

Our Story

The past,
present &
future of
Montclair
Presbyterian
Church



Our welcome mug

**WELCOME TO THE 2012 MISSION STUDY REPORT OF
MONTCLAIR PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (MPC).** For the past twelve months, we have poked and nudged, asked and wondered, debated and distilled — all in the hope of discerning who we are and why we exist. After an exhaustive church-wide survey, seven well-attended congregational gatherings, 15 in-depth interviews, dozens of pulse-taking Q & A's and hundreds of hours of research and analysis, what we've discovered is both enlightening and confirming. For years, MPC has seen itself — and been seen by others — as different. And indeed we are. We celebrate action, champion creativity and make it safe to believe in God with either an exclamation point or a question mark. As one member put it, we aren't your grandmother's church. (Which isn't precisely true given how many of us are grandmothers, but we got the idea.) So who are we, exactly, and how and where do we fit in? As a church? As Presbyterians? As a community of socially progressive, spiritually active, cheerfully contrary Christians? We invite you to find out.



OUR MISSION

We are an imperfect Christian community
here to stir up a joyful ruckus
with hearts and arms wide open.

We gather to ask big life questions,
learn to live more intentionally in the world
and support others as best as we are able.

Everything we tote along
on our spiritual journey
— wonderment, curiosity, questions,
acceptance, stubbornness, advocacy,
independence, humor and hope —
gives life to our belief
that God's love embraces everyone.

WE
EXPERIENCE
THE HOLY
THROUGH
OUR
COMMUNITY.
JAZZ,
STORYTELLING
& KNOCK-OUT
BBQ, TOO.

STATISTICS DON'T LIE. BUT THEY DO HAVE A KNACK FOR TELLING THE OCCASIONAL HALF-TRUTH. According to our 2011 survey, MPC is a well-educated, relatively affluent, theologically diverse and not-as-young-as-we-used-to-be community. All of which is true in a one-dimensional sort of way. Yet if there is something MPC is not, it's one-dimensional. We are 80-year-old women holding picket signs on street corners and teenagers stacking cans in food pantries. We are seekers and survivors, memoirists and musicians, justice-fighters, authority-buckers and lifelong learners. Walk through our doors on a Sunday and you'll find yourself surrounded by polite, albeit opinionated, optimists who delight in asking big questions and practicing abundant, inclusive love. (No matter whom we happen to irk in the process.)

Looking inward The paths we took to better understand who we are.

THE SURVEY

In November 2011, the MPC Mission Study team emailed, postal mailed or hand-delivered an in-depth survey to more than 300 MPC members and Friends of the Family (what we call non-members). We had a response rate of nearly 50% — impressive by any measure. The survey itself required time (at least one hour), introspection (no problem) and a strong desire to help determine the journey ahead. Along with looking at MPC as a whole, we examined subgroups including Friends of the Family (FOF) and people 54 years old or younger (U54s).

CONGREGATIONAL GATHERINGS

Beginning monthly in September 2011, we conducted seven congregational gatherings to explore big questions including “Who are We?”, “Who is our Neighbor?” and “Why Do We Exist?”. Attendance was reliably high, often hovering around 80 – 90 people. Across tables strewn with notepads, markers and granola bar crumbs, we searched for understanding. We laughed, reminisced, shared and healed, trusting in one another and in the process.

ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEWS

Individual Mission Study Team members conducted 15 one-hour-long interviews with congregants who represent the swath of MPCers: male, female, straight, gay, long-timers, “newbies”, young parents, teenagers, retirees, theologians.

COMMITTEE QUESTIONNAIRES

MPC boasts a flotilla of committees, sub-committees and one-member armies. Questionnaires were sent to all requesting input on what they view as their greatest challenges and opportunities.

Number of MPCers:

300+

80% are members & 20% are Friends of the Family including nearly

20

ordained ministers & seminary trained congregants as well as a handful of faithful atheists
(350+ members & FOF in 2002)

Female:

69%

(62% in 2004)

Age 55 or Older:

76%

28% of us are over 75
(18% in 2004)

White:

95%

Unchanged since 1994
(Oakland: 26% White, 28% African American, 25% Latino, 17% Asian)

Attended for 10+ Years:

80%

51% have attended 20+ years
(46% in 2004)

Snapshot: MPC at a Glance



MPCers at Family Camp in Lake Tahoe — a 35-year tradition.

Well Educated:

95%

are college graduates &
70% have advanced degrees or
done post-graduate work

Live Within 15 Minutes Driving Distance:

70%

(75% in 2004)

OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

37,157

population
(36,941 in 2000)

8,988

number of families
(8,913 in 2000)

47%

age 45+
(14% age 65+)

Think about it
We embrace uncertainty
as an expression of faith.

55%

believe that it is
ESSENTIAL that the
new pastor believe in God.

*Respondents were given the choice
among essential, very important
(25%), not very important or not at
all important (20%).*

69%

see the Bible as the record of many
different peoples' response to God
and because of this, people and
churches today must interpret the
Bible's basic moral and religious
teachings for themselves.

79%

agree that there are other ways to
salvation than through
belief in Jesus

62%

*do not believe that Jesus'
resurrection was an actual event.*

20%
believe that it was.

Spiritual vs. Religious Don't ask us what we believe, but what we question.

MANY MPCERS PREFER TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS SPIRITUAL RATHER THAN RELIGIOUS. The reasons why vary, from associating religion with close-minded fundamentalism to feeling judged and rejected (or feeling that others have been) by institutionalized religion such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) and its policies of exclusion in regard to ordination and same-sex marriage. And while most MPCers don't want to be perceived as too "religious", some don't want to be seen as too "Christian".

WE HEAR GOD'S LANGUAGE OF LOVE, JUSTICE, ACCEPTANCE & PEACE IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

Much as our survey questions may have left room for varying interpretations, responses indicated a lack of belonging to any one religious tradition. For example, 37% of the respondents thought that the sermon does not need to be biblically based or illustrated, 67% said they would prefer a spiritual to a biblical emphasis and 75% said that a sermon based on a clear, unambiguous Christian authority was either not important or downright distracting.

The focus on spirituality does entail some strengths worth noting. A core value held by many at MPC is intellectual stimulation and the importance of questioning —questioning authorities (big business, financial institutions, institutionalized religion) and questioning the experience, conclusions and attitudes of others (particularly in terms of social and political assumptions). Along with inquisitiveness, MPCers place a

high value on empirical methods and are inclined to trust good science rather than allow dogmatic positions to rule the conscience. For those who so highly value intellectual honesty, a step back from any association with a surrendered intellect is important.

"We are satisfied to be Presbyterians so long as we are left to be the kind of Presbyterians we want to be."

Lew Mudge, the late MPC scholar & theologian

SPIRITUALITY = ACTION At MPC the idea that a deeper spirituality could motivate responsible social activism and thus an outward engagement is supported by the very name of one of the congregation's committees, the "Spiritual Activists," whose central goal is "to change our culture of materialism and violence to one of generosity, compassion and cooperation." One of the ways they seek this change is to sponsor monthly Taize prayer services.

Our congregation has taken a stance against injustices we have known in our own denomination. We have voiced a controversial "yes" in our affirmation of the God-given equality of all people. And we have voiced a controversial and politically risky "no" to our denomination's rules barring the ordination of gay and lesbian people and to the prohibition on same-sex marriage.

Is it possible that so much of our identity has congealed around a narrowly focused moral outrage (however justified) that we now fixate more on our differences from other congregations and the denomination as a whole to the detriment of the

underlying unity that has been the basis of our religious tradition?

We may be doing too little to nourish a commitment (however argumentative that may need to be) to solidarity with the Presbyterian Church. Yet it is important to note that our denomination has changed due to the reforming commitments of Montclair and other “More

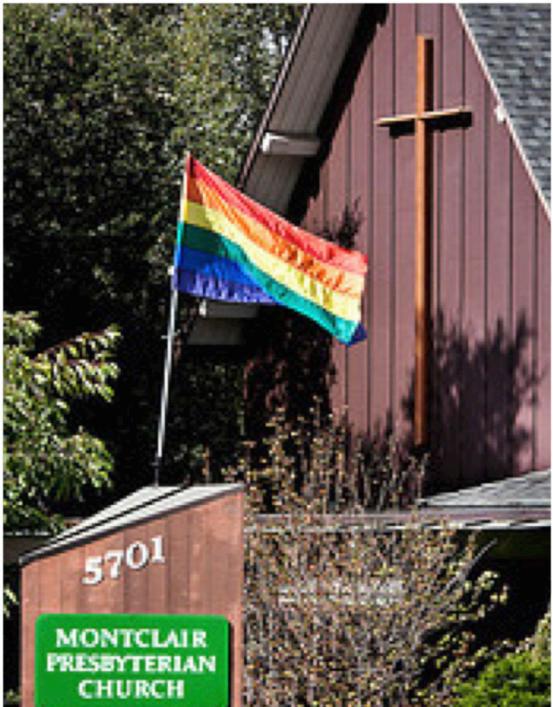
Light” congregations and individuals acting in concert. Increasingly, many in our congregation feel disconnected from the denomination and from church as an institution. Some have voiced a need for more education regarding what it means to be Presbyterian. One way our struggle with the institutional church has been expressed is in our difficulty coming to agreement about whether or not it is because we are a church that we have been able to achieve the community that claims such solid devotion.

We have a somewhat tenuous hold on the foundation of our existence as a church and as a faith-based community that needs to be strengthened if we care about the future survival of the church. There is a possible linkage to be noted here: the emphasis placed on the value of community, the notion mentioned in the context of one of our congregational gatherings that “we experience the holy through our

relationships”, and the emphasis on spirituality over that of religion. Perhaps no finer theological statement could be made than that we experience the holy through our relationships.

Spirituality, for many, was described as a deep, personal and visceral connection with the transcendent — not the superficial, airy, and detached kind of spirituality that is the product of a lack of groundedness, but a more profound experience and feeling than knowledge of a religion or attachment to dogma could possibly be.

THE BIG QUESTION The question that arises from all this is whether affirmation of the spiritual and rejection of religion adequately encompasses who we are and who we need to be. Or whether we should seek in a deliberate way to better understand the traditions, history, symbols and stories of our past to help us know the foundations of the community we experience today — and to help us express our faith in a new age.



The rainbow flag proclaims our acceptance & inclusiveness

**“Love people!
It irks those in power.”**

Anonymous

FAITH TRIO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Ecumenical and interfaith understanding and involvement have been longtime interests of MPC. Shortly after 9/11, MPC became part of a “Faith Trio” with the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California and the Jewish community from Kehilla Synagogue and we have met regularly since then. Our discussions have sometimes been difficult. There is common concern for basic injustices and unanimity regarding the evil of terrorism, but issues of religious motivations, culpability for injustice, cultural differences, and remedies are more difficult topics. Sometimes it's easier to speak superficially and socially than to dig into the religious dimensions of the world's problems. In the context of interfaith dialogue, there is less potential for offense for some to speak of their spirituality, than to speak of their religion -- and in the case of those who would like to completely divorce themselves from the objectionable forms of their religion, the easiest approach may be to voice a preemptive rejection of it. In such a situation we might ask what religious perspective we have to contribute to interfaith dialogue, and how we can honestly discuss our deeply held faith with people of other traditions. We are hungry for such significant connections with others.

WHERE WE
ARE TODAY
MAKES SENSE
WHEN YOU
CONSIDER
THE TWISTS
& TURNS
WE TOOK TO
GET HERE.



Our children & teachers, 1927

PERHAPS HARD TO IMAGINE NOW, BUT MPC BEGAN LIFE AS CENTRIST PRESBYTERIAN WITH TRADITIONAL WORSHIP AND HIERARCHAL GOVERNANCE. We came into being in 1926 as a satellite Sunday School of First Presbyterian, Oakland, and were organized as a congregation in 1930. By the early 60s, we reached 670 members, with an astonishing 554 children and youth. In 1964, our pastor, John Merrill, opposed California's Proposition 14, an attempt to overthrow the Rumford Fair Housing Act. His position — resolute and vocal — caused dissension within the congregation. That, combined with the general social unrest of the late 60s, contributed to MPC's slowing, stopping, then declining growth. By 1968, membership was 450 and average attendance on Sundays was 125. Then came Duke.

EVERYTHING WAS POSSIBLE Duke Robinson was called as pastor to MPC in 1968. In keeping with the times, the members who stayed — and the many who came — felt exhilarated by possibility and new energy. Membership stabilized around 300 with a sizable number of Friends of the Family. Participation was high and boisterous. We began to think of ourselves as a “Church Family” and became deliberately non-traditional in theology, style, spirit and language. Some called us the “church for church dropouts.” We took pride in “doing church differently.”

Worship became Celebration, a “festive drama, our joyous response to Christ’s presence and life’s gifts,”

which is language we still use today. We threw out choir and clergy robes, along with liturgy like the Doxology and established creeds. We rarely prayed the

Lord’s Prayer. The range of musical offerings widened: Dixieland Band, folk, gospel, popular and show tunes in addition to our sacred music repertoire. During this period the intellect was valued over spiritual experience.

LOOKING TO THE THIRD MILLENIUM

In anticipation of Duke’s retirement, MPC developed

a Mission Study in 1994, which observed that MPC looked forward to the Third Millennium from a position of



Rev. Duke Robinson at 60s peace march

strength. It also identified four Growing Edges of ministry, which required new thought and energy. In 1998, when called as Head of Staff, Pastor Karen Stokes regarded these edges as central to her call to serve us: Spiritual Development, Christian Education, especially for children, Caring and Community and Social Mission.

BRINGING GOD INTO THE CONVERSATION

With the short-term leadership of Interim Pastor Karl Shadley, and then Pastor Karen Stokes, we engaged in new practices to help us nurture and deepen our experience of God and to balance nourishing the human spirit with our already well-established emphasis on activism and activity. We introduced a printed Order of Worship in our Sunday bulletin. Gathering Chimes called us to go inward and prepare ourselves for Celebration. We instituted monthly communion and time for meditation and quiet reflection. We had more focus on scriptures and Bible-illustrated sermons.

Karen was masterful at preaching intellectually engaging sermons that also touched the heart. Children participated more fully in Celebration. We began to describe ourselves as a “faith community.” Members expressed interest in learning more about the basic beliefs, values and traditions of the Christian faith, and how they are relevant to issues of everyday life and work. We sought support from one another on living as progressive Christians in today’s secular world. But in church, as in life, controversy happens. Ours came in 2006.



Rev. Karen Stokes

Go out into the world in peace.
Have courage.
Hold on to what is good.
Return no one evil for evil.
Strengthen the fainthearted,
support the weak
and help the suffering.
Honor all people.
Love and serve God,
rejoicing in the power of
the Holy Spirit.

Karen brought this charge to our attention and we have embraced it ever since.

STAFFING CHANGES In the summer of 2006, MPC initiated several staffing changes in an attempt to find both budgetary and structural balance. Most controversial was the elimination of the Associate in Drama position.

As early as 2002, the Finance Committee raised concerns about how to continue to fund the Drama program and other staff positions. Over the years the drama program had changed and had become less active.

The idea behind the move in 2006 was that the Drama Committee should transition to being a committee of equal standing with other committees — meaning, it would no longer have a designated specialist staff member of its own. Many at MPC viewed the change unfavorably. They saw it as detrimental to a long-standing program and a hurtful thing to do to a beloved staff member who had been part of the church family even before she became a staff person 27 years before.

SANCTUARY RENOVATION In 2001, an MPC task force was formed to evaluate and envision how our buildings might better enhance our ministry and identity as a congregation. Two things precipitated the study: a desire for more church school space and a need to conduct an in-depth seismic evaluation (we sit directly on the Hayward fault line). A Building Renovations Committee was formed, as well as a Capital Funds Committee.

In the summer of 2006, the congregation voted to move ahead with a full sanctuary renovation and seismic retrofit. The vote was 2/3rds in favor and 1/3rd opposed.



Enjoying Celebration in our new, light-filled, seismically safe sanctuary, 2009.

Reasons for opposition were varied — process, aesthetics, choices — and the decision to move ahead was controversial. For the opponents themselves and for those who were either witness to the conflict or who sought ways to bridge the differences, this was an extraordinarily painful period.

Despite the dissension over the decision, MPC conducted an extremely successful capital fund drive, raising over \$2 million, which exceeded all expectations. The beginning of the campaign preceded the economic downturn, but even during the Great Recession and up to today, generous contributions have continued to come in.

The funds were spent on the sanctuary earthquake retrofit, renovation and ADA compliance issues, as well as on additional projects in the Education Building, church office, Family Room and Thornhill Room. Funds were raised with the understanding that they would benefit not only us, but would also be given to worthy organizations selected for external giving grants. A total of \$150,000 has been designated as grants over a five-year period.

Construction began in the fall of 2006 and we moved back into our new worship space in August of 2007.

RECONCILIATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

Session created a Reconciliation Committee in the spring of 2007 to address unresolved feelings and issues that arose from the staff changes and sanctuary renovation decision from the previous year.

A survey conducted by the committee in

- 2008 invited people to engage in a healing process by meeting with one person, with or without a mediator; by participating in a small or large group meeting with a facilitator/mediator; and/or joining a

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Matthew 7:12

committee that worked on structural/process changes. While many people did not feel the need to engage in the process, a number of others did, including some who eventually left the church.

The Health and Reconciliation Team (HART) was established in the first quarter of 2009 to encourage anyone still disaffected to participate in mediated conversations around his/her concerns. HART remains in place to address concerns of individuals which may arise and provide conflict mediation.

LESSONS LEARNED

The controversies and subsequent reconciliation work taught us to:

- Discuss differences in healthy ways
- Agree that disagreements need not separate us or make it impossible to come together

- Choose to interact with one another in healthy ways
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect
- Be accountable for words and actions
- Focus on solutions, not complaints
- Engage in a creative constructive program to find out what people need, what would help them move forward, and ask for their help
- Communicate and dialogue with the congregation

Heeding the need for communication, there have been numerous opportunities for dialogue and conversation with the congregation over the past few years about matters of importance to our community life. Town Hall meetings were facilitated by the Finance and Personnel Committees in 2009 –10 that focused on budget and staffing issues. New policies were developed about the availability of staff, respectful of the needs of both the congregation and the needs of staff and clergy. Also adopted were emergency contact procedures for clergy and staff. The congregational gatherings of the current Mission Study allowed for in-depth dialogue and information sharing.

TRANSITIONING TO A NEW PASTOR

The beginning of a transition to a new pastor really started in the fall of 2008, when Karen's husband, the Rev. Chandler Stokes, accepted a call to serve a church in Grand Rapids, MI. Karen told us she would remain with us to finish work she wanted to do — most notably, completing fundraising for the capital campaign and "living into the new worship space, enjoying the fruit of all the effort." Karen left us to join Chandler in August of 2010. Leonard Nielson, an MPC elder who had served as volunteer project manager for the sanctuary renovation, provided a key managerial/head of staff function during Karen's sabbatical in 2009 and again during the period between Karen's departure and the hiring of our



Rev. Dr. Beth Buckingham-Brown

Interim Pastor. We celebrated Leonard's ordination to the ministry in the fall of 2010, an event held in our sanctuary.

CALLING BETH

In October 2010, we called the Rev. Dr. Beth Buckingham Brown to be our interim pastor. During this time of transition, Beth continues our tradition of meaningful Celebration. She models prayer for children and adults alike. She challenges us to look at who we are as individuals and as a church community, pushes us to examine our structures and processes, and encourages us to interact more deeply. A good and open listener, Beth is a voice for clarity, perspective and compassion.

Looking Ahead Now that
we know where we've been,
let's see where we can go:



Celebration What we feel we do best

The good news is that we really like Sunday service, which we call Celebration. The better news is that Celebration has changed and evolved over time, and the congregation is open to new ways of sharing worship. In Celebration, we want the whole person — heart, soul and mind — engaged in the experience of the radical hospitality of God. According to our survey, Celebration is considered by MPCers to be “what we do best.” The survey cites the pastor, Celebration, filling a spiritual need and the music program as key elements in “What attracts people to MPC – and keeps us here.”

- Celebration is the one time when we all gather to connect with one another, nurture our friendships, begin to create new relationships, and participate together in a time of celebration, reflection and fellowship. We appreciate strong, inspiring, challenging preaching that is sensitive to the diverse range of spiritual beliefs held by the congregation.
- Each Sunday provides “surprise elements.” Guest musicians, dramatizations, presentations from the youth group or a guest speaker, chanting, new songs — nothing is boring or routine. The congregation is highly participatory and is up for and responsive to whatever is happening.

ATTENDANCE

51%

2 – 3 times a month &
25% attend weekly

WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT CELEBRATION

Music

99%

Very or generally satisfied with the
choir, anthems and instrumentals

Provides a meaningful experience of God & the Christian Tradition

89%

Very or generally satisfied

Food for Thought

- Someone said at a congregational gathering, “It is safe now to be a Christian in this church.” The words “faith community” are increasingly being used to describe us. For a long time MPC has treasured its ability to “do church” differently. What does all this mean for us and how we celebrate in 2012 – and in the years to come?
- Many are hungry for and appreciative of the increased contemplative and meditative time in our Celebration and our monthly evening Taize services.
- In Celebration, we pray Prayers of the People, a time when the pastor asks us to offer any joys or concerns. While some value the community connection and compassion that come from these prayers, others think prayer is “magical thinking” and are uncomfortable.
- We have a long and eclectic tradition of exemplary music-making, honoring all kinds of music. To encourage inter-generational singing, we now have a Family Choir for anyone who wants to show up early and practice on designated Sunday mornings. Our music staff works with our children who gift us with music several times a year. Yes, we appreciate our music program. Yet some would have us throw out the hymnal and toss out the organ. Something to think about.
- Beginning to integrate children and youth more regularly into Celebration has helped connect our multi-generational community. We should continue to find inventive ways to bring us all together.

Social Activism

From global to local, we work for justice

MPC has a strong legacy of social activism. Forty years ago, we provided physical sanctuary for a conscientious objector-sailor, were involved in civil rights- and anti-war-demonstrations and sponsored an Amnesty International prisoner. These days, you'll find us registering voters, circulating petitions, delivering dozens of weekly food bags

HOW ACTIVE ARE WE?

88%

of MPCers are actively involved in social justice or advocacy groups, organizations & committees outside of MPC. 39% are involved in three or more.

to Oakland school children and participating in the Oakland Community Organizations as well as the Presbyterian-sponsored Joining Hands Against Hunger (Bolivia).

On gay rights, we are a defiant entity within the Presbyterian Church. We first declared

ourselves a More Light congregation in 1988. Social activism was one of the strongest areas of the church for many years and has largely been responsible for attracting such a diverse membership theologically.

But times have changed and our activism is changing along with it. Social issues are different now than they were 40 years ago and the people with the time and energy to dedicate to social activism has changed as well. While global issues still race our hearts, we are also profoundly aware of needs right outside our door, from underfunded public schools to elderly residents struggling with access to food and transportation.

*God has told you,
O mortal, what is good;
and what does God
require of you but to do
justice, and to love
kindness, and to walk
humbly with your God?*

Micah 6:8



MPCers at a Million Moms March

Food for Thought

- Many of our older members lived through and participated in some of the greatest activist periods of the 20th century. How can the experience and wisdom of our older generations inform the activism of the younger generations?
- We need to look at the activism issues that are pertinent now and find inventive opportunities to engage our community across the generations.
- Many of our younger members live in two-income households, leaving less time and energy for activism. Because schools now require a great deal more from parents, both financially and in volunteer hours, MPC might want to find ways to engage with our neighborhood schools in ways that benefit the schools and support the parents.
- MPC's Global Vision Statement — an effort to frame our social justice passions and leanings — was approved by Session in 2009. Despite many efforts, it is still not a well-known treatise within MPC. We might want to promote the Global Vision Statement as a means to motivate our membership to social action or re-evaluate the statement altogether to make it more accessible and relevant to our members and friends.

Outreach Sharing our love & energy with our neighbors

MPC is a place where we can grow in balance of heart and mind – we want intellectual **AND** emotional engagement. Our beauty is in our diversity and we intentionally welcome and make room for a variety of theologies that have been formed and theologies that are in process. We have become a safe haven for those who have fled from negative church experiences. We are discovering our Treasure and our Light.

After decades of not being like the churches who proselytize, we are waking up to our call to do outreach so that those who “need” a church like ours will know we are here and ready to receive them with open arms. We just completed four weeks of outreach at the Montclair Farmer’s Market on Sunday mornings and we are now excited about future opportunities to share who we are.

The other side of outreach lies in finding the places where we can give to the outside community – to help those in need. **We want to be actively involved.** Our survey showed that 2/3 are satisfied with and/or want more opportunities to engage in giving and service to persons in need, and over half of us hope that the church will help members discover their own gifts for ministry and service.

Our congregational gathering on “Who is our neighbor?” with a panel of principals from our local schools, began to stir conversations about who we can be.



MPCers at the Montclair Farmer's Market in August 2012

Food for Thought

- Find ways to become continuing partners with our neighborhood public schools, whose needs are different from the East Oakland schools we already serve.
- Consider the overlooked needs of elders and the disabled within our church and in the outside Montclair community.
- Add to the opportunities that will bring the outside community in – author nights, major music performances, educational forums, summer BBQ's after evening services.
- Continue to update all the connection sources that help others find us – our website, Montclair Village Association membership, self-descriptive flyers, media listings, street signage.
- Educate the congregation on ways to articulate MPC and invite newcomers to share in what makes us different.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Creator in heaven.

Matthew 5:14 -16

Pastoral Care Supporting one another with compassionate action

We rely heavily on our staff to support members during illness, life crises, needs for short-term counseling and other situations requiring care. As our congregation ages, we find pastoral needs increasing. Over the years, pastoral care has been perceived as uneven. While some congregants

have been very satisfied, others have been less so. We have recently committed 25% of a full-time staff position — Coordinator for Children, Youth and Family — to join the Head of Staff in providing pastoral care. In addition, we have gifted congregants who share in providing care through the following programs:

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Philippians 2:1-2

coordinates periodic social events and facilitates connection, when necessary, with the church staff and with services provided by volunteers. Unlike ordained Deacons, MPC's Beacons program gives non-members an opportunity to assume leadership roles in the church.

Companions: One congregation member "walks alongside" another member intentionally for a stated period of time.

Helping Hands: Provides meals and short-term assistance often when people are in crisis.

Beacons: The church family has been organized into geographical units or "Beacon communities" that continue our tradition of looking out for one another and nurturing supportive community life. As we get to know one another better as neighbors, we are in a better position to strengthen relationships and to give and receive care and support. The Beacon (a designated lead person for each group)



A corner of our garden.

Food for Thought

- Refine the structure of effective pastoral care programs and set reasonable and consistent expectations with the pastor and the various groups who provide care.
- Fine-tune the Beacons program and the effectiveness of the Beacon and the Beacon communities in helping to provide connection and support to members and friends.
- As of this writing, 20 members of the congregation have moved to Rossmoor, a Senior Living Community in Walnut Creek. In addition, eight members have moved to Piedmont Gardens, another Senior Living Retirement Community, and another half a dozen are considering moving within the year. As the congregation ages, the number of home bound or shut-in members is increasing. We should consider how to establish support groups within each senior community and/or care facility where there is a critical mass of MPC members and friends.

Children & Youth Programs

Where growing
never stops

The MPC programs for children and youth are in a period of transition after the retirement in 2011 of Susan Hunn, who served as the Associate for Children and Youth for 32 years. Our new Coordinator for Children, Youth and Family Life (CCYFL) — Rev. Katie Morrison — is working closely with the Children and Youth Committee to examine the strengths and opportunities within each program.

Our survey reinforced that regardless of how much adults under the age of 55 are attracted to MPC, the number one aspect of church that keeps them coming is the quality of the children and youth programs.



A warm welcome at Family Camp, 2012

NURSERY

The nursery is key to attracting families with young children. For a number of years the nursery has been staffed on Sunday mornings with dedicated youth. In order to strengthen our program, Session has recently created and filled a Head Nursery Teacher & Caregiver Provider position. In addition to being a consistent presence each Sunday, our new teacher is responsible for creating an early church experience for the youngest of attendees — engaging those who are old enough to participate with songs, stories, art and movement.

Food for Thought

- Work on the physical space and the signage is ongoing, with the goal of transforming the nursery into the most welcoming of spaces.
- We will be recruiting adult volunteers to partner with the Nursery Head Teacher so there will always be two adults present with the infants and pre-schoolers.



Having fun with a newspaper project (left) and coming back home from a successful youth group mission trip.

CHILDREN

One of the areas the 1994 Mission Study highlighted as requiring some attention and intention was the children's Sunday School program and curriculum. An elder in the congregation was instrumental in bringing the Godly Play curriculum to our children in grades K-6 — a program which continues to this day. Godly Play has been a gift for both the children and the adults who work as program volunteers. Over the years we have strived to create a welcoming, inviting and nurturing environment for school-age children. We want children to be taught the stories of our Christian faith, but not be indoctrinated with any specific theology or beliefs. We want them to wonder, to ask and to love. On Sunday mornings the children begin worship with the congregation and participate with the Celebration leader in Time with Children, which is thematically linked to that day's service. They are also involved in a children's choir that assembles at least twice yearly to sing in Celebration.

Food for Thought

- We have been using Godly Play for over a decade. We have identified the need for more training for the adult volunteers and a return to the original design for the program, which has evolved over the years. Participation among children is strong up until 4th grade. Between 4th and 5th grades, and the beginning of Youth Group in 7th grade, there is a tendency for some children to lose interest. The Children and Youth Committee and the CCYFL are considering what can be done to re-stimulate enthusiasm and interest.
- Continue to involve children in Celebration and other church events.

YOUTH

Over the years both church and non-church youth have participated in Sunday night youth group meetings, retreats, mission trips and service projects. A number of former youth group members come back to volunteer as youth group advisors. The youth group program maintains a good balance from fun and games to serious topics and service projects. The Sunday night conversations are beginning to touch on faith traditions (ours and others) and on a variety of spiritual practices so that youth can experience different ways to connect with God now and, if they desire to do so, in the future.

Food for Thought

- Typically the points of intersection between youth and the congregation are during fundraising for youth mission trips. We need to find authentic ways to integrate youth into the life of the church — for example, through participation as lay leaders, greeters, taking offerings, as musicians, communion servers and Celebration drama participants, some of which is already happening.
- While youth may be very involved during middle and high school, once they go to college and become young adults, they are not returning to church here or anywhere. What can be done?

Bridges How to build & strengthen our community on the inside

MPC is like all communities in that individuals within its membership go through periods where they sometimes feel more and sometimes less connected to the church community. While this is a natural part of community life, and sometimes a result of generational divides, it is in our best interest to try to reduce the number of people who feel “out” of community at MPC. We heard throughout our Mission Study congregational gatherings that our church community was a very important presence and touch point in peoples’ lives.

New programs arise to replace old ones. Extended Families provided an intergenerational experience for decades. Each of these families consisted of 20-25 individuals, single and married, parents, grandparents and children, who participated in various activities and provided support for one another. Now the Beacons program, which groups congregants and their families by geographic area, will enable neighbors to interact socially and support one another. The recent Women’s Retreat program has been successful in deepening relationships, but the attendees have been mostly those over 55 years old.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.
Corinthians 12:12

Younger MPCers (U54 with families) say that they would like to get more involved, but that they don’t have the time to participate in groups that require long-term commitments or significant hours. They also want what Celebration provides, so that leading programs for children during Celebration defeats one of their primary reasons for attending. Furthermore, for U54s, there are simply too few families at MPC to create a peer group of critical mass.



Food for Thought

- The Mission Study survey indicated that 60% of MPCers feel that bridging the intergenerational gap is highly important. MPC, a church of at least seven generations, might consider developing a more robust intergenerational program that provides for extended communal time for people of all ages.
- Some MPCers report that while they do participate, they don’t feel able to enter inner leadership circles. This occurs even for MPCers who have been at the church for a decade or more. The Session Nominating committee can address this by paying attention to the names that always come up and the names that never or rarely come up for church leadership.

MPC IS A CLOSE-KNIT COMMUNITY FOR SOME:

44% have 4+ close friends at church

BUT NOT FOR ALL:

29% only come for service with no other involvement

22% have no close friends at church

WHAT U54s VALUE MOST:

70% stay at MPC for Child & Youth programs
(compared to 20% of the community as a whole)

Session, Committees & Staff Structure

Finding the right balance

MPC has always prided itself on leadership from below rather than leadership from above. Since Duke's era, we have emphasized organic ideas, activities and groups to meet perceived needs. This has resulted in a very different structure than is found in most Presbyterian churches which typically have 4-8 committees, each headed by a member of Session, an elected Elder. At MPC, there are currently at least 34 committees or groups that meet. Of these, ten are considered to be Session committees:

Celebration	Personnel
Nominating	Social Justice
Membership and Outreach	Adult Education,
Children and Youth	Stewardship and Finance
Family Life	Congregational Care

Until very recently there was no requirement or attempt to have Session Elders serve on the various Session committees. Rather, an Elder was appointed liaison to each committee from Session. Session would adopt multiple annual "Emphases" and it was the responsibility of the liaison to make sure each committee developed programs with focus on the annual emphases. The benefits were a great deal of freedom and creativity, while drawbacks were a lack of communication and coordination between the various committees/groups and Session.

In contrast, while the structure of Session and the multitude of committees has resulted in more flexibility in responding to changing needs, the staffing structure cannot be as flexible. The staffing model has remained fairly consistent and is in keeping with the church's size and the fact that we are primarily a program church. We have a full-time Administrative Assistant who manages the office and a Head of Staff who oversees staff, moderates the Session, preaches weekly, and is the staff support to a number of committees including but not limited to: Personnel, Stewardship and Finance, Nominating, Celebration, Social Justice, Membership and Outreach, and Congregational Care.

For 32 years, we had an Associate for Children and Youth, which was a non-ordained position. During that time, other staffing decisions were made "around" the existence of that position. In addition, we have at various times employed an Associate Pastor whose primary responsibilities included Social Justice and Pastoral Care. Recently, we combined some part-time positions and, in addition to the Head of Staff position, we now have a Coordinator for Children, Youth and Family Life who is also responsible for providing pastoral care. We employ a Music Director, an organist and a janitor — all part-time.

While different efforts have been made to link all the parts together, there is tremendous opportunity in the future for synergistic staffing and structure.

"We are as contrary as Jesus."

An MPCer

Food for Thought

- We want to explore ways to find projects that will attract and involve a wider pool of people at the leadership level, avoid volunteer burnout and connect people with specific gifts to specific committees or activities.
- Clarification of purpose and mission is needed between committees/ activities and leadership
- Recently, Session created "Clusters" of similarly-oriented committees that would meet periodically to improve communication, achieve better coordination and clarify accountability. When the idea was first suggested, each cluster was assigned a Session liaison and the liaison was responsible for attending meetings of all included committees and reporting back. What has happened since, however, is that most of the Elders are now actively serving on various committees and even chairing some committees, so that communication has been happening directly through them. The ongoing struggle in the structure and governance of MPC is the tension between allowing for the freedom and creativity that is cherished, while at the same time providing enough structure for efficient communication and coordination.
- We have a valued and well-respected staff. Because the cost of salaries and benefits continues to rise, we want to ensure that we can continue to adequately compensate them for the work they do.

WE ARE A PROGRESSIVE CHURCH WITH RELIABLY CONSERVATIVE BUDGETS. THE PARADOX HAS SERVED US WELL.

2011 – 2012 FINANCES

Actual Income

\$398,104

Actual Expense

\$374,227

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

Since 2006

\$2,025,000

raised and pledged through 2013

\$150,000

gifted to outside non-profits
for five years through 2013

\$300,000

in loans outstanding

WE HAVEN'T DONE MUCH OUT-OF-THE BOX THINKING WITH OUR FINANCES AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO DOING SO WITH OUR NEXT PASTOR. Given our aging community and accompanying reduction in pledges, we need to take aggressive steps now to alleviate potential problems ahead. Ideas being investigated include implementing a legacy gift program, pursuing more grant opportunities, educating members and FOF on finances, and seeking ways to increase pastoral care without funding additional staff.

Budgets, Funds & Pledges

	FY 2013	FY 2012	FY 2011	FY 2010	FY 2009	FY 2008	FY 2007	FY 2003
GENERAL FUND								
Income	Budgeted							
Gifts and Pledges	\$287,000	\$273,000	\$299,320	\$340,914	\$339,190	\$353,894	\$330,397	\$335,889
"Promised" Pledge Revenue	\$247,000	\$245,000	\$268,000	\$279,000	\$292,000	\$276,000	\$311,000	\$302,000
Number of Pledges	129	130	154	163	162	154	178	177
Average Pledge	\$1,915	\$1,885	\$1,740	\$1,712	\$1,802	\$1,792	\$1,747	\$1,706
Rents	\$106,500	\$112,543	\$97,363	\$93,226	\$90,412	\$87,511	\$84,812	\$72,114
Other Income	\$8,850	\$12,561	\$36,141	\$36,666	\$37,503	\$87,352	\$76,809	\$39,495
<u>Total Gifts and Income</u>	<u>\$402,350</u>	<u>\$398,104</u>	<u>\$432,824</u>	<u>\$470,806</u>	<u>\$467,105</u>	<u>\$528,757</u>	<u>\$492,018</u>	<u>\$447,498</u>
Expenses								
Total Salaries & Operations	\$386,150	\$374,226	\$426,587	\$505,946	\$512,061	\$491,948	\$473,039	\$405,523
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FUND								
Income	///	\$54,007	\$130,324	\$181,943	\$106,286	\$260,880	\$248,952	N/A
Expenses	///	\$10,240	\$19,869	\$94,879	\$276,729	\$322,659	\$1,274,886	N/A
External Tithing	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	N/A	N/A	N/A
RESTRICTED & PROGRAM FUNDS (25)								
Total Balance as of 6/30/12	\$174,350							

NINE WAYS A NEW PASTOR WILL WIN OUR HEARTS.

ENGAGE US ON SUNDAYS

We cherish Celebration. Without putting too fine a point on it, our pastor needs to:

- Offer a Celebration service that is emotionally moving and intellectually challenging
- Bring us sermons that are imaginative, challenging and thought-provoking. We need someone to preach about social justice — and believe in it, too. The game won't be won here, but can be lost.

UNDERSTAND WHO'S IN THE PEWS

Our pastor preaches to and cares for:

- Intellectuals (95% are college graduates; 70% have advanced degrees or done post-graduate work); ordained ministers and seminary-trained parishioners (nearly 20 at last count);
- Intensely loyal members & friends (80% have been here 10+ years); and,
- Fiercely independent (yet increasingly fragile), politically liberal, LGBT-welcoming people who are comfortable wrestling with their belief in the existence of God.

SUPPORT ROBUST CHILDREN & YOUTH PROGRAMS

Our U54s care about the strength and dynamism of the Children and Youth programs almost as much as they care about having a great pastor. Without a strong program in place (we're working on it), it'll be difficult to attract and keep this core group.

HAVE STRONG ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

Our pastor needs to manage and mentor a staff team and volunteer leadership. And, to keep us inspired and motivated, our pastor should also . . .

BE GOOD AT RELATIONSHIPS

We have strong opinions and aren't shy about sharing them. We need our pastor to foster community through openness and dialogue. Humor works, too.

WORK WITH US TO CREATE & IMPLEMENT A FINANCIAL PLAN

We need to plan for sustainability, which includes thinking creatively about fund-raising, bequests, grants and more.

COMMUNICATE WELL & OFTEN. TRANSPARENTLY, TOO

Involving MPCers in an ongoing dialog about the church and the ongoing development of its mission, matters. The congregational gatherings the Mission Study team held nearly monthly for the past year have strengthened our community and should become an ongoing process.

CELEBRATE OUR QUESTIONS

We need a pastor who is conversant in — and delights in — theological differences.

HELP US SHINE OUR LIGHTS

MPC is an enthusiastic, engaged and aging community. Half of us are over 70. We have much to offer, and the good news is that we are now focused on doing so. At the same time, increasing our community will benefit us in many ways, from being able to expand our good works to providing a more vibrant in-church experience for our U54s. Our pastor needs to have both leadership skills and charisma to help us succeed at this critical task.

Or to explain it all another way . . .

Big Love.
Big Questions.
Big Hope.

This is MPC.

**“THIS IS
OUR
CRAZY
CHURCH.
PRAISE
GOD!”**

An MPCer



The invitation
to share in our journey
comes with
open hearts and minds.

We seek a prophetic pastor who
celebrates our questions,
embraces our passions,
inspires our spirits
and challenges us to think
deeper, harder and more radically
about how we can better express
God's unconditional love for the world.

You, perhaps?

*Our world is full of light and possibility
inside and outside our sanctuary.*

**MPC'S 2012
MISSION STUDY TEAM
WISHES TO THANK . . .**

THE CONGREGATION

for being so open and willing to answer question after question, month after month, with enthusiasm, candor & enough quotable quotes to liven up the report.

REV. DR. BETH BUCKINGHAM-BROWN

for providing invaluable encouragement, insights and perspective throughout our 12-month-long adventure.

SESSION

for trusting us to do the work we needed to do.

TOM DAVIES

for his key involvement early in the discovery process.

**LEE AURICH, TOM DEBLEY, GRETCHEN
GARLINGHOUSE & KATIE MORRISON**

for allowing us to show off their lovely photographs.

SHERRILL FIGUERA

for being so reliably and cheerfully helpful.

And, finally . . .

ONE ANOTHER

After a year of digging, interpreting, debating and distilling, we not only have a report to show for it, we're still talking to each other!

Blessings,

DEBBIE FALLEHY, GRETCHEN GARLINGHOUSE,
EARL HAMLIN, DAVE MILLER, JANET MULSHINE,
NANCY MURR, MARGE NICHOLSON & DAVID SIEGENTHALER

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