directed for them.

When possible, other issues under the charge of deacons are to help provide meals and transportation, deliver weekly flowers from worship, and keep an inventory of disposable supplies for various church functions. Deacons also obtain elements for Communion and set up in sanctuary. They are encouraged to take Communion to those requesting it who cannot attend worship. This is a way of sharing the Body of Christ with the church family.

4. Congregational Life

Concord provides opportunities for fellowship among members such as:

- **Homecoming** is a celebration at the end of summer, welcoming people back to the more “regular” church schedule of activities in early September with potluck lunch, music, games and activities.
- **Hayride at Bellevue State Park** is a big favorite with both church members and preschool families with as many as 60 adults and children participating.
- **New Members Receptions** are church-wide celebration, held after worship welcoming new members. New members are matched with Shepherds, who guide the new members into the fellowship of the church.
- **Gathering Time after Worship:** A time after worship for those attending services to enjoy each other’s company with light snacks/beverages. This time of fellowship unites and bonds the congregation and welcomes new participants.
- **Sundaes on Sunday:** A special Gathering Time after church during the summer to have build-your-own ice cream sundaes. Usually done 2 or 3 Sundays during warmer months.
- **Trunk or Treat:** A event coordinated with our Fairfax community where the Halloween children’s parade ends in Concord’s parking lot. Church members decorate their vehicle trunks and pass out candy to the community participants.
- **Advent Fest:** An annual event with lunch and Christmas crafts to welcome the season of Advent with fellowship and creativity.
- **Chocolate Challenge and Chili Cook-off:** A collaboration with the youth program in Spiritual Formation where members enter chocolate desserts or chili/soup and sell samples at \$1.00 each. The cook that sells the most samples is awarded bragging rights and the proceeds go to support the youth mission trip and other youth spiritual development activities.
- **The Concord Concert Series**, founded in 2006 by the Minister of Music, promotes larger musical endeavors which minister to the cultural and spiritual needs of the neighboring community while charging no admission fee. The Christmas program features selections from Handel’s Messiah along with more contemporary seasonal music. The success of these events is indicated not only by increasing attendance but increasing participation of individuals from other churches and the community.
- **Easter Sunday Egg Hunt:** A special Gathering Time on Easter Sunday where the younger children enjoy an Easter egg hunt and receive “treat bags”.

5. Mission

We are in the process of reestablishing our commitment to mission beyond the church as the key to returning to being a mission-driven rather than maintenance-driven church. Our intent going forward is to focus and organize our mission activities by turning more of our total energy and attention outward.

Benevolence:

Concord Presbyterian Church has a history of making mission giving a priority, through pledges, designated monetary gifts, and in-kind gifts (food, clothing, supplies). One of the designated benevolences, the Deacon's Fund, is intended to meet emergency needs of those in Wilmington area. This program is administered for Concord by Friendship House. For details on Mission giving see Appendix C. The Mission Committee is currently looking at new ways to involve members in hands-on projects and in global awareness and commitment.

Outreach:

Concord members are also active in contributing their time and talents to a variety of mission activities. A frequent part of coming to worship is bringing tangible goods to support mission activities in the area. Current examples of outreach include:

- Friendship House: A local ministry committed to making a difference in the lives of low income and homeless people. Concord members provide clothing and food and volunteers to help sort clothing at their Clothing Bank. We also provide support to Friendship House shelters for women recently released from prison.
- Emanuel Dining room: A mission to serve meals to those that need them. Concord members provide a lunch once a month that serves about 100 people.
- Youth Mission Trip: A week each year is devoted to a work camp to do construction or remodeling in a community of need providing opportunities for both Youth and their Adult leaders.
- Adult Mission Trip: Concord members have participated in Presbytery Mission trips for Hurricane Katrina relief, and to Guatemala to build stoves, but have not had a trip since 2012.
- Presbyterian Missionary: For many years we have helped to support Karla Koll, now in Costa Rica.
- Seaman's Center: Wilmington has a very busy port and we provide Christmas boxes for the Seaman when they come into the port during Dec. We are currently looking at going twice yearly to work on gardening, car washing, or providing other services they need. Members also volunteer at this welcome center.
- Blessing Bags: Youth of the church put together bags of supplies which are provided to church members to hand out whenever they run into someone in need.
- Prayer Shawls: A dedicated group of knitters keep the pastor supplied with prayer shawls to hand out to people needing extra care. Members are also encouraged to take them to friends who are hurting.
- Share the Spirit: An annual Christmas project connecting the church and preschool in providing gifts to people in need in our local community and to our Afghan refugee family.
- Blessing Box: Concord worked with a Girl Scout Troup to create a covered and enclosed box on church grounds that offers shelf stable food for those in need. Church and community members provide the food items and stock the box.

- Afghan Refugee Resettlement: Since March 1, 2022, the church has supported a refugee family from Afghanistan with housing, family items, assistance with dealing with government support services and the asylum process, English tutoring and more.

Community hospitality: In addition to benevolence giving and mission service, Concord seeks to make maximum use of our building to support community groups such as AA, neighborhood civic associations, space for a polling place for elections, continuing education programs, music rehearsal space, etc.

D. Physical Plant and Technology

Concord's buildings were constructed between 1954 and the 1960's in a typical brick colonial style. The buildings are debt free and have been well maintained. There are 3 interconnected pieces in a U shape. Unfortunately, the elevations of the levels in each building are different so that stairwells are necessary at every interconnection. There is a ramp to the sanctuary and ground level access to Fellowship Hall through a back door. All other entrances involve steps.

Sanctuary building: The sanctuary seats 300. The chancel was renovated in 2016 to provide greater flexibility. Below the sanctuary are classrooms used by the Preschool. Behind the sanctuary is a sanctuary lounge, office and storage rooms. The Narthex was renovated to add an accessible bathroom and a kitchenette. A new air conditioning system is scheduled to be installed in 2024.

Fellowship Hall building: A large Fellowship Hall includes a commercial grade kitchen. Sunday School classrooms and the art closet are housed on the second floor with Preschool offices and storage space on the first floor.

Administration Building: A small chapel also used as a choir room, a meeting room and church offices are housed in this wing.

Other features include a 50-space parking lot also used as a 'Park and Ride' lot during the week and a courtyard that contains a Memorial Garden and a lower level play area. A new electronic sign was installed this year allowing the church to share information with the community. The church is adjacent to a county park with recreational areas. In response to the pandemic air purifiers have been added to the sanctuary and chapel.

Technology: Concord has new lighting and sound amplification systems in the Sanctuary, with both wireless lapel and wired microphones that are used routinely for Worship and special services. A new video projection system for the Sanctuary is comprised of two large LED screens.

In response to the pandemic, Concord staff and lay members spent months creating a state-of-the-art livestream system for worship services. A team of member volunteers provides the three people needed each week to run the system. The service is available in real time and can be accessed at any time on YouTube. The system uses 4 cameras with two large monitors in the sanctuary and two smaller ones in the chancel.

A Wi-Fi network covers most of the facility, including the Sanctuary. Laptop computers have been provided for the staff members. All laptops and the file server are backed-up daily. Both commercial and custom-made software are utilized to facilitate the work of the staff and manage the finances of the church and preschool. About eighty percent of the congregation, including all of the Session, is connected by email. The website was renovated a few years ago. The church has a managed presence on Facebook. The weekly Concord Connects newsletter is sent by email.

E. Finances

At the end of 2022, Concord had liquid financial assets of about \$2.6M, comprised of cash and securities. About \$1.2M of that is in an endowment fund. The church is debt-free. The 2023 operating budget is about \$750,000, of which about \$134,000 is for benevolence. Staff expenses are just under \$371,000. A copy of the 2023 budget (Appendix C) is attached. The number of pledging units, 49 in 2023, has been steadily declining as the congregation ages and dies faster than new members are received. However, this decline has been partially offset by robust giving from remaining members, with an average of over \$5,793 per pledging unit in 2023. Pledges for 2023 were \$283,864. In the face of declining pledge income, budgets have been sustained by taking income from investments and by sharing facilities expenses with the Preschool. Though growth in the investment income is not likely to keep up with declining pledges indefinitely, financial modeling suggests that Concord's finances will be stable for the next 15-20 years.

Over the years, the congregation has been generous in supporting capital campaigns for major projects. The latest of these was in 2011 called Brightening Concord's Future with a goal of providing funds to upgrade and modernize the facilities. \$400,000 was pledged over a three-year period with all income received by June 2014. Ten percent of the funds raised were designated for mission work. Capital improvements included chancel renovations for greater flexibility, a kitchenette and bathroom in the narthex, window replacement, new carpet in the 2nd floor hallway of the Fellowship Hall building, a new floor in Fellowship Hall, and a new freezer and refrigerator. A structural problem with the roof, largely covered by insurance, led to a refreshment of the sanctuary, including new floor, painting, asbestos removal, new lighting and new roof. The boiler was replaced, a new floor and cabinets were installed in the kitchen, and viewing windows were added to the pre-school classroom doors.

Recently a new electronic sign was installed at the corner of Foulk and Murphy Roads at a cost of \$60,000. Over the next year, air conditioning units, installed 30 years ago, for both the Sanctuary/Preschool and the Fellowship Hall will be replaced at a cost of \$50,000. An appeal to the congregation has already received donations of \$7500 to address this cost; the remainder will be drawn from the Endowment Fund.

F. Preschool

Concord Preschool, a non-profit organization, has been an outreach of the Church since 1956. The school has both a Preschool and Childcare Administrator and Director with a staff of 30-35 people supporting an enrollment of 155-180. A summer camp program for school age children was established for parents needing childcare year-round.

Though the preschool operates independently, it is governed by the preschool board, responsible to session, comprised of an elder, church members, staff and parents. It has the full support of Concord's staff. It is important for the Pastor to be very visible to the children (and parents) who are attending the Preschool. Some examples of this are:

- Pastor attends Open House/Parent Orientation
- Pastor co-leads weekly chapel with the Director of Children & Youth Ministry
- Wednesday, prior to Thanksgiving, for Grandparents' Musical Program
- Christmas Chapel
- Spring Musical
- Kindergarten graduation

The church and preschool intentionally seek additional opportunities to collaborate in mission and fellowship.

IV. Concord and the community in which we live

A. History of Concord

Concord was founded in 1952 as a new church development of New Castle Presbytery and started in an empty shoe repair store, a few blocks from the current location of the church. Sunday School was held in members' homes. The church's growth paralleled that of the surrounding Brandywine Hundred suburbs. By the late 1960's membership reached 1500 members. Membership has been on a decline since then, (see Appendix D). Some of that decline can be attributed to the founding of other Protestant churches including 2 PCUSA churches in the surrounding suburbs.

The founding pastor served as architect for the church building. Worship moved from the shoe store in 1954 with the construction of the chapel. Construction of all of the church buildings was completed in the mid 1960's. The Preschool was started in 1956.

Concord has had 7 installed pastors:

Henry Jacobs—1952 to Dec. 31, 1961

Gilbert Van Bever—Sept. 23, 1962 to Dec. 31, 1976

(Andrew) Thomas Murphy—Oct. 23, 1977 to July 20, 1986

Donald Purkey—Sept. 18, 1988 to April 30, 1991

Neta Pringle—Nov. 22, 1992 to Sept. 15, 2002

Francis (Fritz) Ackerman—Nov. 28, 2004 to Sept. 30, 2012

Lynn Horan—Oct. 27, 2014 to July 10, 2017

Steve Clark -

Concord also had Assistant or Associate Pastors from 1957 until 2002.

B. Demographics of the community

Concord is located in Brandywine Hundred, which is a largely residential area dominated by developments of single-family homes. Demographic data is provided by Mission Insite based on a 2.5-mile radius around the church. There are 55,012 people in this area; the population is projected to remain stable over the next 5-10 years. Population of the area is 63.7% white, 28.0% African-American, 3.3% Hispanic, 2.7% Asian, and 2.3% Pacific Islander/American Indian/Other. These percentages are expected to remain stable for the next five years. Twenty percent of the population is age 17 and younger; 20% is age 18-34; 21% is age 35-54; 15% is age 55-64; and 24% is age 65 and older. Of the 22,549 total households in the area, 66.3% are family households, 29.0% are one-person households, and 4.7% are non-family households. Fifty-seven percent of adults in the population have college or advanced degrees and the average household income is \$123,081 with only 4.9% below the poverty level.

Changes in religious involvement: In the ten years prior to 2021, of the population in the area:

- 61% *remained active* in a religious congregation
- 3% *began active involvement* in a religious congregation
- 10% *ceased active involvement* in a religious congregation
- 26.% *remained uninvolved* in a religious congregation

C. Links to community information

New Castle Presbytery

<http://www.ncpresbytery.org/>

Brandywine School District

<http://www.brandywineschools.org/site/default.aspx?PageID=1>

Information on Brandywine Hundred area/North Wilmington

<http://www.city-data.com/city/Brandywine-Delaware.html>

The city of Wilmington

<http://www.city-data.com/city/Wilmington-Delaware.html>

New Castle County Relocation and Visitor Bureau Information

<http://www.visitwilmingtonde.com/visitors-and-residents/relocation/>

Friendship House - major local mission/ministry partner

<http://www.friendship-house.org/>

Concord Preschool & Childcare

<http://www.concordpreschoolandchildcare.com/>

V. Appendices

A. Sample Worship Bulletins

- [April 30, 2023](#)
- [May 7, 2023](#)
- [September 24, 2023](#)

Worship attendance

[Note: Number in parentheses reflects online views]

The average attendance at Sunday morning worship from October 2, 2022, through September 24, 2023 was 47 (50). The highest attendance occurred on Christmas Eve 112 (62), Easter Sunday 96 (74), and our 70th Anniversary on October 23, 2022 88 (64). Lowest attendance occurred Christmas Day 20 (46) and New Years' Day 25 (44).

Worship attendance has traditionally been lower in the summer months, when the choir does not sing in the service. Generally, this period starts the second Sunday in June and ends on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend.

Attendance at seasonal and special services during the period (October 2022 through September 2023) was as follows:

Messiah Concert– 200 (347)

Christmas Eve (one service) – 112 (62)

Ash Wednesday – 17 (23) Also approximately 30 received drive-through ashes.

Maundy Thursday – 21 (56)

Palm Sunday – 61 (68)

Easter Sunday – 96 (74)

B. Budget and financial assets

- [Treasurer's Report – Oct 2023](#)
- [Balance Sheet – Oct 2023](#)

C. Membership history

Year	Members Added	Members Deleted	Membership
1952	73	0	73
1953	45	6	112
1954	61	7	166
1955	124	21	269
1956	177	8	438
1957	94	13	519
1958	145	21	643
1959	162	38	767
1960	128	46	849
1961	84	44	889
1962	130	65	954
1963	219	106	1067
1964	175	65	1177
1965	165	59	1283
1966	218	83	1418
1967	153	77	1494
1968	186	148	1532
1969	124	143	1513
1970	113	144	1482
1971	100	117	1465
1972	109	90	1484
1973	101	92	1493
1974	100	118	1475
1975	66	108	1433
1976	46	122	1357
1977	56	84	1329
1978	47	79	1297
1979	50	110	1237
1980	49	140	1146
1981	45	205	986
1982	34	60	960
1983	33	61	932
1984	37	83	886
1985	20	79	827
1986	26	75	778
1987	16	55	739
1988	29	63	705

Year	Members Added	Members Deleted	Membership
1989	20	31	694
1990	30	47	677
1991	11	57	631
1992	6	70	567
1993	6	31	542
1994	56	40	558
1995	16	47	527
1996	17	21	523
1997	8	22	509
1998	16	46	479
1999	18	19	478
2000	9	34	453
2001	10	106	357
2002	16	15	358
2003	2	24	336
2004	10	14	332
2005	15	29	318
2006	7	26	299
2007	11	3	307
2008	15	30	292
2009	7	14	285
2010	0	9	276
2011	0	13	263
2012	17	16	264
2013	7	8	263
2014	10	36	237
2015	1	12	226
2016	6	7	225
2017	3	11	217
2018	6	48*	175
2019	3	6	172
2020		5	167
2021	2	6	163
2022		4	159
Oct 2023		5	154

*36 losses in 2018 due to roll cleaning