

Concord Revision

Final

Session Approved January 21, 2004

Beliefs:

We are united as a community of faith at Concord in response to God's call to us.

We join together to worship, to learn and to serve.

We acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior.

We acknowledge that we all are imperfect and are sinners. But we live in the hope of the Gospel and seek to live our lives with "the mind of Christ"

We are grounded in the scriptures and are called to share the Good News; the Good News is for all persons

We are called to help the needy in our church, our community, and beyond and to seek justice for all.

As a community of believers we are moved to try to bring to life several passages of Scripture that describe the Kingdom

The Spirit of the lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me, he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD to display his glory (Isaiah 61:1-3)

I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Col 1:25-29)

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit in state on this throne, with all the nations gathered before him. He will separate men into two groups, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep on

his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right hand, “you have my Father’s blessing; come enter and possess the Kingdom that has been ready for you since the world was made. For when I was hungry you gave me food, when thirsty, you gave me drink; when I was a stranger you took me into your home, when naked you clothed me; when I was ill you came to my help, when in prison you visited me. Then the righteous will reply, Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you drink, a stranger and took you home, or naked and clothed you? When did we see you ill or in prison and come to visit you? And the king will answer, “I tell you this: anything you did for one of my brothers here, however, humble, you did for me.” (Matthew 25: 31-41)

Context:

Concord Church celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2002. Concord was founded as suburban Wilmington began to grow and the church experienced explosive growth. Membership peaked at 1500 members in the '70's followed by a slow and steady decline to today's 350 members.

The Church last developed a Vision in 1998 which affirms the church's openness to all persons.

As Concord Presbyterian Church, we commit ourselves to be a Christ centered people of God

By the Grace of God and energized by the Holy Spirit.....

We will feed the spiritual and intellectual hunger of God's people

We will build a church family that welcomes, embraces, and loves all people, excluding no one from full involvement in the life of the church

We will serve the world around us, sharing in the concerns and struggles of its people

We will respond to God's goodness with celebration

Although we value and would welcome diversity, our community and our church are predominately white. The church has made a particular point to make children with special needs feel included in all activities of the church. As the homosexuality issue has consumed the church at the denominational level, Concord has affirmed a position of accepting the full participation of homosexual persons and continues to feel tension on this issue.

Concord reaches out to new residents through personal mailings. We know how to welcome Christian newcomers to our church but we have no experience or expertise in inviting people with little or no faith experience into Christian fellowship. We are uncomfortable with the idea of doing evangelism while recognizing that that is a vital need in today's world

Concord's community includes many other Christian churches of various Protestant denominations as well as several Roman Catholic Churches and a synagogue. There are no eastern religion institutions in our immediate neighborhood but practitioners of eastern religions live in the community. Churches occasionally join together for special events. However, there is no organized cooperative church ministry in our local neighborhood.

Up to one third of the residents of our immediate community are unchurched (no religious affiliation of any kind). This represents 15,000 persons.

Concord has a long and proud tradition of reaching outside our walls to serve the greater Wilmington community and beyond. Church members support food and clothing closets, Habitat for Humanity, homeless shelters, and various soup kitchens. The church supports missionaries, various mission projects annually and sponsors annual intergenerational Mission trips of its members. We are responsive and generous when mission and ministry opportunities are brought to us.

The focus of Concord's mission work has been outside of the immediate community in which we live. Our immediate neighborhood is generally upper middle class and well educated; our Mission work has been directed to the poor and powerless. While our Church building is well used by the community, the church has little or no link with the groups that use our facilities. While our community profile is highly educated and affluent, there are significant numbers of persons in our immediate area that do not fit this profile; Concord has no organized ministry for those at our doorstep. We have little recent experience in surveying a community to identify needs and to define new programs.

Concord has programs in place to support Church families with ministry needs. The Deacons and Concord Women organize this response which includes transportation and meals. We also have some members who have been trained as "lay pastors"

With mission programs, education programs, music programs, women's groups, church boards and an aging membership, many at Concord are feeling burned out, over committed and running on "spiritual empty". But the strong commitment to the church and its programs and ministries, keeps us from cutting back on what we are doing.

Concord offers a superior education program for children, youth and adults rich in variety and substance. This includes outside leadership. Sunday morning classes, midweek men's and women's Bible studies and women's circles are included. We have a Director of Children and Youth Ministries. Our education program does not attract people from the community. Concord sponsors a Preschool and Day Care that serves the local community. Over the last several years, Concord has worked to increase the connection between the church and the Preschool

Concord offers a music and arts program incorporating adult and children's vocal and bell choirs as well as special music programs and dramas. We have a Minister of Music who also works with the Preschool.

Vision

Our church and each of us are so at one with Christ that we carry out Christ's will in relationship to each other, our immediate community and the larger world.

Mission

We believe that over the next several years, Concord's Mission should include:

SPIRITUALITY

We need to reinvest in the spiritual energy of our membership. Active prayer ministries, retreats and other programs are needed to recharge our spiritual batteries. We also need to learn how to mentor those new to a relationship to Christ. The church hungers for more fellowship that includes all age groups.

EVANGELISM

We believe that Concord must be a vibrant community of believers that invites people to become part of our fellowship. We intend to grow. We also recognize that traditional church structures and organizational style may need to change as we adapt to what it means to be the church of the 21st century. However, we must avoid the temptation to measure our success by church growth alone.

We live and are engaged in Mission in times that require Concord to address new challenges for which it is currently not equipped. We are used to doing ministry and mission in a context where everyone in our community knows the Good News of Jesus Christ and our role was to be welcoming to those who wished to join Concord for worship, fellowship and service. We now find ourselves in a world where we need to take ownership for introducing our neighbors to Christ and sharing the message of what Christ can bring to their life and soul.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

We must shine God's light on injustices in the world and join in efforts to overcome them. Our mission concerns for poverty and homelessness both within our immediate neighborhood as well as in greater Wilmington and the world remains unchanged. We seek to be a link between our local community and the larger world. We envision inviting those in our local community to join with Concord in our community and world outreach efforts.

LOCAL COMMUNITY SERVICE

We seek to provide for local community needs from a Christian perspective. This must begin with a more focused effort on understanding local community issues. We envision doing this work in partnership with other churches where we can. We need to be much more active in communicating to the local community. More intentional efforts to meet the needs of our community may lead to additional worship times and/or styles.

3 Year Plan

We believe that over the next 3 years, our energy must be focused on these key areas

Rebuilding Concord members' spiritual energy—prayer, church-wide retreats, strong educational programs, diversity of fellowship programs. Many Concord members feel “burned out” and are looking to recharge their batteries to do our mission. We seek to be a community energized by the spirit. We value continuation of a strong worship service as we also consider additional worship times or styles.

Learning how to witness to the community as individuals and as a church. In the 21st century we can no longer rely on the culture to share the Good News. This work is unfamiliar to most members so the emphasis must be on learning how to do this. We will seek to develop cooperative church strategies. Our primary focus will be on those who have no church relationship

Building a stronger connection between Concord and our immediate community. Our outreach efforts have focused beyond our immediate neighborhood so we must begin by systematically identifying needs and building a relationship with our immediate community. We can also structure church programs to be more “inviting” to non-members. Our music programs could provide a vehicle to link the church and community. We must improve our communications around activities of community interest such as education and cultural opportunities. We should develop relationships with local civic associations and the council of civic associations. Ministry programs that could emerge in this area include ministry to singles, marriage support, ministry to local retirement communities and support for the unemployed.

Continuing Concord's commitment to social justice and community service. Concord members highly value the work we do in the greater Wilmington area as well as our commitment to global mission. This will continue. We believe we could build links in the local community by intentionally inviting others in the community to join Concord in our outreach programs.

1 Year Plan

Insure church structures support the strategies

Create a task force to address the size, structure and responsibilities of Boards, staff and committees in the church to insure that they support the 3 year strategic directions.
Improve mentoring and record keeping to help new transfers of responsibilities.

Build spiritual energy and increase fellowship

Begin training of elders to be spiritual leaders of the church.
Hold spiritual retreats using different styles and venues.
Emphasize Christ's call to share our joys and concerns at every event as a first step. Then later add opportunity to share faith experiences and experiences in witnessing.
Increase fellowship activities and increase variety. Experiment with various times of day and formats for fellowship. Target a few done well. Consider a mini-Concord academy of interest.
Investigate ways to make worship more meaningful.

Learn how to witness to the community

Preach on this issue
Identify programs that teach us how to do this in terms of Christ's call
Work toward implementing programs that witness to children, youth and adults
Explore opportunities to work with other churches to witness to children and unchurched people.

Build a stronger connection to our immediate community.

Begin effort to understand the needs and identify opportunities for service.
Work on communications that help to link Concord to our community; consider professional banners to advertise church events.
Look for opportunities to structure education, worship, music and fellowship events at times that are more "welcoming".
Get the web site going.

Continue Concord's commitment to Social Justice and community service

Continue to support and celebrate Concord's ministries in this area.
Publicize our existing mission work and invite community members to join in this work; consider a Mission Fair and invite community members.
Consider new seniors and intergenerational programs.
Consider having Concord "hosts" present when building is in use by outside groups.
Increase publicity inside the church.