

**MISSION STUDY OF COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
**a/k/a “THE BARN”**

**INTRODUCTION**

In 1959, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, a group of 35 people met to form a new Presbyterian congregation in Simsbury, Connecticut. The group, formerly members of Westminster Presbyterian Church, was committed to prayer and Bible study. Their stated purpose in forming Covenant Presbyterian Church was *“to accept God’s love and to grow toward a fulfillment of a personal relationship with God through a complete acceptance of Jesus Christ, and to serve Him by carrying out His will and sharing His love and teaching with others.”*

In 1963, the beautiful and expansive Mahoney Farm was purchased and has been the location of The Barn ever since. The primary building is, in fact, a former barn. The hayloft of the barn has served as a sanctuary for over 40 years. In addition to the main barn building, the property became home to a retreat center known as the Center for Renewal. The Barn also established ministries such as The Master’s School, the Crisis Pregnancy Center, and The Covenant Christian Book Room. Although some of these ministries are no longer part of The Barn, and some have changed form, they bear witness to how God called a people to serve Him in a place of renewal, healing, study, equipping and worship, from which people would be sent out to serve a needy world. Indeed, Covenant has a rich history of sending members of its body on missional service both within the United States and around the world.

A characteristic of Covenant Presbyterian Church has been, and continues to be, a desire to seek a deeper relationship with God. This spiritual hunger has drawn believers to Covenant from a variety of church backgrounds, both Protestant and Catholic, charismatic, evangelical and traditional. Inasmuch as our church regards the Holy Spirit as the seal of one’s personal redemption in Jesus Christ, and God manifests Himself in the believer through spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit, Covenant has been embraced by people of various denominations who seek something deeper and more profound than a casual faith and lukewarm Christianity.

During the course of its 46-year history, Covenant Presbyterian Church has had but three head pastors. William McConnell, former Associate Pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, became the first Head Pastor and served from July 1960 until February 1964. In July of 1964, John Hunn was installed as Head Pastor and served this body until 1983. The next year, V. Don Haas was called to be Head Pastor and served this church faithfully until his call ended in April of 2006.

Covenant Presbyterian Church is a member of the Willow Creek Association, is affiliated with Presbyterians for Renewal, and is a participant in the New Wineskins Initiative.

## OUR MISSION

*To transform those separated from God into fully devoted followers of Christ.*

That simple expression of our church's mission runs through every ministry at the Barn.

## OUR VISION

*To be a Biblically functioning community where children, youth and adults, through the active presence of the Holy Spirit (1) Come to faith in Christ (2) Grow to maturity in Him (3) Advance God's Kingdom in the world.*

## OUR CORE VALUES

In June of 2005, after several months of prayerful discussion, the Session of Covenant Presbyterian Church identified 5 "core values" of our church. These are understood to be the threads that run through all that we do as a church. Moreover, we regard them as a sort of measuring stick against which to evaluate new initiatives and new ministries. They are:

### **Spiritual Growth** (because we recognize that people who follow Christ grow in faith)

- We will be known as a congregation that is grounded in the Holy Scriptures.
- We will be known as a congregation that teaches its youth to walk closely with the Good Shepherd.
- We will learn to abide in Christ. (John 15:5)
- We will be led by the Holy Spirit.
- We will be a people and a place of healing and transformation.

### **Cultural Engagement and Outreach**

- Our worship will be relevant to those considering Christ, and meaningful to believers.
- We will incorporate meaningful traditions and liturgy into the worship experience.
- We will seek to understand the postmodern culture and learn to speak its language.
- We will seek to find where God is working and join Him there. Lost people matter to God.

### **Community** – God's design for human relationships

- We will be known as a church of small groups where life transformation can occur.
- We will have small groups where our fears, failures, and dreams are known and where we are loved unconditionally.
- We will develop relationships through women's and men's ministries.

### **Practicing Time Alone With God**

- We will incorporate into our daily lives time alone with God.
- We will communicate with God by receiving from Him through his Word and by listening prayer.
- Man's highest function is to quietly listen for God's voice and follow it regardless of the cost.

### **Stewardship**

- God gave His excellent best in His son; we therefore must give Him our excellent best. (Philippians 2:15-16)
- He has given us this land – we must care for it wisely.
- He has given us talents and spiritual gifts – we must use them wisely.
- He has given us material resources – we are to invest them wisely.
- We are to mentor (help others discover their gifts) and empower believers in the work of the ministry. (Ephesians 4:11-12).

### **THE LAND AND ITS BUILDINGS**

It is impossible to fully describe Covenant Presbyterian Church without mentioning the land we have been blessed with. The Barn rests on 36 acres of rolling hills in a predominantly suburban community. The main barn building houses not only the hayloft sanctuary, but also classrooms, offices, a small kitchen, and meeting rooms. In 2000, the church added a new wing containing additional meeting rooms, rooms for the junior high and high school ministries, and the expansive, circular Celebration Hall. Celebration Hall was originally intended as a multi-purpose space. However, since its construction, it has housed our 10:15 AM contemporary worship service. The hayloft sanctuary, a more rustic, intimate space, is used for our 8:30 AM contemplative service.

The land also contains residences for the families of the Head Pastor, the Youth Pastor, and the Sexton. The Center for Renewal is located on the east side of the property and is large enough to accommodate retreats as large as forty people and can sleep seventeen. It also contains the residence of the McDermott's who run the retreat ministry.

In 1977, an outdoor worship space was constructed overlooking Hop Brook. It has been used for summer worship services, as well as special events such as weddings. Nearby, the Hop Brook forms a pool that is the site for baptisms of both adults and youth (although not infants).

One cannot walk the land without feeling God's presence. The stillness and beauty have invited countless people to a closer, listening relationship to God.

## SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

The Barn has always placed a high value on small group life and regards it as an important structure for the support, edification, and fellowship of its members. Since January of 1998, the Barn has used Stephen Ministries' ChristCare resources as a model for small group ministry. The "ChristCare" groups are groups formed and covenanted for a specific purpose and time frame – usually eight weeks, but often renewed many times over. They are designed to promote growth as a disciple, worship and prayer, caring and community building, Biblical equipping, and missional service. Leaders are specifically trained to effectively lead these groups. By the end of 2005, the Barn had 15 adult ChristCare groups along with several youth groups.

## CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

*We minister to children at the Barn – bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ, teaching them to hear and respond to the voice of God, and encouraging them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus, growing in maturity and obedience, and impacting the world around them.*

One of the most dynamic and consistently successful areas of ministry at Covenant Presbyterian Church is Children's Ministry. For several years, our Sunday program for ages 4 through 6th grade was called the Good Shepherd program. At present, we are transitioning into a "workshop rotation" model of Sunday School. Our programs are divided into age-appropriate levels that encourage children to listen to and respond to the voice of God. At appropriate ages, children have been encouraged to journal their thoughts regarding what they are saying to, and hearing from, God. From 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade, children build upon this foundation with Biblical equipping studies. This includes "big picture" topics such as the history of Israel. Children are encouraged to learn Biblical principles and recognize their application in their own lives.

One of the most vital aspects of Children's Ministry is the yearly Covenant Day Camp. Begun as a vacation Bible school, Covenant Day Camp developed during the 1990's and became an important outreach to our community, as well as a blessing to our own church body. For one week in August, our expansive grounds are transformed into a Bible-era "marketplace" where tribe leaders lovingly teach Biblical principles, artisans teach crafts, and children are entertained and taught through daily "street dramas." In 2005, the Camp hosted over 220 children, with ages ranging from kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Historically, more than half the children attending are from outside our church body. In 2005, over 130 junior and senior high schoolers (many former campers) participated as staff, under the direction of dozens of adults. Every year we stand in awe at how the Holy Spirit is evident in this incredible ministry. Many families have been drawn to worship with us at the Barn as a direct result of experiencing God's transcendent love during Camp week.

## YOUTH MINISTRY

*We desire to see young people's lives connect with God through relationships with peers and adults. It is our goal to provide programs that provide safe places for kids to be themselves while being challenged with the claims of the Gospel of Christ.*

In 1990, Covenant Presbyterian Church hired Brad Moger as Pastor to Youth. Since that time, Pastor Brad has administered programs for youth that are equal parts edifying and engaging. Along with his wife Kristin, and Intern Andrew Means, Brad directs thriving programs for junior highs and high schoolers. In past years, Brad and his team have led mission trips to Peru, directed local missional work in inner-city Hartford, and led numerous retreats. In addition, Pastor Brad started the popular Sunday morning Connections program for teens which features worship, ministry, and the discussion of difficult topics like relationships, sex and peer pressure. Brad also started ChristCare groups for youth. At present, Youth Ministry is planning to send a team to the Gulf Coast to help in the hurricane relief effort, and a team to inner-city Hartford. These programs and others are attended by youth both within and outside of our church body.

Additionally, Youth Ministry is integrally involved in Covenant Day Camp, as evidenced by the large number of junior and senior high students who serve at the camp. Pastor Brad serves as a dynamic, up-front leader of worship and prayer during this transformative week.

It should be readily apparent from the active youth ministry life of Covenant Presbyterian Church that we regard ministering to the unique spiritual (and practical) needs of our youth as crucial to fulfilling our church's mission.

## WOMEN'S MINISTRY

*It is our vision that through faith in Christ, women, as they are rooted and established in love, may have the power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (From Ephesians 3:17-19)*

Covenant enjoys a flourishing Women's Ministry that touches women's souls in a variety of ways. This has become a significant outreach to women in our surrounding community. Women meet (in considerable numbers) on a weekly basis to engage in biblically based study programs. Recently, the women have corporately studied The Life You Always Wanted, by John Ortberg, and Living Beyond Yourself: Exploring the Fruit of the Spirit, by Beth Moore.

In addition, the women of the Barn attend the yearly "Women of Faith" conference in Hartford, go on retreat each year at the Center for Renewal, and host a yearly Advent Brunch. The last Advent Brunch was attended by 300 women and we witnessed 40 women either receive Christ and become new believers, or re-dedicate their lives to Him.

## MEN'S MINISTRY (Christus Rex)

*Dedicated to transforming the men of the Barn into fully devoted followers of Christ through teaching, fellowship and missional work, so that we might transform the world for Christ.*

Covenant's Men's Ministry, in its current form, began in 2004. Its leadership is committed to establishing a vital and sustaining men's ministry which we regard as essential to a thriving church. In its first two years, men's ministry – known as Christus Rex – has offered men fellowship, prayer, Biblical teaching and fellowship at monthly "Men's Nights." These events have featured roundtable discussions about sexual sin, comedic sketches, speakers such as former New York Giant Lee Rouson, and brief films. In addition, in the past year, Christus Rex sent a team of men to work at a Habitat for Humanity site, and supported the Advent Brunch as parking attendants, waiters, and cooks.

As a relatively new ministry, Christus Rex is still, in some ways, fighting to establish itself into the culture of Covenant Presbyterian Church. It is the strong belief of Christus Rex that God works mightily when men come together in service to Him. Christus Rex believes, too, that men beyond the walls of Covenant can be brought to a deeper walk of faith through Biblical teaching from, and the supportive fellowship of, other men.

## MISSIONS

*We are called to apply ourselves and our resources to help fulfill the Great Commission, both within the Simsbury community and throughout the world.*

Covenant Presbyterian Church has historically strongly supported missional work. This support has taken the form of both training people for mission and funding missions. We currently support overseas missionaries in Senegal (the Garretts), Viet Nam (the Copples), Papua New Guinea (Diana Smyth), Norway (the Odlands), Peru (the Cooleys), China (John Barwick), and Bangladesh (Milton Coke). The Barn dedicates 10% of its Operating Fund income to missions. In addition, our church has sent members on three short-term mission trips to Peru. Additionally, the church provides support to domestic missions such as Youth Challenge, The Crisis Pregnancy Center, Quail Ministries, Theological Education Institute, The Master's School, and Vision New England, among others.

As noted above, we expect to send a team from Youth Ministry to the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast in the Summer of 2006 to provide assistance and relief.

We at the Barn do not regard ourselves as an island of Christianity, but rather part of a global community of Christians. Our primary mission field is certainly local, but the Holy Spirit calls us to look beyond the Simsbury community to share God's grace with

others in need, and to share with people anywhere the incredible and wonderful truth of what Jesus Christ did on the Cross.

## OUTREACH

*Extending the transforming love of Jesus Christ to everyone.*

Inasmuch as our mission statement challenges us to transform those separated from God into disciples of Christ, it is essential that we continually seek to reach the lost amid the secular culture around us. There are two primary aspects to this task. The first is to make contact with those separated from God in a loving, non-threatening way, and to begin to guide them to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (i.e. evangelism). Typically, this will take the form of inviting folks to worship with us and to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” To effectively do this, we, as a church, must seek to understand the culture around us and learn to speak its language. We must understand fully the reasons why people have drifted away from a faith in Christ, or never had one to begin with. We must find ways to model Christ’s unconditional love within our surrounding community in such a way that it kindles a hunger within non-Christians, or nominal Christians. As a church, Covenant has always been comprised of people who want “more of God.” We need to seek to help the lost and unchurched outside Covenant to recognize that hunger in themselves.

The second aspect to the work of outreach is to provide a church environment where people feel welcomed, safe, understood, and connected. We strive to do this through our two Sunday worship services. The services, one contemporary and one contemplative, are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Currently, there are various yearly outreach events that are directed to our surrounding community. These include Covenant Day Camp, Women’s Advent Brunch, and sponsorship of the Holiday Café at the Simsbury Celebrates event each November. Additionally, the Barn is planning to launch an Alpha program in the near future.

While the concept of outreach has been an undercurrent of most, if not all, of the Barn’s ministries over the years, a number of members have recently felt a strong calling from the Lord to be far more purposeful in fulfilling the two aspects of outreach. In 2006, an Outreach Committee formed to brainstorm ideas on how to reach our community through new events and existing ministries, and how to welcome people into our church community and help them become fully devoted followers of Christ.

## WORSHIP/CREATIVE ARTS

*To capture the affective and truth-revealing power of the arts to enhance the preached and lived message of the Gospel on Sunday morning and beyond.*

It furthers God's Kingdom little if we can bring the lost to our door only to make them feel like outsiders who don't "speak the language." For that reason, our second worship service on Sunday is in the larger Celebration Hall. The space is more conducive to an exuberant, contemporary worship than the more intimate hayloft sanctuary. We try, wherever possible, to remove "church-speak" from our liturgy so that new attenders can understand fully what is going on. The contemporary service also frequently features visual elements like PowerPoint, dramatic (or comedic) sketches, video clips, and other creative elements. It is always our goal to have the contemporary service fully grounded in Biblical truth and teaching, but to present it in a way that is both relevant and accessible to "seekers" and edifying to more mature Christians.

Recognizing that the Barn is comprised of people from a variety of church backgrounds, who may connect to God in a more contemplative, prayerful and liturgical way, we provide an earlier Sunday service in the Hayloft Sanctuary. This first service features traditional hymns and liturgy, and times of quiet, prayerful reflection and confession. This first service, while not attended to the same degree as the contemporary service, represents an important connection with the Barn's longstanding traditions of contemplative worship and listening prayer.

## PRAYER

*To seek to make prayer a priority in the lives of everyone in the congregation, both individually and corporately. To support those here at the Barn and beyond by "praying in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests." (Ephesians 6:18)*

Closely associated with the contemplative traditions of Covenant Presbyterian Church is the recognized importance of prayer – both corporate and personal. We believe that, as Christians, we are called to act in obedience to God, something that is difficult without prayerfully discerning God's will for us. For that reason, the Barn encourages its members and attenders to set aside time each day for prayer. Nearly all events and meetings conducted at the Barn appropriately begin and end in prayer.

While we regard prayer as part of each individual's walk of faith, Covenant has a Prayer Team that provides individual prayer after our Sunday worship services, provides "soaking" prayer for long term needs, sponsors the yearly Prayer for Families Day each January, plans and directs monthly healing services, coordinates a prayer chain, and provides training for those who want to learn more about prayer.

Additionally, as Session contemplated the transition from one Pastor to another, we began a weekly, 24-hour Lenten prayer vigil. As the 2006 Lenten season ended, Session recognized that every aspect of the transition and interim period needed to be covered in prayer, and that we – corporately and individually – needed to seek God's direction for this church. It was therefore decided to continue the prayer vigil indefinitely.

## RETREAT MINISTRY

*We exist to draw people into an intimate encounter and deepening intimacy with Jesus Christ.*

Practicing time alone with God is, as stated above, one of our Core Values. That purpose is furthered by a retreat center located on our property – the Center for Renewal (CFR). The CFR, located on the northeast portion of the property, became a retreat center in 1982. In the late 1980's, church members Kit and Tricia McDermott heard God's call to change careers and establish a retreat ministry that emphasized listening prayer. Through the years, the McDermott's have developed and led "Listening in Christ" retreats as well as "Deus Solus" (God alone) retreats. The McDermott's facilitate retreats both through Covenant Presbyterian Church, and through their Klesis Ministries.

In recent years, Kit and Tricia have devoted more of their time and energies to transforming our second service into a contemporary, outwardly-focused service, and have run comparatively fewer retreats.

## OUR STRENGTHS

The paramount strength of our church is that we strive at all time to be grounded in God's word. We regard Scripture as inerrant and timeless. We believe that all men and women are sinners needing reconciliation with God, through acceptance of Jesus' death for our sins. (Romans 10:9). It is our steadfast commitment to Biblical truth, and our recognition of God's redemptive love, that has drawn people to our church – both believers and non-believers. Likewise, we are strengthened by our corporate sense of mission: to reach the lost and to make devoted followers of Jesus Christ. All these things are, to those of us at the Barn, non-negotiable.

Covenant Presbyterian Church is blessed to have members deeply committed to Christ and actively seeking the advancement of His Kingdom. Our congregation includes a multiplicity of ordained clergy, both Presbyterian and from other denominations. We are not a people who regard our life in Christ as something that happens only on Sundays. We strive to live out our faith day to day. We are also a highly creative congregation, constantly generating and testing new ideas. Our collective hunger for a deeper relationship with God, and our desire to bring others to Christ, ensures that we are never complacent.

Our land, beautiful and expansive, is certainly one of our strengths. It gives us an environment conducive to listening prayer and spiritual healing. We are naturally drawn to slow down and to listen to God's still, small voice.

Another strength is that we at the Barn, at our best, strive to serve God with excellence. The best example of this is Covenant Day Camp which, while a profoundly successful ministry to children and their families, is always being examined for ways to improve.

And without question, a strength of the Barn is our sense of community and connectedness with each other. We may debate and disagree, but at the core of this church is a deep and abiding love for each other as fellow workers in God's Kingdom.

### OUR CHALLENGES

At times, the plurality of leaders blurs lines of authority. At times, our desire for new programs, however meritorious, outpaces our resources – both human and financial. Likewise, we have had a tendency to embrace such a multiplicity of programs and initiatives that it is impossible to maintain all of them for any length of time. It weakens us whenever a new program is adopted, and embraced for a season, only to be discarded or ignored over the passage of time.

Another challenge for us is how to blend the rich, contemplative heritage of Covenant Presbyterian Church with our recognition that effective outreach entails engaging people through a more contemporary, often exuberant style of worship. This challenge is exemplified in the differences between our two worship services. Our Mission Statement embraces both aspects, and we feel God's leading to honor both parts of our corporate mission.

### OUR NEXT PASTOR

As a church of strong, talented, creative people, we require a strong leader who will harness the Barn's commitment, energy and hunger for God and his lost, in furtherance of our Mission. Put another way, we need a leader of leaders – a person gifted with discernment in helping us remain focused on what God is calling us to do.

Likewise, we need strong, biblically-based leadership from the pulpit. Therefore, our next Pastor should be a gifted preacher, who can deliver inspiring (and challenging) sermons grounded in Biblical principles that are accessible and relevant to both the mature Christian and "seeker" alike. Moreover, our next Pastor will need to be flexible enough to adapt his/her preaching to both our contemplative and contemporary services. There will also need to be a willingness to occasionally share pulpit time with the gifted preachers within our existing church body.

Our next Pastor must be a Spirit-filled disciple of Jesus Christ whose theology is aligned with our own. We expect that such a person would be energized and inspired by the considerable resources available here at the Barn.

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