

Working With Our Neighbors Planning Group – May 21, 2017

Our mission:

To help the congregation consider opportunities for and challenges for our congregation to act on our call to be good neighbors to people in our community, both local and around the world.

Our charge:

- Review information from the recent congregational meeting for relevant information and comments and prepare a summary of the most important points for the congregation
- Compile an inventory of the ways our congregation acts on our call to help make God's Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, including but not limited to the work of:
 - Missions Committee
 - Mission Groups
 - Youth and children's ministries
 - Denominational affiliations
 - Mission Day efforts
 - Individuals in the congregation acting on their own personal faith journeys
- Examine trends in the ways progressive Christians act out their faith as a congregation; determine the questions WSBC needs to ask itself about the ways it does 'missions'
- Develop a comprehensive statement describing Watts Street's collective efforts to do missions

What we have learned so far:

We have spent our time during this beginning phase gathering information about our current work with neighbors near and far through research, interviews and conversations with church staff, members of our congregation, our mission partners, and also through researching information about trends from several peer congregations. In short, WSBC has an abundance of connections with both our local and larger world neighbors. Many of these connections are through financial support, and some are through more direct relationships, and some are a combination of the two. We have found the following information that can be quantified:

WSBC provides funding:

- We currently fund sixteen mission affiliations throughout the United States (\$35,600)
- We currently fund twenty-five mission partners, with twenty-one of those being local (\$50,000)
- We currently fund sixteen mission projects, with all but one, El Salvador, directly connected with a WSBC member and a local project/organization. (\$19,000)

- We currently have \$13,000 in our budget for missions and pastoral discretionary funds that allow for distributing funds to individuals and groups in crisis or who have immediate needs for funding.
- We currently have a minute for mission each month and provide a minimum of \$750 to each organization mainly through individual contributions.
- Over twenty local non-profit organizations have been started either through our church as a mission or by an individual WSBC member, most of them with funding and support from WSBC.

WSBC provides meeting space:

- We currently have 17 outside groups who meet at WSBC on a regular basis (Durham Early Head Start, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Durham CAN, Reality Ministries, Sobriety Plan Group, Autism Society,...)

WSBC members are involved in our local community:

We have learned the following information that we do not have specific data for, but we know is true. WSBC members are involved in our local community, outside of their involvement with projects and outreach opportunities through WSBC. A sampling of 30 WSBC members were interviewed about their connections with the community outside of WSBC and the response was overwhelming. Their connections included serving on boards and volunteering for direct service delivery. Our annual Watts on Mission Day provides opportunities for our members to do good work with and for our local neighbors; some of this work is along side our neighbors. This is also an opportunity for WSBC members to be in community with one another.

Providing services to local groups/organizations is a large part of the WSBC youth group activities. Youth participate on a monthly basis in service projects, as well as participating in weeklong service projects around the state and country every summer. Also, Senior High youth travel to El Salvador every three years as a service project.

WSBC members are involved around the world:

We currently have strong relationship with our sister church, Emmanuel Baptist Church, in San Salvador, Over 75 members have been to El Salvador, including close to 40 youth. In the past our church members have also been involved with churches in Russia and Venezuela. Within the past few years, WSBC members contributed \$17,000 to the Maya (water) Project to the Middle East Children's Alliance.

Current Trends

We learned from our peer congregations that there are trends happening in churches in the area of outreach/mission work with neighbors. We are still exploring these trends and will include our findings in the final report.

New Ideas

There are individuals in our congregation who have ideas for outreach to our neighbors. We are keeping a list of ideas that are being brought to this planning group and also sharing them with the current Missions Committee. We will continue to keep track of these ideas throughout this planning process.

What we plan to do next:

1. We will continue to gather information from:

- Upcoming focus groups (May 4 and 10) hosted by this planning group
- Interviews with representatives from other faith communities
- Interviews with WSBC members, including youth
- Feedback from Beach Retreat discussions/activities
- Feedback from surveys (from the steering committee)

2. We will closely examine trends in the ways progressive Christians act out their faith as a congregation; determine the questions WSBC needs to ask itself about the ways it does 'missions'.

Questions we are investigating:

- Do we want to change the name of the current Missions Committee to reflect relationships or connections? (doing with as opposed to doing for)?
- What does it mean to "connect" with our neighbors? How important are relationships vs financial support with our neighbors to us?

- How do WSBC members currently stay informed about opportunities to connect, and how can we more effectively communicate information about these opportunities to long-time, new and prospective members?
- Thinking about WSBC members' connections with our neighbors: How can the church encourage *individuals* to develop more or better connections? Do they want more or better connections?
- Are we interested in working collaboratively with other faith groups to provide needed support and/or services with our neighbors?
- Does our current missions funding strategy still meet our needs? Is the idea of a set percentage of the budget for Missions appropriate for our church now? If so, at what level?
- What is our current mission group structure and format? Does our mission group format still meet our needs?
- To what extent should our funding be tied to congregational involvement in the ministries that are funded?
- Are there mission initiatives that can involve large segments of the congregation? If so, should they be one-time efforts or continuing?
- What is the appropriate balance between advocacy efforts and efforts to provide direct services to our neighbors?
- What are the most significant unmet needs in our community that our church might impact?
- To what extent should the church focus on creating its own programs instead of participating in existing programs?

Submitted by Paula Januzzi-Godfrey, on behalf of The Working With Our Neighbors Planning Group
(Jonathan Sauls, April Walton, Bob Kruhm, Greg Palmer)