

Background Paper for The Dotte Initiative (a New Church Development of Heartland Presbytery)

History

There have been two major incarnations of ministry at 3500 Dodson, Kansas City, Kansas. In 1949 the Presbytery of Topeka Highlands purchased 3.5 acres for a church and nearby lot for a manse. This led to the chartering of the Maple Hill Presbyterian Church. In 1981 Maple Hill merged with Ruby Avenue Congregational Church to form the United Church of the Good Shepherd. In late 2011 the session informed the Committee on Ministry of Heartland Presbytery that they no longer wished to conduct mission and ministry at that location, although they were maintaining a membership of 60 and worship attendance in the 40's. Heartland Presbytery appointed an administrative commission with the attached charge that has been working and reporting to the presbytery for nearly two years to discern the next Presbyterian mission and ministry for that location. Weekly worship was maintained by the AC for a Presbyterian remnant from January 2012 through Easter of 2013. Special services have been held there for the active scouting programs (Cub Pack and Girl and Boy Scout troops), some fellowship activities, the hosting of traveling mission groups and other minimal elements of Christian mission and ministry continue.

Neighborhood Assessment and Awareness

The Administrative Commission has used a number of tools and conversations to get to know the immediate neighborhood of the church as well as the larger potential service area. This work began with conversations with the departing session and the UCC members who moved their memberships to the Rosedale United Church of Christ. There were significant conversations with remnant Presbyterians, most of whom do not live in the neighborhood and the Girl and Boy Scout leaders, who do live in the neighborhood. There were limited conversations with neighborhood schools and the Boy Scout District officials.

The Administrative Commission used three sources for demographic understanding and assessment:

- Business Decision, a subscription resource provided by the Kansas City Public Library, which concentrates on the analysis of U.S. Census data and additional marketing information used by businesses
- Presbyterian Church (USA) Neighborhood Demographics, provided by the General Assembly Office of Research Services, which is based on US Census data and concentrates on information relevant to churches and anticipated ministry preferences of a population

- The Impressions Report, prepared by the General Assembly Office of Church Growth and Evangelism, these were secured for us and interpretative assistance provided by Dave Moore, New Church Development Coach for the PC(USA).

These tools indicate the feasibility of a Presbyterian mission and ministry based at this site. Additional door to door assessment will be in order when there is professional staff and a volunteer corps in place to address specific neighborhood needs and desires. Such assessment at this time would be premature and counterproductive, suggesting to the neighborhood that a ministry was in place to meet identified needs, when it is not. The AC is charged to “Explore fully the potential for the development of a new congregation at the site...” The AC continues in that work, presenting the presbytery with a plan for such development.

Funding

New Church Development in the 21st Century is being done with new models and characteristics. These are exemplified in the PC(USA) initiatives for *1001 New Worshiping Communities*. Although still successful in some places, the traditional NCD model of reaching new people through new buildings in growing areas, build it and they will come, has proven too expensive and too high risk for many presbyteries. Many of the current models involve faithful, creative, entrepreneurial leadership using available resources to reach new people.

The building at 3500 Dodson is currently maintained by the presbytery. It is an attractive and well equipped facility, a ready and available resource for a new worshiping community. As a new worshiping community gains size and strength, the AC would anticipate it assuming the expense of its own worship, meeting and administrative space. For the immediate future, however, the presbytery’s expense for the care and maintenance of the property will increase only marginally with its increased use.

The largest increased expense will be for appropriate professional leadership. For this the AC has applied for and received an Innovation Fund Grant from the Synod of Mid-America. This grant is for approximately the first \$20,000 of salary and pension expenses. Several years ago the Presbytery’s Personnel Committee and Council determined the size of the presbytery staff did not require the middle management level of an office manager. The Personnel Committee and Council discerned that if additional staffing was needed it would be in the area of new church development or redevelopment. The position was maintained, but not filled. The AC has consulted with the Personnel Committee and Council to determine that this position fits the work intended by maintaining the position in the salary pool. The Synod grant is renewable up to three years, making funds secure for at least that period. The General Assembly offers a variety of grants, which will be accessible depending upon the nature of the new worshiping community that develops. Access to these grants would make funding secure for up to five years.

Engaging Other Area Congregations

The AC in exercising its charge has had some direct engagement with other area congregations and additional indirect engagement. An elder from the Grandview Park congregation is a member of the AC. One pastor in the area was invited to serve, but declined. Two members of the AC spent several years serving on an Administrative Commission for First Presbyterian Church of Kansas City and became familiar with the area. Two members of the AC have served as COM liaisons to area congregations. The AC met with the session of the Argentine United Presbyterian Church at their invitation and reviewed a proposal regarding the Dodson property. The executive presbyter, who is staff to the AC, has met with the session of the Bethel Presbyterian Church and had conversation with their pastor.

This direct and indirect engagement has helped the AC understand the specific Presbyterian ministries already underway in Wyandotte County. The current congregations in Wyandotte County are successful, because their mission is intensely local and representational of the opportunities and gifts in their immediate communities and membership.

The AC would anticipate that as the NCD takes form; its leadership will continue to build relationships with other churches in the area. The exact nature of these relationships cannot be defined until the new worshipping community begins to emerge and finds its own voice for mission and ministry. The AC would anticipate that neighboring congregations and pastors, as well as others from across the presbytery will be true colleagues in ministry and partners in mission for the NCD pastor and emerging leadership at 3500 Dodson.

Risks, Benefits and Capacity

All new endeavors have an element of risk. In some places where new church development was attempted no new church emerges. In some places we have had good success. The AC believes there is sufficient potential for the Dodson property to proceed. We know that as risky as new church development is, the greater risk is to close the door to any attempt. It is certain that no new church emerges, where no new church development is attempted.

In general the success of one ministry does not diminish other ministries. The Synod's Innovation Fund, for example, is not available to established ministries or programs. The grants are intended only for new innovative endeavors. The money from the presbytery salary pool has been designated by the Council for some time for a presbytery staff person working in the area of new church development or redevelopment. Other GA grants that will be sought are also funds specifically for new worshipping communities, new church developments or earmarked toward the particular ministries that may emerge. Finally, new endeavors generally attract new dollars. The pie from which monies come is not without capacity to grow. Sessions and individuals with a heart for new church development will be invited to contribute new dollars for the success of the program and new worshipers will bring their new tithes and offerings.

Current Charge to the Administrative Commission (by unanimous action of Heartland Presbytery 11/12/2011)

A. The Administrative Commission shall be charged to:

1. Consult with the congregation regarding their desire for the continuation of the mission and ministry of the United Church of the Good Shepherd.
2. Explore fully the possibility of redevelopment of United Church of the Good Shepherd in its entirety and with respect to the Presbyterian Church (USA) alone.
3. Explore fully the potential for the development of a new congregation at the site of the former Maple Hill Presbyterian Church, in accord with G-3.0303a to “develop strategy for the mission of the church in its district”.
4. Only after consideration of the appropriateness of the location of a new church development, explore fully the appropriateness of the location for the relocation of any existing congregation of Heartland Presbytery per G-2.0303b to “control the location of new congregations and of congregations desiring to move as well as to divide, dismiss, or dissolve congregations in consultation with their members.”
5. Bring to Heartland Presbytery through its Committee on Ministry recommendations for action in these areas of the presbytery’s responsibilities with respect to ministry in the area of the current United Church of the Good Shepherd.
6. Have original jurisdiction and serve as the session in all matters for any ministry that may continue or emerge at the 3500 Dodson, Kansas City, Kansas, location, including but not limited to the session’s usual role in ministerial leadership and use of property.

Current AC membership: RE Bev Barr, RE Melissa Carle, RE Bob Grant, TE Kathleen Knehans (moderator); TE George McCall (clerk), RE Martha Richards, TE James Gale (former member currently Synod’s liaison); TE Charles Spencer (staff)