

**CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF THE SLATE BELT...MISSION STUDY 2023
(approved by Session on May 17, 2023)**



**...upon this rock I will build my church...Matthew 16:18
like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy
priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
1 Peter 2:5**

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Living Stones	3
Christ Presbyterian Church of the Slate Belt Overview	
<i>Location</i>	4
<i>Demographics</i>	5
Mission and Ministry in the Slate Belt	
<i>Worship</i>	5
<i>Building and Grounds</i>	6
<i>Mission Programs</i>	6
<i>Slate Belt Ministerium</i>	6
<i>Shared Ministry</i>	6
<i>Leadership Structure</i>	7
<i>Staffing</i>	7
<i>Finances</i>	7
<i>Cemetery</i>	8
Mission Statement and Values	
<i>Statement, Rationale and Values</i>	8
Where is God Calling CPCSB	9
Appendices	
Appendix A: Church History	
Appendix B: Quick Insite (15-mile radius) Report	
Appendix C: Statistical Report	
Appendix D: 2022 Annual Report	
Appendix E: Full Mission and Values Statement	
Resources	
www.christpcsb.org	
https://www.facebook.com/christpresbyterianchurchslatebelt/	
Slate Belt Heritage Center http://slatebeltheritage.net/	
Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC)	
https://www.lehighvalley.org/	
Slate Belt Rising https://www.slatebeltrising.org/	
Pen Argyl Area School District https://www.penargylschooldistrict.org/penargyl/	
Bangor Area School District https://www.bangor.k12.pa.us/	

Introduction

The Mission Study Team has been meeting faithfully every Monday since April 3rd examining information we have been gathering from Session, committee chairs, the congregation and MissionInsite. In March we conducted an Appreciative Inquiry process with the congregation to hear and document their hopes and dreams. We have also completed an Asset Mapping exercise led by Reverend Nicole Vogel. From all of this information, we have compiled the following Mission Study.

Living Stones

The congregation of Christ Presbyterian Church of the Slate Belt (CPCSB) in Bangor, Pennsylvania, is a welcoming group of neighbors, friends and families who gather together for worship, fellowship and service to others. Hospitality is a core value. We are members of two smaller Presbyterian Churches who successfully merged together in 2019 to create a larger congregation dedicated to serving God and neighbor. The history of the two smaller congregations can be traced back to churches which were founded in the late 19th century. Over the 20th century, a series of mergers occurred so that the members could continue and expand mission and ministry in the Slate Belt area. We are grateful to the saints before us who let something die in order for new life to begin, and we are proud to be a continuing part of that tradition.

In late 2018, Faith United Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Parish of Bangor-Roseto, which were located within two miles of one another, were both without a called pastor. The moderators of both churches' Sessions introduced the subject of merger. In 2019, the Presbytery convened the two Sessions which then agreed to pursue merging. From that meeting, the two churches began to worship together alternating each Sunday during the summer of 2019, anchoring the process of merger in worship. The symbolic point of merger occurred in November of 2019 with a service that began at Faith United through the breaking of the bread. The service was then suspended and moved to the Presbyterian Parish where the cup was served and the merger celebrated with food and fellowship.

To build two congregations into one, great care was taken throughout the merging process and beyond to ensure equal representation on committees and listening deeply to each other's suggestions, dreams and hopes. In her first six months, our designated pastor spent time with Session members and others in the congregation listening to their stories, particularly attuned to hopes, dreams,

fear and any grief they might hold. Most of those conversations conveyed a sense of hope and excitement and very little grief.

The legal and organizational aspects of the merger were completed in August 2020. At the same time, we began a search for a three-year designated pastor who arrived in November 2020. Since then, working with the Session, committees and the congregation the following has been accomplished:

- Created a new mission statement, values and goals
- Formed committees and an administrative structure that included contracting an experienced church bookkeeper
- Resumed and expanded mission and ministry programs
- Strengthened our financial outlook
- Introduced us to using technology and broadcasting our services live through Zoom and Facebook.

We have also worked to create worship services that incorporated some of each other's traditions while adding new components. The latter has been particularly true of services for Christmas Eve, Holy Week and Pentecost. While most think of themselves as being part of CPCSB - occasionally you will hear references to Faith or Presbyterian Parish. For some it has been difficult to leave the past and some from both churches declared at the outset of the merger that they would not be joining the new church, but for the majority, the merger brought hope and celebration that mission and ministry could thrive.

This is just the beginning of our story. We continue to ask who and what God is calling us to be and do in the Slate Belt of Northeast Pennsylvania. For a detailed church history see Appendix A.

CPCSB Overview

Location

The discovery of slate south of the Blue Mountains and west of the Delaware River in eastern Pennsylvania brought skilled and unskilled workers and their families to the area from Cornwall, England, Italy and Wales. These new Americans established numerous churches in the area and our roots of CPCSB can be found in the Presbyterian and United Church of Christ traditions that were established by these immigrants. They joined the larger group of Pennsylvania German farmers in the region and helped to shape the culture of the Slate Belt.

Today the Slate Belt encompasses northern Northampton County including the communities of Bangor, Roseto, Pen Argyl, Portland, and Wind Gap. We are in

close proximity to the Lehigh Valley, the Pocono Mountains, New York City and Philadelphia as well as the Appalachian Trail. Opportunities for leisure and recreation are plentiful in our area including skiing, hiking, fishing, and hunting.

Within driving distance one can access a variety of arts and humanities programs. Many quality colleges and universities are nearby. Kirkridge Retreat Center, the Columcille and Lake Minsi offer unique opportunities for spiritual renewal.

Demographics

More than 269,000 people were recorded as living within a 15-mile radius of CPCSB in 2022 with the majority of the population being white. Our area has a low poverty rate; however, two of our boroughs have high percentages of working poor who don't qualify for state and/or federal benefits. Much of our population can be classified as empty nesters and retired folk ages 45 and up.

Our membership reflects these trends with the majority of our members being 50 and up, retired, and at this time, all white. See Appendix B for the QuickInsite Report and Appendix C for the Statistical Report.

Economically, the Slate Belt has endured tremendous changes over the last 50 years with the decline of the slate and garment industries which provided employment near where one lived. Today, residents work remotely, drive to nearby industrial parks or work for the local school districts, hospitals, Waste Management or other types of industry.

It is within this setting that God has called us together to serve others as CPCSB. God has truly blessed us with the resources needed to build a new and stronger church that is called to minister to the needs of others. Our congregation looks to the future with optimism and hope as we embrace mission and ministry in our community.

Mission and Ministry in the Slate Belt

Worship: Everything we do stems from worship where we come to praise and glorify God and go out to serve. Our worship seeks to be both inspired and experiential. In our services, we explore our faith to become better witnesses to Jesus' love in our community. A small choir guided by our music director provides inspiration. We also use many artistic components, recognizing that worshipers learn and experience God in different ways. Our worship is offered virtually and in-person.

Building and Grounds: The congregation is richly blessed with a beautiful church building on three acres. Parking is easy and plentiful. Centrally located in the Slate Belt region, the church property is flexible and accessible both inside and outside. The fellowship hall can accommodate many people and contains a working kitchen area. These attributes enable the church to be creative in its programs of worship and its mission efforts. The congregation is only limited by its creativity in developing a spiritually rich and rewarding future.

Currently, we rent a corridor to Children's Garden Preschool at below market rates as well as provide free space for a local Girl Scout Troop. Offering low-cost or no-cost space to the community is a privilege to provide as we ask the question how God is calling us to use our space to serve the community.

Mission Programs: One of the strongest spiritual gifts identified in our congregation is the gift of service, which is defined as the spiritual gift that enables the receiver to work gladly behind the scenes in order that God's work is fulfilled. For our youth assessment, these were the gifts of the hands, the eyes, the ears, the heart and the feet. This is evident in the many mission programs we have undertaken including: a free monthly hospitality lunch; prayer shawl ministry; and, collections of food, toiletries, supplies, paper products, new undergarments, and money. We have also endeavored to establish deeper relationships with local nonprofits including Portland/Upper Mt. Bethel Food Pantry, Hope UCC Food Pantry, Meals on Wheels, Slater Family Network, Families First, Bloom for Women, Recovery Revolution, Sync Recovery and A Clean Slate. We also participate in the PCUSA Special Offerings and the Presbyterian Giving Catalog.

Our Mission Team consistently looks for ways to better know and serve our community, including inviting the local nonprofits to be part of our worship service.

Slate Belt Ministerium: The church is part of the Slate Belt Ministerium, an ecumenical consortium of churches and nonprofits in the area who meet monthly for fellowship, sharing information and hearing from guest nonprofit speakers.

Shared Ministry: In 2021, our pastor had a conversation about confirmation with other Presbyterian pastors who serve within a 15-mile radius. Between four churches we discovered there were nine youth who were ready for confirmation. The decision was made to combine our efforts allowing nine confirmands to

embark on a six-month journey of meeting at each other's churches on a rotating basis, engaging in team-building activities, fellowship and learning and exploring their faith. As a result, they were confirmed on Pentecost 2022. Their favorite thing as reported by them was to visit each other's churches.

From that initial effort, three churches have continued to explore shared ministry resulting in:

- A combined youth group
- Another combined confirmation class for 2022-23
- Advent pulpit exchange
- Rotating Lenten study/supper with 25 to 30 people each session
- Combined Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Good Friday Services
- A Chicken Pot Pie dinner and other social get-togethers
- A quarterly men's lunch

A shared ministry team of pastors and members now meets monthly and has offered the following definition for what such ministry means: "Spreading the good news of the Gospel through experimenting with building relationships across boundaries." A fall series on Living and Dying Well is currently being planned. We are excited to see what directions shared ministry might take us as we explore more deeply the relationship between the involved churches and our Slate Belt community, and hope our new pastor will share that sense of exploration and experimentation.

Leadership Structure: To care for the gifts of property, mission and worship/music, we have established a committee structure for all three. There is a Session of seven with a clerk who is not currently a session member. The Session currently oversees finance and personnel.

Staffing: Church employees include a part-time custodian and administrative assistant, a contract organist and pro-bono music director (it is his tithe). Other property-related services are contracted. An experienced church bookkeeper has also been contracted.

Finances: In 2022, we ran a small surplus and our 2023 budget is on track with expenses and income. As part of the merger, the Faith United building and a tract of land was sold with the majority of that money put into an unrestricted investment. Two other funds are restricted to the cemetery upkeep and building improvements.

Cemetery: The church owns a cemetery in Roseto, PA. The Cemetery caretaker is a member of the church and we are currently exploring better marketing opportunities to continue to sell plots.

Annual Report: See Appendix D for the 2022 Annual Report.

Mission Statement and Values

In 2021, our pastor began a months-long discernment process with the Session and committee chairs to define a new mission statement and values for the church. We spent many meetings asking ourselves questions such as:

- Who is God/Jesus/Holy Spirit to us?
- How do we define church?
- How do we define community?
- Are we inclusive or exclusive?
- What does discipleship mean to us?

As part of this process we involved many other people from the congregation being transparent throughout. From these questions and discussions, we arrived at this statement with supporting rationale and values:

We are called to be love in the world.

Rationale: Just as Jesus was love, we are also sent into the world to be love. We believe this unconditional love saves and heals and so we seek to be a place of love and healing.

Values: Our values align with who we seek to be:

- We believe every person matters regardless of background or status, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation
- We believe we need to meet people where they are not where we think they should be
- We believe that God is inclusive not exclusive
- We believe we need to be non-judgmental, unbiased, affirming, and justice oriented
- We believe that prayer is the foundation of our life together
- We believe that we need to be the best examples of God's love and healing

The results of our efforts were celebrated during a Sunday service in 2022. See Appendix E for the full statement.

Where is God Calling CPCSBB?

As we continue to live out our mission statement in our community, we are grateful for our congregation's spirit of generosity and its enthusiasm to explore and experiment. Foundational to this is our desire to grow in discipleship, building thriving relationships among and beyond our congregation.

Clearly, the congregation seeks to become a greater source of God's love and grace within the community. We continue to search for a greater understanding of Christ through the serious study of the scriptures and increased opportunities to pray and reflect. We know through our research that the top spiritual issue for our community is loneliness and a feeling of disconnection. People of all ages and family structures long for a place in which to belong without judgment. We have begun to ask how God is calling us to address this vitally important spiritual issue.

The congregation yearns for the leadership of a fulltime pastor who has the creativity and passion to build on the spiritual strengths of our people as we continue to discern where God is leading us in the Slate Belt. We hope our new pastor will partner with us in mission and ministry including developing thriving community relationships.

Throughout the merger process and continuing to today, Lehigh Presbytery has provided many resources to us: connecting us to an attorney, working diligently with us on securing a designated pastor, and awarding a five-year grant to support a pastor position as well as a grant to improve our technology. The Presbytery has also provided advice and education on many salient topics, made access to MissionInsite reports possible, highlighted the merger and its positive aftermath at a Presbytery meeting, helped us produce a video about the merger which is currently on our website, and has been available for any and all questions and needs. They are currently assisting us in any way we request in our search for a new pastor.

This supportive relationship that exists between CPCSBB and the Lehigh Presbytery will serve as a source of guidance, structure and prayer as we move forward in seeking our vision for the future.