



*Providence Forge
Presbyterian Church*

Mission Study Report

2021



Mission Study Team Report

Contents

Team Members.....	1
PFPC Mission Statement.....	2
Where is Providence Forge.....	3
Who Were We?	4
Who Are We?	7
Where is God Leading us in the Future?	9
In Conclusion.....	11

Mission Study Team

Team Members

Ruth Adams

Pete Adamson

Chris Christian

Martha Martin

Paul Robinson

Laura Richards

Interim Pastor

Nancy Coleman

Study Time

June 2021 – November 2021

Submitted to PFPC Session

October 17, 2021

Submitted to PFPC Congregation

November 14, 2021

The Mission Study Team thanks the congregation for their valuable input from which this document was created. Without that input, this document would not have been successfully completed.

Mission Statement

To Further God's Kingdom on Earth, One soul at a time.

Vision Statement

Our vision is to be a people who worship the one true God, follow Jesus as He is revealed in the scripture and know ourselves as God's people chosen to share our faith with others. To achieve our vision and answer the Great Commission, (Matthew 28:16-20) we will strive to:

- Further God's kingdom through a vibrant and growing congregation.
- Nurture this congregation through worship, education, fellowship, and support.
- Spread the Word of Christ through outreach and service.
- Engage and enable our youth to secure the future of our faith.

Where is Providence Forge Presbyterian Church?

Providence Forge Presbyterian Church is located in the unincorporated town of Providence Forge, VA in New Kent County, approximately halfway between the cities of Richmond and Williamsburg, Virginia. Each is approximately 25 miles away. It can be accessed from Interstate 64, exit 214, travelling south for approximately 4 miles. The rural crossroads town, with one stoplight at U.S. 60/Route 155, is geographically in the center of the combined two counties of New Kent and Charles City. The counties are geographically approximately the same size, about 200 square miles, but there the similarity ends. Charles City is a more rural county with a population of less than 10,000 and a slower rate of growth, with extensive farming and forestry as primary land uses and rural residential housing. The County is bounded by the historic James River and the Chickahominy River. It has no stoplights and no 4-lane highways.

New Kent lies to the north of Charles City County, and the Church is about ½ mile north of the county line on Townsend Road, just off Primary Route 155. With the second highest growth rate in Virginia, New Kent's diversified population is estimated to be 23,716. New Kent is bounded by the Chickahominy, Pamunkey, and York Rivers. It is accessed from the east and west by both Interstate 64 and U.S. 60, a four-lane divided highway. Both highways extend for approximately 20 miles through the County. New Kent has a variety of housing types in traditional subdivisions and rural residential large lot developments, an abundance of farm and forest land, developing parks and recreation programs, growing business and retail establishments. New Kent's amenities include 4 golf courses, 4 wineries, several campgrounds, and the Colonial Downs Horse Race track. Currently, New Kent has a school system with four facilities (soon to be five) educating over 3,000 students in pre-Kindergarten through grade 12.

The majority of employed residents of Charles City and New Kent commute to jobs in the Richmond area, Williamsburg/Newport News, and Hopewell/Petersburg. These areas are also visited for cultural, professional, and entertainment services and events.

The community is centrally located on the East Coast—it is 2 hours from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, 2 hours from the mountains in western Virginia, and 2 hours from the Atlantic coast beaches. There is easy access by air at 2 international airports (20 and 40 miles away), plus Amtrack Rail and commercial bus service, as well as the previously described highway system.

There are more than 50 churches in New Kent County, serving a variety of faiths and some non-denominational. The nearest Presbyterian Churches are 15 to 30 miles away in adjoining counties.

Who Were We?

The congregation of Providence Forge Presbyterian Church traces its history back to the days of Colonial America. In 1770, Charles Jeffreys Smith, a Presbyterian minister, purchased 500 acres of land and established the village of Providence. This village included a forge, a blacksmith shop, and a sawmill. Smith's home became the manse, and was probably used as a *meeting house*. After the Revolutionary War, Presbyterians began sharing St. Peter's Church with the Episcopalians, alternating Sundays for worship. When the Presbyterians decided they needed space to grow, they purchased land and built Olivet Church in 1856. This church, which included a balcony, could seat 200. This church prospered until the American Civil War broke out in 1861. Then it lost its pastor, who returned to his home in the North, and the Presbyterian Church divided like the nation did. In spite of the occupation of Union troops, Olivet still held services as often as it could and the ladies continued to hold Sunday School on the grounds. After the war, Olivet prospered as a group of German immigrants settled nearby and joined the church. Unfortunately by the late 1880s, the membership at Olivet dropped to 21 and the session was dissolved in 1889. Services did continue, sharing a minister on a rotating basis.

Much of the congregation moved to Townsend's Chapel in Providence Forge due to the poor, swampy roads leading to Olivet. By 1930, the Presbyterians gained clear title to the Chapel, calling it *New Olivet*. By 1934, Olivet had been abandoned as a living church and those left officially moved to Providence Forge. The Chapel burned in 1934 and the congregation met in various places while a new church was built on the site. One minister served two churches in New Kent, Providence Forge and Windsor Shades, and one church in Charles City, Bethany, on a rotating basis until 1953.

Most of the members in the 1930s were people who lived in the Providence Forge area. Sunday School classes met in the various parts of the sanctuary. The congregation suffered through the Great Depression and World War II. In spite of this, the congregation grew and by 1954, it was necessary to add space to PFPC. First, the upstairs was converted into three classrooms and in 1961 a new brick one-story addition, comprised of nine classrooms and two restrooms, was added. Sunday School attendance had reached 100. During these times, Sunday School began in the sanctuary with a scripture reading and hymns. Attendance pins were routinely distributed. The *Workers' Council*, those members charged with taking care of all things related to Sunday School, held an annual picnic at Buckroe Beach and Amusement Park. Later the picnic was held nearby at Harry Mountcastle's pond. The *Council* also provided other entertainment for the children of the church and neighborhood, including parties at Valentine's Day, Easter and Halloween. Vacation Bible School began in 1953. It was held for a week during the day. At Christmas a pageant was presented by the

youth one evening near the 25th and gifts were given to the children, as were oranges and candy. Each child entering the Junior class was given a *Bible*. The *Workers' Council* faded out of existence sometime in the 1960s as one elder was placed in charge of Sunday School and a Superintendent was appointed. as the attendance continued to be near 100 into the 1970s. But attendance started to decline in the late 1980s. By the early 2000s, the session determined that Youth Sunday School would not meet in the summer months, but the adult classes continued to meet.

In spite of the decline in attendance, the Christmas pageant continued, but changed from an evening event to being held during Morning Worship. By 1999, as more and more mothers were working, the annual Vacation Bible School moved to an evening activity, so there would be enough teachers. An adult class was also added. In 1975 Sunshine Nursery School was established to provide pre-school education. Children from around the counties attended. This signaled a change in the congregation as well. The church was no longer just a church of Providence Forge, but its members included residents of all areas of New Kent and from Charles City. In the late 1900s other activities developed for the youth, PFPC fielded a coed softball team in the county youth league. The church continued to sponsor a Boy Scout troop, as it had since 1938. In the 1980s, a Youth Group, led by then pastor Hal Wallof and Joe and Debbie Taylor, was very active going to various places around Virginia. Mission trips with youth and adults participating began as the century closed. This would eventually lead to the establishment in 2009 of PFPC's *In God's Hands Service Camp*, which helped elderly homeowners in New Kent and Charles City.

The congregation of PFPC was very generous. This generosity extended to sponsoring missionaries overseas, sponsoring/mentoring seminary students, providing educational scholarship money to youth of the congregation, collecting money for the hungry (through 2 – 5 cents a meal programs), driving for Meals-on-Wheels, putting together health and school kits, which were distributed through Church World Services, and taking up collections for special causes. The men of the congregation undertook Men's Mission trips for several years. Some believe that the greatest impact that PFPC made on the community was their role in establishing and their continued support of the NK-CC Heritage Library.

For many years during the 20th Century, the Women of the Church were formed in two Circles, the Louise Perry Circle, which met during the day, and the Friendship Circle, which met in the evening. They supported the missions, a child through Christian Children's Fund, and financially adopted a family during Thanksgiving and Christmas. Because of a lack of participation, both Circles have ceased to exist.

When PFPC was first established, the leadership included a Board of Elders and a Board of Deacons. At first there were no terms set for either group. In 1972 terms

were set at 6 years, but in 1985 all were placed on three year terms. In 1995 the congregation made the decision to combine the diaconate and the session into one body.

PFPC continued to have a relationship with Olivet Church. A service is held there on the third Sunday of May. Quite often PFPC's minister officiated at this service. Until recently, PFPC would cancel its service that Sunday. Christmas Eve service has been held there since 1988. Many members of PFPC attend both services whether they have ancestors buried there or not.

People come and stay at PFPC for various reasons. Since 1953, there have been only six full-time pastors and five treasurers. Since 1947, there have been only two long-time organists/choir directors. A vast majority of the congregation has served as a Deacon, Elder, Sunday School teacher, or a member of one committee or another. Not only is it the only Presbyterian Church in New Kent County, it remains small enough to feel like home.

Who Are We?

- The approximate 144 active members of Providence Forge Presbyterian Church:
 - Live in New Kent County in Providence Forge, Quinton, New Kent, Eltham, Lanexa, and in Charles City County, York County, and Williamsburg.
 - Live within 30 miles of the church, while most live within 20 miles.
 - Fall into these age distribution categories:
 - 25 and under—11
 - 26 through 40—19
 - 41 through 55—33
 - 56 through 70—48
 - Over 70—32

- Became members through a variety of ways, including:
 - Being born and raised at PFPC
 - Were raised Presbyterian and upon moving here, wished to continue to worship as Presbyterians
 - Their children attended Sunshine Nursery School and wanted to stay
 - Loving the small church atmosphere

- Believe that Worship, Christian Education, and Fellowship deepen their spiritual life while enjoying Worship and the music and connecting with church family each week.

- Believe that we do a number of things well, including:
 - Worship
 - Worship music
 - Vacation Bible School
 - Fellowship
 - Sunshine Nursery School
 - *In God's Hands Service Camp*
 - Men's Mission
 - Giving to 5 cents a meal program

- Spend at least 1 – 4 hours in the ministries of the church each week.

- Pre-COVID, over 85% of our members attended PFPC between 2 and 4 times a month, while 60% attended nearly every Sunday. The combined average attendance for both services was 100. During COVID close down, services were held on Zoom. Once the church opened, some members continued to attend

service on Zoom, while others attended in-person services. Attendance during the fall 2021 has been 58.

- Many of our members:
 - Volunteer with *In God's Hands Service Camp* and the Men's Mission activities.
 - Teach Sunday School classes and Bible Study Classes.
 - Have invited neighbors and friends to attend PFPC.
 - Have taught at Sunshine Nursery School
 - Volunteer to help with social activities
 - Volunteer to help with the physical operation of the church

- Remain members of PFPC because:
 - The church members have become their second family
 - They enjoy the music of the worship service
 - There is the opportunity to participate in all phases of church life
 - They relate to the sermons

- We are financially responsive to the needs of our church, including
 - Preparing and meeting our budgeted items
 - Supporting local needs
 - Supporting needs of the Presbytery

Where is God Leading us in the Future?

I. The survey of the congregation revealed the following:

1. We are a community church
 - We welcome visitors and new members
 - We are supporting and loving to all who enter our doors
 - We embrace and desire to maintain the character of a small community church
2. We are a traditional church
 - We wish to keep the 11AM service a traditional service
 - We believe in providing a strong scripture-based worship service
 - We support having the choir continue to be an integral part of worship
 - We honor the history of the church
3. We believe our church is a gathering place
 - Fellowship opportunities are one of the highest priorities for our congregation
 - Support exists for large and small groups to use the church facilities
 - We want PFPC and its facilities to be a prominent part of the community and therefore offer our facilities to outside groups such as AA and Woman's Clubs
4. We believe our church is a teaching place
 - We provide adult and youth Sunday School classes and child care during worship service
 - Vacation Bible School teaches our youth and community youth
 - We provide additional Adult Bible Studies throughout the week
 - Sunshine Nursery School teaches our youngest Christians and has for 45 years
5. We are a serving church
 - We do mission work within our community
 - We support community charities and people in need, regardless of any connection to PFPC
 - Members and leadership actively participate in community activities
6. We desire to have a full time pastor who
 - lives in the community and maintains regular office hours
 - provides strong Biblical based sermons
 - has good communication skills
 - engages the members of the congregation to be involved in ways they are most comfortable

- has the skills and desire to work with youth, build our youth program, and provide support to Sunshine Nursery School
- will help grow our congregational membership

II. Challenges and Recommendations that currently face our church include:

1. Improvement of a centralized network of communications between
 - Session and congregation
 - Committees and congregation
 - i. Committees need to share meeting dates and welcome new attendees
 - ii. Better advertising for events/mission work/Bible Studies
2. Facilities
 - Our current facilities need to be enhanced if we are to remain here
 - The use, development, or disposal of the Pocahontas Trail Property needs to be considered, decided, articulated, and executed
3. Membership
 - Need to develop a plan to attract and retain new members
 - Develop leaders among all members (specifically for Youth, Bible Studies leaders, and Outreach)
 - Need to discover why members left and develop a plan to do self-evaluation
4. Spiritual growth
 - Evaluate and expand our Christian Education class offerings
 - Focus our Pastor search on one who provides spiritual guidance through energetic, Biblically-based sermons
5. Youth
 - Develop a comprehensive plan for the administration of our Youth program, including procedural guidance, leadership succession, and other volunteer support necessary to properly serve this important segment of our Church community
6. Community
 - Increase our community outreach for both mission involvement and for growing our congregation
 - Identify opportunities and provide assistance to community members along with members of the congregation
7. Finances
 - Session needs to clearly communicate to the membership the status of church finances including costs and expenses of church operation

In Conclusion

Beliefs of the Mission Study Team

The congregation supports and works to maintain the character of a small church with a traditional worship service and will be looking for a pastor to lead that service. The members support growth but lack the leadership and skill set to facilitate growth in membership.

As with many smaller organizations with broad service missions and objectives, much work falls on a relatively small base of member volunteers. We support and want growth in our congregation, but need pastoral or other professional assistance to effect growth in our membership, as well as ongoing guidance and support in the development of leadership and volunteers to conduct all committee activities.

We encourage all members to participate at some level in all PFPC activities as we continue to explore pathways to reach out to others and support each other in our walk of faith.