

Mission Retreat Report—Summary

On April 26, 2008, at the invitation of Pastor Doug Brouwer, thirty individuals from First Presbyterian met for a full day retreat at the Inn at St. John's in Plymouth to discuss thoughtfully and prayerfully the mission program at First Presbyterian Church Ann Arbor.

To paraphrase the stated goal of the retreat in the letter of invitation to each attendee:

The retreat is intended 1) to provide the basis for articulating a clear definition of why we, as Christians and as members of First Presbyterian Church Ann Arbor, engage in mission. and 2) to define steps necessary to ensure that our church—and its members—can clearly express and carry out the mission program of the church.

A two-step approach was used to reach the stated goal—an analysis of why mission? and, assuming that the answer requires action, the development of a plan of how best to accomplish mission in today's global society? Recognizing that the process required the retreat attendees to evaluate the church's existing mission programs against a solid theological background and to gain an understanding of current thinking in the area of mission in today's global society, the retreat planners invited Marian McClure, a Presbyterian pastor and former director of worldwide global ministries for PCUSA, to guide the retreat discussions and to assist us in reaching our goals.

Prior to the retreat, all attendees were asked to read two articles: “The Story of the Missional Church” by Stephen A. Hayner and “One Man's Journey into Mission” by Alan Roxburgh. Members of the mission committee were also asked by Marian to participate in a series of exercises designed to begin the process of developing a job description for the mission committee and Session as it relates to mission. In addition, Marian provided pre-retreat materials including General Assembly materials entitled “Gathering in God's Future” and “Presbyterians Do Mission in Partnership” and Chapter III of the Book of Order. Included within those exercises was a prioritization by the committee of session responsibilities as they related to mission. (Chapter 10 of the Book of Order.)

In the morning's sessions, Marian guided the attendees through a succession of questions and exercises designed to assist in the discussion of why mission? Each discussion was preceded by opening remarks by Marian—or as she referred to them, a “theological/biblical tee-ing up” of the topic. Her comments were followed by small group discussions of questions she presented. A full report of the retreat including Marian's comments as well as those of the small groups is available by contacting Sue Jeffers.

The afternoon's sessions were intended to provide the basis for how best to accomplish mission in today's global society? Again, Marian lead the attendees through discussions of the structure, focus and activities that we as First Presbyterians need to carry out in order to address the theological basis for mission as discussed in the morning. Again, the comments of the group are provided in greater detail below.

Three prevailing themes surfaced throughout the day:

1. the need to break down the existence of “silo” mission ministries within the church
2. the need to recognize the theological bases of mission in evangelism and service (justice)
3. and the need to work towards a missional church and the expectations that God has for his people in the world.

The retreat concluded with the consensus to compose a small group of attendees to develop an action plan which was based upon the theological underpinnings for mission as discussed in the morning and which considered the thoughts expressed in the afternoon's sessions on how best to carry out that rationale in the mission program at First Pres. As Marian expressed it—an action plan designed to empower people to express why mission is necessary and to add coherence to the church's mission program.

An ad hoc mission committee has been meeting throughout the summer and will present the action plan to all mission retreat attendees in early fall. —*Sue A. Jeffers, Co-Chair, Mission*