



March 30, 2023

To: North Creek Presbyterian Church Session
From: NCPC Mission Study Steering Team

Subject: **North Creek Presbyterian Church Mission Study**

In June 2022, the Session of NCPC formed the Mission Study Steering Team to conduct a mission study of North Creek Presbyterian Church. This action was in response to the direction of the Commission on Ministry (COM) of the Northwest Coast Presbytery. In 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, North Creek went through a difficult time of pastoral transition that had been a few years in the making. In response, the COM approved the installation of Rev. Kurt Helmcke (previously the Associate Pastor) as pastor for a designated term of three years from the date of April 1, 2021. A Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) was formed, Rev. Helmcke was interviewed, a call was extended, and the pastor was elected by the congregation. The COM also directed the session to conduct a congregational mission study and provide for the election of a new Pastor Nominating Committee (by March 31, 2023) to conduct an open search for the pastor position. The currently installed pastor is approved to be a candidate for this PNC process.

Independent of presbytery requirements, it is the conviction of the Mission Study Steering Team that NCPC is due for a renewed study of the mission and vision of the congregation, the most recent one having been completed more than a decade ago (2011-12). NCPC's current situation is not defined solely by the dysfunctional aspects of a difficult pastoral transition. The previous installed pastor began his seven years of service nearly ten years ago. A seven-year term of pastoral service followed by a three-year time of transition led by a pastor trained in transitional ministry is not outside the norm for contemporary Presbyterian congregations. Since the most recent mission study, much has changed in both the congregation and community. These significant changes, along with the pressing need to strategize a recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, serve to make a congregational mission study highly relevant and beneficial.

The Mission Study Steering Team reviewed NCPC's history of mission statements and strategic visioning practices. The decision was made to conduct the study in a manner consistent with the process of Appreciative Inquiry, as outlined by Mark Lau Branson in his book *Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* (Alban 2004, 2016). In order to hear the congregation's stories of what they value about NCPC and what their hopes are for the congregation's future, the decision was made to conduct appreciative inquiry interviews in a large gathering format utilizing break-out groups led by a team of facilitators. Resulting interview notes were reviewed to find themes that emerged as significant shared convictions of the congregation. A report of the results follows this cover letter.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dave Berkompas, Karen Butler, Rev. Kurt Helmcke

With thanks to the following coopted members (in addition to Steering Team members) –

Focus Group Interview Facilitators: Callie Carmean, Vic & Robin Chaloupka, Dan Clark, Steve Giboney, Cindy Little, Kathy Hulet, Dave Phippen, Jill Thomas, LeAnn Venn. **Interview Data Processing and Theme Discernment:** Linda Berkompas, Vic Chaloupka, Kathy Hulet, Cindy Little, LeAnn Venn.



Executive Summary

North Creek Presbyterian Church is in the midst of transition, with the challenges and uncertainty that come with it. Yet transition is also a time of envisioning new expressions of faithful ministry and mission. The Mission Study Steering Committee offers this report to the people of the North Creek congregation in gratitude based on God's past faithfulness and in hopefulness born of faith in God's promised future. This study summarizes who we are, where we hope to journey together in ministry and mission, and how God may encourage us to grow in this time of transition.

Our appreciative inquiry revealed that

1. **We are a biblically grounded, Christ-centered congregation**, concerned about spiritual growth and committed discipleship.
2. **We value mission and reaching out in service to others**, concerned about caring for those in need both inside and outside the church.
3. **We appreciate fellowship and aspire to be a welcoming community of faith**, concerned about the connections of encouragement we make with one another.
4. **We consider ourselves a multi-generational community**, concerned about maintaining a vital ministry among families with children while our core membership ages through the retirement years.

The following statements reflect the corporate self-understanding of the NCPC congregation:
(Derived from the responses to each appreciative inquiry interview question)

- When we feel the most engaged, motivated, and aware of God's presence, **we are participating in worship, serving together, and relating in fellowship.** (Q1)
- The essential practices we value most are **biblical teaching/learning, fellowship with one another, worshipping God together, and serving like Jesus.** (Q2)
- Our three defining characteristics are that **Jesus Christ is central, we are friendly & caring, and we are mission & service oriented.** (Q3)
- Our three strongest hopes for the future are (Q4):
 - 1) **To strengthen an ongoing outreach to children, youth, and parents in our community** that restores a significant presence of younger generations in our church membership.
 - 2) **To extend our outreach to the community in meaningful and relevant ways** that make an impact for the gospel and result in increased visibility & public awareness.
 - 3) **To maintain the fellowship connections and discipleship opportunities** that North Creek has become known for.



Background & Process

Background:

In June of 2020, the congregation's Lead Pastor resigned. Associate Pastor Kurt Helmcke was given leadership of worship, preaching, and operations management, while Rev. Heather James was hired on a six-month contract as half-time transitional pastor to moderate the session and lead the congregation through the transitional issues of an unanticipated pastoral departure. Rev. James and the session conducted a survey of the congregation through Holy Cow Consulting that incorporated a congregational discussion forum (January 2021, online via Zoom) and a follow-up survey to show areas of growth and continuing concern. The full survey results were shared in an open congregational forum in July 2021, and continue to inform session leadership. Following the direction of the Commission on Ministry of the Northwest Coast Presbytery, a Mission Study Steering Team was appointed by the session in June 2022.

Process:

The Mission Study Steering Team designed a three-part process to collect data and feedback from the members and friends of North Creek Presbyterian Church.

Stage 1 – Congregational Scripture Study

During September and October 2022, our sermon series prepared us to participate in the congregation-wide mission study. We studied the early church in the New Testament book of Acts and explored the five foundational practices that were essential for their life together. These five essentials provide a solid foundation for the church in every age, and we were challenged to carry them with us on our journey into the future God opens for us as a congregation. The list of five essential, common activities of the church empowered by the Holy Spirit expressed in Acts 2:42-47 are Proclamation (kerygma), Service (diakonia), Teaching (didache), Community (koinonia), and Worship (leiturgia). The series was titled *"Here We Go! Packing the Essentials for Faithful Witness."* During the eight-week series, participants were provided with "travel journals" that invited them to reflect upon each of the five essentials by appreciating the past (how each has been experienced at NCPC) and anticipating the future (what we hope God might provide in each area in the future). These reflections prepared participants to share in our major congregation-wide envisioning event on Saturday, October 22.

Stage 2 – Appreciative Inquiry Interviews (Envisioning Workshop #1)

We conducted our appreciative inquiry interviews in one congregational event that we called an envisioning workshop. On Saturday, October 22, from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM, more than 80 people gathered to share in the interviews. The full group met in the sanctuary for worship, orientation, gratitude exercise, and a time for silent reflection on personal answers to interview questions. Participants were randomly assigned to groups of eight for sharing their responses to the following interview questions:

1. *Reflecting on your entire experience at our church, describe a time when you felt the most engaged, motivated, and aware of God's presence.*
2. *When it comes to the essential practices of the church we've been studying, what are two things you are grateful for in your experience of life together in the body of Christ at NCPC?*



3. *What do you think is the most important characteristic or value of NCPC? (What makes our church special?)*
4. *If you brought to God two hopes or wishes for the future of our church, what would they be?*

After sharing, each group started the process of identifying common themes that emerged. The group facilitator took notes on poster paper, and individual written responses were collected. These notes were processed over a series of weeks by the Mission Study Steering Team and selected group facilitators. This report is the result of their identification of common themes among interview responses.

Stage 3 – Contextual Considerations & Provocative Proposals (Envisioning Workshop #2)

On January 21, 2023, nearly 70 people gathered at the church for the next phase of the envisioning process. This included:

- A *Lectio Divina* scripture meditation on select words of Jesus from the gospels.
- A presentation on the current age and ethnicity profile of our surrounding community.
- A report on statistical trends in congregational participation and financial resources.
- A group exercise of envisioning an outreach program to families with children in the surrounding community staffed by primarily older adult congregation members.

Appreciative Inquiry Interview Results

Envisioning Workshop #1 – October 22, 2022

Overarching Themes Revealed by Appreciative Inquiry

Four themes emerged from the entire exercise of appreciative inquiry. They represent widely-held convictions among the members and friends of North Creek Presbyterian Church about the identity and purpose of the congregation. Present and future ministry plans should attend to and emphasize these themes.

1. **We are a biblically grounded, Christ-centered congregation.**
This is the most widely-affirmed aspect of our corporate identity. We want to grow spiritually into a life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ through solid biblical teaching, God-focused worship, and committed discipleship.
2. **We value mission & reaching out in service to others.**
We generously reach out to serve those with needs in our congregation and community. We want to continue to care for the world around us, and to have a vision for discipleship that calls people to servanthood in the manner of Jesus Christ.
3. **We appreciate fellowship and aspire to be a welcoming community of faith.**
At our best we're a caring and compassionate congregation, encouraging and supporting one another while reaching out to include new people. Both small groups and occasional social events nurture a sense of belonging.



4. **We consider ourselves a multi-generational community.**

Maintaining this aspect of our identity leads us to highly value a vibrant ministry to families and young people (children & youth). We are concerned that our core membership is aging into the retirement years while young family participation declines.

How We Determined This

The first line of reflection was the workshop participants themselves, asked to conclude their group discussion with the following question: *“Looking at the group discussion notes on poster paper, what themes do you see? What might God be trying to tell us through these responses?”* Following the event, group facilitators were asked to identify the themes they noticed emerging as they led discussion. The Mission Study Team collated both sets of responses and distilled them into the four themes listed above.

Common Themes from the Four Interview Questions

Question #1: Reflecting on your entire experience of the church, describe a time when you felt the most engaged, motivated, and aware of God’s presence. (Yellow index card)

Statement of Common Themes from Interview Results:

When we feel the most engaged, motivated, and aware of God’s presence, we are:

Participating in Worship

Singing praises, observing communion, participating intergenerationally, sharing personal testimonies.

Serving Together

In Mission through mission trips and service projects; in Ministry as officers (elders & deacons) and working with children’s ministry.

Relating in Fellowship

Getting to know each other at retreats & in meals shared in homes, and in-depth over time through ongoing small groups.

Question #2: When it comes to the essential practices of the church, what are two things you are grateful for in your experience of life together in the body of Christ at NCPC? (Blue index card)

Statement of Common Themes from Interview Results:

The essential practices we value most are:

Biblical teaching & learning

Highly valued in pastoral leadership and preaching, as well as in discipleship classes.

Fellowship with one another

Welcoming and open in the sense of being non-judgmental, valuing intergenerational relationships and small group community

Worshipping God together

Meaningful music, prayers, opportunities for healing, all ages present.

Serving like Jesus



Caring for the community, showing love to our neighbors and those in need.

Question #3: What do you think is the most important characteristic or value of NCPC? (What makes our church special? (Green index card)

Statement of Common Themes from Interview Results:

Our three defining characteristics are:

Jesus Christ is Central

The gospel of Jesus Christ is of primary importance. We appreciate having a life-giving relationship with Jesus and invite others to follow Jesus. Our focus on Christ is why we value bible-based preaching and teaching.

Friendly & Caring

We long to be a connected, welcoming, and encouraging body of believers. We don't always succeed in this, but we want to be ever-growing into this kind of community.

Mission & Service Oriented

We emphasize the importance of service & generous giving in the life of discipleship. Our local and global mission efforts define us as a congregation that follows Jesus into the world to meet needs.

Question #4: If you brought to God two hopes or wishes for the future of our church, what would they be? (Pink index card)

Statement of Common Themes from Interview Results:

Our three strongest hopes for the future are:

- 1. To strengthen an ongoing outreach to children, youth, and parents in our community that restores a significant presence of younger generations in our church membership.**

Included in this hope are: concern for families, desire to be a truly multi-generational church, capable leadership for programs for children & youth, desire for more young families, desire for young people & families to return to participation following COVID-19.

- 2. To strengthen our outreach to the community in meaningful and relevant ways that make an impact for the gospel and results in increased visibility & public awareness.**

Included in this hope are: support for service through missions, sharing the gospel with people in our community, bringing people to Christ, make impact in our community, elevating our community profile.

- 3. To maintain the fellowship connections and discipleship opportunities (growth & service) that North Creek has become known for.**

Included in this hope are: desire to maintain existing & provide new opportunities for fellowship & service, more variety in learning opportunities for different levels of faith



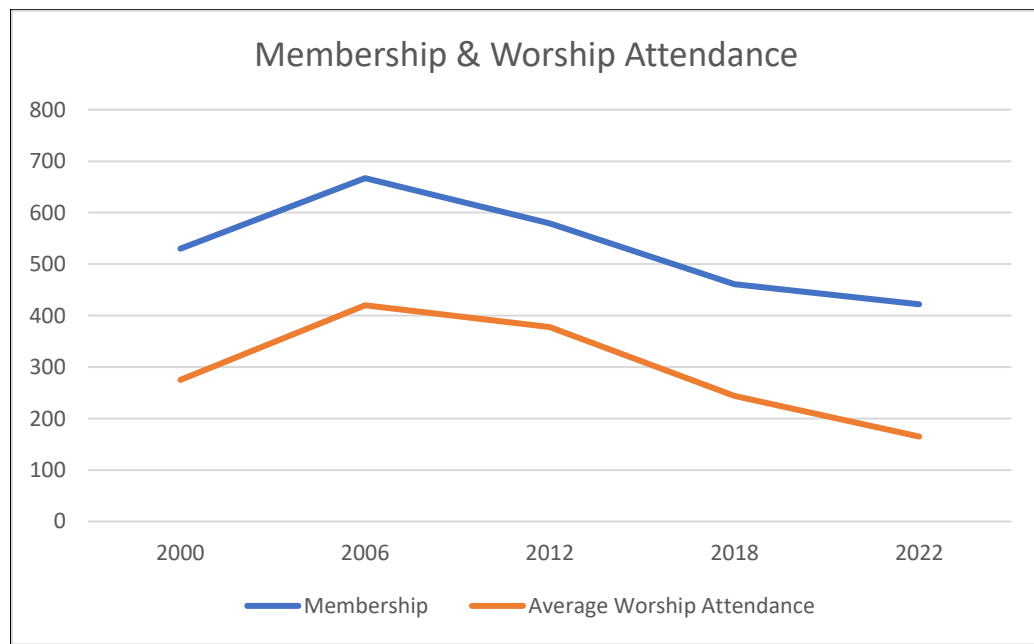
maturity, keeping remote worshippers connected to the congregation, being open to new ideas that help us to change and grow.

Statistical Trends

NCPC is a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA), a denomination that has declined in membership by 62% during the span of its 40-year history (from 3 million in 1983 to 1 million in 2023). In the opposite direction of this trend, NCPC grew in members during the first 25 years of its existence. Membership peaked in 2006, held reasonably steady through 2012, then began to steadily decline. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated losses; some of those losses have been recovered as attendance slowly increases on the other side of the pandemic. However, the congregation faces the general challenge of membership loss. While the church may find faithful ministry at smaller size, one concern is the increasing financial burden of stewarding a facility designed for a much larger congregation.

Membership & Worship Attendance

Membership & worship attendance increased until 2006 and plateaued until 2012, when a steady decline began.

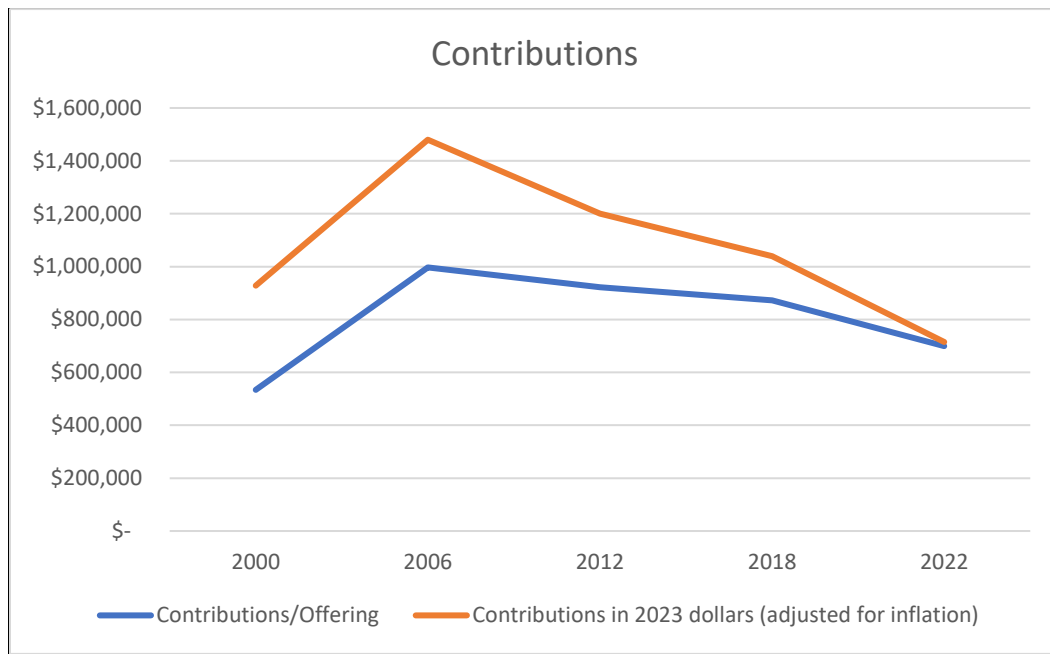


The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted attendance in 2020-2021.



Annual Giving: Real Numbers & Adjusted for Inflation

Financial resources increased until 2006 and plateaued until 2018, when transitional issues and then COVID-19 contributed to an acceleration in the rate of decline. Especially noteworthy is the comparison of the 2022 budget to previous budget levels adjusted for inflation. For example, in 2006 NCPC had **twice** the purchasing power of the 2022 budget. It would be unwise for the congregation to expect levels of staffing and services to be maintained given this significant decline in financial resources relative to inflation.



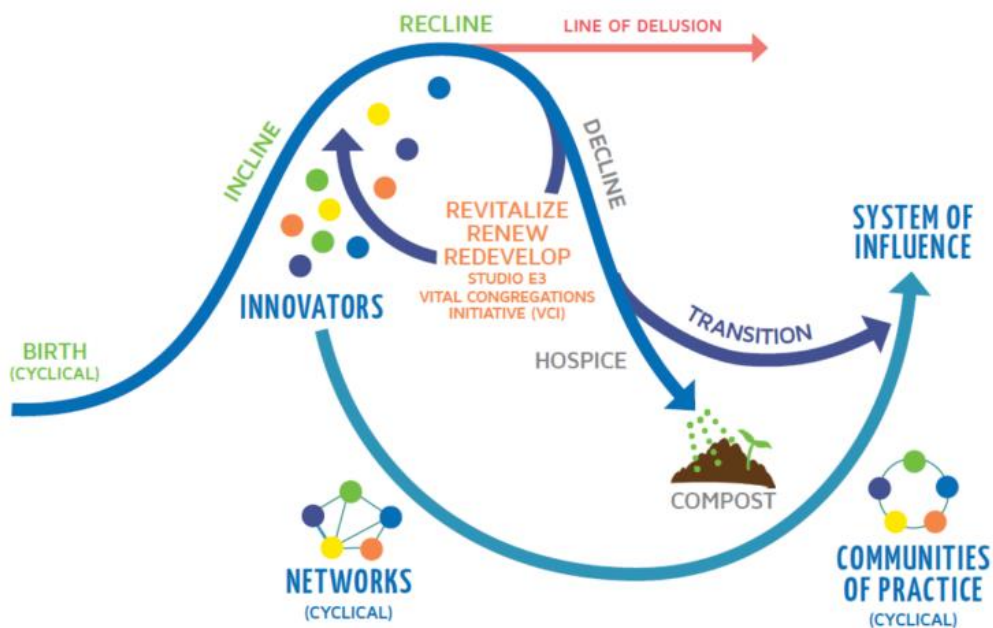
The COVID-19 pandemic impacted congregational giving in 2020-2021.



Interpreting the Statistics

INCLINE, RECLINE, DECLINE. North Creek has matured into the full experience of the congregational life cycle as described in the *Two-Loops* diagram (below). Charter members recall the birth of the congregation, and many current members recall the years of rapid numeric growth. Membership remained steady for several years and was no cause for alarm. After 2012, the decline in participation began to accelerate and continued through the recent pandemic. The church is in a time of transition where recovery of COVID-19 era losses is a reasonable goal but returning to the glory days of 2006 is not. The congregation will need to innovate and adapt to changing conditions to transition into sustainable ministry.

TWO LOOP LIFE CYCLE FOR CONGREGATIONS



Revision of Chris Corrigan's "A Theory of Change: Living and Dying in the Church of the 21st Century." Unpublished slide deck from EDGE seminar. Provided by Rev. Erik Samuelson.

Obstacles to Growth

Plans for growing the congregation's membership will face obstacles, including these macro-level realities:

- In 2020, the United States population of those active in religious membership dropped below 50% for the first time in history.
- Barna Research concluded that 1 in 3 church participants dropped out completely during COVID-19.
- Pew Research concluded that COVID-19 impacted medium-size churches (like NCPC) more than small-size churches (small tight-knit communities) or large-size churches (possessing significant financial & technological resources).



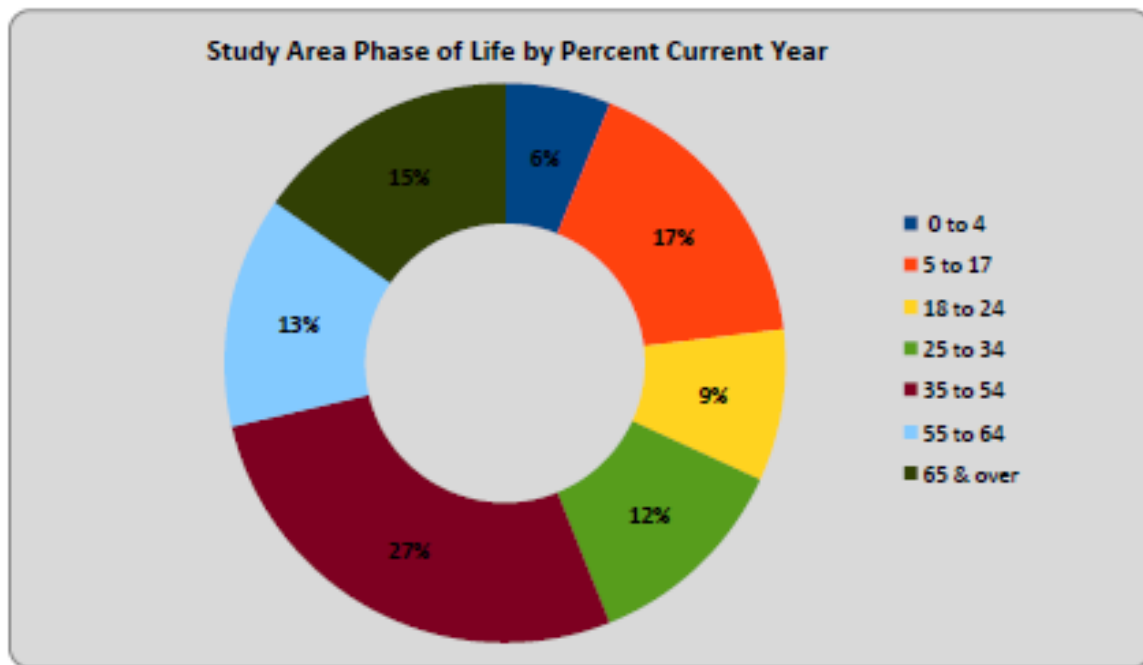
Community Context

Age of Membership

NCPC began as a new church development primarily of the Baby Boomer generation. In the 1980s and 90s, this generation was in the families-with-children life stage. Currently, this generation is fully situated in the retirement years. The aging of the membership shows in the increasing prevalence of memorial services, people dealing with significant medical concerns or end-of-life issues, and members who live alone after the death of a spouse. At the same time, Children's Sunday school and Youth Ministry attendance has steadily declined. One of the more noticeable scenes demonstrating these two trends is that of a sanctuary full of mostly retired worshipers observing a Children's Message where few or no children are present. This is in stark contrast to the "glory days" of 40-50 children on the chancel steps.

Community Phase of Life Profile

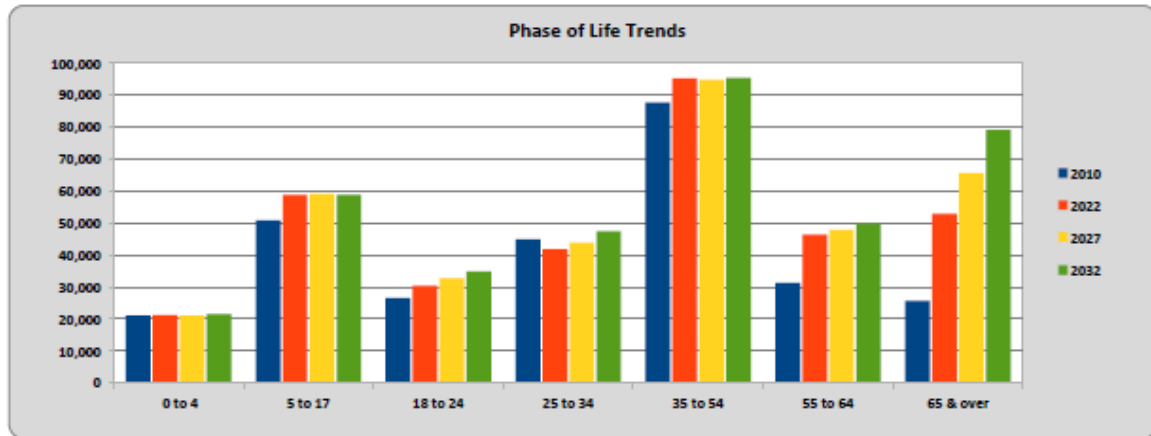
Our community features a healthy mix of generations, including the age ranges associated with families with children & youth along with those who are in their retirement years. Hopes for renewed multi-generational vitality in the congregation are reasonable considering the presence of younger adults and children living in the surrounding community.





Phase of Life Growth

Our community not only has significant populations in each phase of life, but also features past and future growth for some of them.

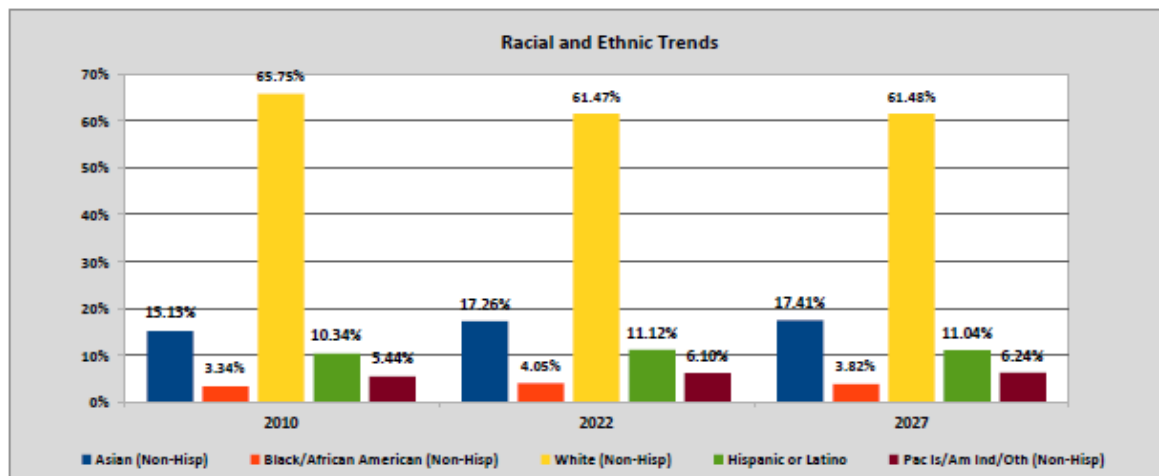


Cultural Diversity of Membership.

The younger adults and children who do attend our church are much more culturally diverse than our older, established membership. This reflects a major aspect of change in the community surrounding the congregation. While NCPC is a primarily white congregation, the community is more diverse.

Community Cultural Diversity Profile

We are an increasingly diverse community in terms of racial and ethnic trends. Our community has seen a decline in the white population along with increases in all other major categories: Asian (including Asian Indian), Black/African-American, Hispanic or Latino, and Pacific Islander/American Indian/Other. Furthermore, we are an increasingly bilingual community, with only 67% of households speaking only English in their homes.





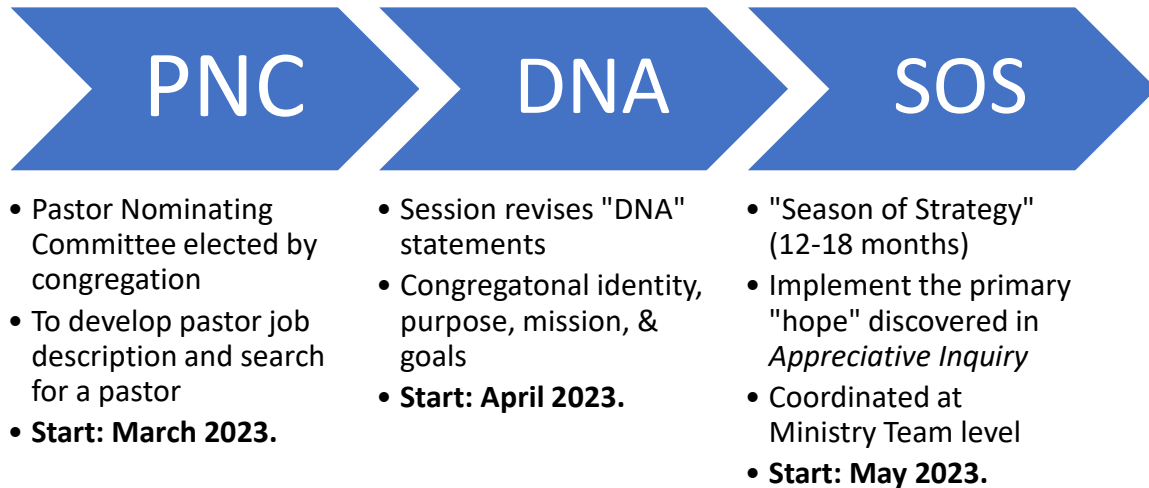
Congregational Assets in a Ministry Context that is Younger and More Diverse:

While overall we are an older congregation with many people in retirement, this might be seen as an asset to reaching out to families with children in the community. Being preoccupied with the demands of full-time employment is not a major obstacle for most of us. Retired members have much wisdom and a significant amount of time to offer. Program initiatives should be designed to match the needs of senior citizens, who will likely be the primary volunteers. One example is to develop programming that takes place during the day so that it doesn't eliminate older members who prefer not to drive in nighttime dark conditions.

North Creek is already beginning to look different in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. Our nursery, children, and youth programs all feature significant diversity, sometimes with those who are non-white being in the majority. Our full-time church staff features the same number of non-white employees as white employees. North Creek has a number of legacy partnerships that reflect an openness to multi-cultural community, including our long-standing sister church relationship with Greater Trinity Church. We look at all these factors as divine blessings, signs that God is already preparing us to reach out to a changing community.

Implementation – Next Steps

This mission study recommends the following three-part implementation schedule:



Season of Strategy (SOS) Purpose Statement

*Lean into outreach to **families in our community,**
In a way that allows us to **serve together,**
Demonstrating our **faith in Jesus, friendliness/caring, & passion for mission,**
As we **faithfully teach the Bible, experience fellowship, worship together, and serve like Jesus.***

Appendix

1. Notes on Qualitative Data Management from Interview Event (10/22/2022):

- Participant note cards (written interview question responses) were collected and are available for review in the church office.
- Group facilitator notes on poster paper were photographed and assembled into an 11-page document that was made available to session elders and data reviewers. This document is available upon request from the church office. The original poster papers were destroyed.

2. The 33-page “Full-Insite Report” on community demographics is available on the church website. Here is a sample of the title page:

About the FullInsite Report

The FullInsite report is designed to provide an extensive demographic portrait of a user defined geographic area. The FullInsite integrates the full array of 2010 Census Data, the latest American Community Survey data and the new Experian Mosaic cluster system!

The FullInsite report is divided into three sections, each providing a different approach to the data. Careful consideration is given to readability and graphic treatment. The hope is that the information it presents will be more accessible to the reader.

Three Sections

- The StoryView Report presents 9 demographic indicators of your study area.
- The TrendView provides four graphs that reflect the more significant demographic trends that will shape the study area in the 5 to 10 year future.
- The ThemeView Report provides a wealth of demographic detail across six themes: People, Households, Families, Diversity, Housing and Work.

THE STUDY AREA

