

Venice Presbyterian Church Mission Study

4244 Layhigh Rd
Fairfield OH 45014

**Prepared by Mission Study Team
12/1/2015**

Introduction	2
Origin of Venice Presbyterian	2
Church Demographics	4
Community Demographics	4
Resources	5
Finances	7
Leadership	7
Congregational Survey	8
Vision for Ministry	10
Potential Landscape Improvements	15
Church General Assembly Report	21

Introduction

In March, 2015, a Mission Study Team was called to research and study who we are and where we are going as Venice Presbyterian Church. The study is used as a beginning for the process of finding a pastor of call. From this we can form a Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC), and begin our search. The Mission Study Team is comprised of the following members: Donna Marsh, Kathy Mienheartt, Sue Toler, and Dan Young. Along with input from Interim Pastor, Janet Dillaman, the church's boards, the congregation, and God's vision, we begin our task.

Pastor Janet Dillaman came to us as interim pastor in August, 2012. With a change to the Presbyterian by-laws, an interim pastor can now be considered as an installed position. Before a full time pastor can be called, we must, as a congregation, go through a time of reflection for our church now and our vision for the future. This reflection was started with a survey distributed to members of the congregation. Questions included what we see as qualities needed for a good pastor, strengths and weaknesses of our church, our outreach to the community, and our vision for the future.

The responses to the survey have been an aid to where we go from here. With this feedback and the cooperation of the congregation, we can act upon God's plan for us.

Origin of Venice Presbyterian – 1823 through 1900

For several years after the village of Venice had been laid out in 1817, and a number of homes had been built, religious services were held in the log schoolhouses, but a desire for a church building and a real church home was manifested in the hearts of a few of the religiously inclined citizens, and plans were soon formalized.

In 1826 Abner Lutes donated an acre of land for this purpose and a two-story brick building was erected, almost on the same site as that of the present edifice. A gallery ran around three sides of the interior, and the choir sat in the back part of the church.

The Venice Presbyterian Church came into being through the efforts of the Rev. Thomas Thomas. He was born in Wem, Shropshire, England, in 1777, of

Welsh parentage. When he was about twenty-six years old, a London philanthropist sent him to Hoxton Academy, preparatory to entering the Gospel ministry. In 1818, he and his wife and five children sailed from Liverpool to America. After enduring many dangers and hardships they reached Cincinnati. In 1820 he moved his family to the Welsh settlement of Paddy's Run, now called Shandon, where a congregation of "independents" had gathered, and over which he became pastor. He remained there for eight years, until he became the first pastor of the Venice Presbyterian Church.

On October 5, 1830, the congregation had made arrangements for the purchase of a house for the parsonage of Rev. Thomas. Rev. Thomas did not get to enjoy the use of the parsonage for very long, however, as he died in October, 1831. In December the Rev. Samuel Smith was sent as a replacement.

About this time the church was changed from the Cincinnati Presbytery to the Oxford Presbytery, and subsequently to the Dayton Presbytery, and then in 1875 was again admitted to the Cincinnati Presbytery.

In 1839 there was a new church building erected. Then in 1856, a larger building was erected.

There is no reference in the church records to the stand the church took in the Civil War, but there must have been sympathy for the plight of the slaves. The Treasurer's report shows frequent contributions to the Freedman's Society.

The Session voted to use unfermented wine for communion in March, 1892. There seemed to be great stress placed on temperance during this period for at the September 3 Session meeting, it was announced that they would comply with the action of the General Assembly in observing the third Sabbath of September as Temperance Day. Nevertheless, the most frequent offence of the church members appeared to be intemperance.

By 1894 the women of the church had three organizations: Home and Foreign Mission Society, The Industrial Society, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

At the turn of the century, the communicant members totaled 125 and the Sabbath School membership was listed as 190.

Church Demographics

Venice Presbyterian Church currently has 124 members. Sixty-three percent are over the age of 55, 4 percent between the ages of 45 and 55, and 33 percent are 45 and younger. Our current average weekly attendance is about 70. We offer many Christian education programs for our members: Adult Sunday school currently averages about 10; Junior church, 6; Wednesday night Bible study, 8; Thursday morning Bible study, 10; Youth group, 6; Women's group, 20; and Men's group, 5. Our Vacation Bible School (VBS) is widely received in the community, and we average about 90 children age four through 6th grade. There are also about 15 middle school and high school students who participate in VBS as leaders. We have a choir consisting of 12 members led by a very talented choir director.

Community Demographics

The village of Ross, OH has a population of approximately 3,500. Ross is located in Butler County (population 386,000) and is a suburb of the city of Cincinnati (population 2,130,000). Cincinnati area temperatures include an average high of 88 degrees in July and an average low of 22 degrees in January. Cincinnati has an annual average precipitation of 44 inches of rainfall and 17 inches of snowfall.

Ross, OH is located approximately 25 miles from downtown Cincinnati and 32 miles from the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport.

Ross Township residents have a median age of 37.8 years. 61% are married and the average household size is 2.65 members. There are approximately 6,300 housing units. The median household income is \$63,000 and the median value of owner-occupied homes is \$173,000. Homeownership rate is 72%.

18.1% of Ross School District residents hold at least a bachelor's degree. Ross is served by four highly-rated public schools – Elda Elementary (K-4), Morgan Elementary (Preschool-4), Ross Middle School (5-8) and Ross High School (9-

12). All four schools are highly rated with Morgan and Ross Middle earning an Excellent rating and Elda and Ross High earning a School of Distinction and Excellent rating from the State of Ohio.

Some of the major employers in the Cincinnati metropolitan area are the Kroger Company – 17,000; University of Cincinnati – 15,000; The Procter & Gamble Company – 14,000; Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center– 12,000, and TriHealth Inc. – 10,000.

Many cultural activities are available to Ross area residents, including Cincinnati Reds and Bengals, Hueston Woods State Park, Kings Island Amusement Park, and Brookville Lake, as well as ballet, opera, museums, symphony and theaters.

The Ross Township area has a diverse group of churches. In addition to Venice Presbyterian Church are First Baptist Church of Ross, Ross Community United Methodist, St. Aloysius Catholic Church, Ross Christian Church, White Oak Christian Church and Shandon Congregational Church of Christ.

Also conveniently located near Ross are major shopping areas, hospitals, parks, and public libraries.

Resources

The congregation of Venice Presbyterian Church is very fortunate to be able to worship in a historic sanctuary built in 1856. The sanctuary has been renovated several times, but still has a historic flavor to its décor. The sanctuary is handicapped accessible by way of an elevator that is easily accessed in the lower and upper foyers. The sanctuary has an electronic organ that was donated by one of the current church families. Though not a pipe organ, it can truly fill the sanctuary with its fullness in tone and volume. We are also very fortunate to have a grand piano in the sanctuary. Both instruments are used regularly for worship services. The sanctuary seats approximately two hundred and has a cry room for infants. The pews are padded and include newly placed, updated hymnals and Bibles for the congregation. This modern, but historic country church sanctuary, is available to its members and the community for worship services, weddings and other events. The restrooms of the sanctuary and foyer area are pending a make-

over. This make-over construction will be a major project for the church and will take quite a bit of planning.

The interior weekly maintenance of the sanctuary is taken care of by a custodian hired by the church. The exterior of the church has been maintained by the Board of Trustees. Some of the more recent maintenance projects were to seal the exterior surface of the bricks and paint the steeple and exterior doors and windows with a Rhino Shield coating. The original steeple houses speakers for a carillon system that plays each evening and chimes on the hour. The carillon system was recently upgraded to a computerized system that offers a wide variety of music.

Fellowship hall: The church fellowship hall is located on the first floor under the sanctuary. This space is a large room with a full kitchen attached. The fellowship hall is home to a pre-school program that has been a main stay in the town of Ross since 1979. There are approximately seventy five children attending on a yearly basis. The fellowship hall is also used by AA, NA, and a church sponsored Boy Scouts of America Troop 923 for their weekly meetings. Potluck dinners, a choir sponsored spaghetti dinner and special liturgical gatherings make this area an integral part of the church. This area is also available for other community events and personal use.

Christian Education building: This facility was built in 1957 and is attached to the sanctuary by way of stairs leading up to the sanctuary and by a hallway in the rear of the sanctuary. The rooms upstairs have served as Sunday school classrooms, meeting rooms, and are currently used for the choir and a meeting room. The downstairs rooms have served as Church offices and a nursery. Nursery care is provided at each service. The other rooms downstairs are being re-purposed as the offices have moved to a newly re-furbished parsonage.

Church annex: The annex, as it is now called, was a parsonage for the pastor and his family. It is a two story brick home with a large first floor living room currently used for a multi-functional gathering space. It also provides a room for the adult Sunday school class, meeting room for various church boards and gathering space for a coffee discussion group. The first floor also houses the office for the church secretary and treasurer. The upstairs rooms are used as the pastor's office, youth director's office, and a youth room. The annex has a full basement which is used for storage. The annex was refurbished by funds from a memorial account in 2014.

The church has plenty of parking. Parking lots in the front and back are easily accessible from all area roads. The church owns an additional building lot connected to the rear parking lot. This property was purchased several years ago as an area of future growth for the church.

Finances

The current financial status of the church is delicately stable. As seen in our most current budget analysis, our monthly budget is met. However, to meet some of the larger monthly requirements, we have had to transfer earnings from our investment funds to meet current needs. We are fortunate to have these funds to rely on for major improvements as well as meeting current expenditures when needed. These funds are managed by an investment committee of church members. Monthly reports are given to the Trustees of the current status of the funds. The church treasurer is a member of this committee and the one that gives the monthly reports. The committee is very careful not to use the principle of the accounts. Only interest earned is used for emergency funding. The Session and the Trustees are given a monthly budget report and the Session oversees all financial responsibilities of that budget.

Leadership

We are served by a full time interim pastor, a part-time secretary, a part-time choir director and musician, a part-time youth and young adult director, and a part-time custodian. Our Session is comprised of nine members. The Session committees are Outreach, Mission, Stewardship, Christian Education, Personnel, Parish Life, Nominating, Worship, and Clerk. The Board of Trustees is comprised of six members and include a President, Vice President, Secretary, Indoor Facility Coordinator and Outdoor Facility Coordinator. The Board of Deacons is comprised of nine members who manage Ushers/Greeters, Community Needs, Sunshine, Coffee Hour/Kitchen Supplies, Nominating, Budget, and a Moderator.

Communication between the boards, especially Trustees and Session, is paramount. We have been making special efforts to make sure communication lines are open. Highlights of the three board meetings are

published in our monthly newsletter as a way to communicate with the congregation.

Congregational Survey

As part of our mission study, our congregation was asked to participate in a survey to gather critical data for our five year plan for leadership and vision. There were 41 completed surveys returned, and the results have been compiled and are shown below. The first question dealt with the qualities we feel are important in a pastor. There were 21 qualities listed, and participants were asked to rate each one based on their importance with #1 being most important, #2 of medium importance, and #3 for least important.

The second question dealt with our church’s current strengths and weaknesses. 13 areas were listed, and participants were asked to rate each one as either a current strength or weakness. While most people feel we have many strengths, there are a few areas that need to be addressed – most importantly communication. We will be working on addressing these areas.

The third question was about what makes up a healthy congregation. There were 14 areas, and participants were asked to determine whether or not they felt each was important. While many of the areas are seen as highly important, some of the highest ranking dealt with youth – primarily the youth program, junior church, and Vacation Bible School.

The fourth question asked where our participants would like to see our church in five years. Outreach to fill membership and outreach/mission work ranked the highest.

Below is a summary of all the results. These survey responses will be used by our church leadership and the Mission Study Team to move toward the pastoral nominating process and our church’s future.

<u>What qualities do you feel are important in a pastor?</u>	<u>Most Important</u>	<u>Medium Importance</u>	<u>Least Important</u>
	<u>#1</u>	<u>#2</u>	<u>#3</u>
Experience	19%	50%	31%
Spirituality	74%	20%	6%
Preaches and lives the Bible	86%	14%	0%
Knows and teaches scripture with interesting sermons	89%	11%	0%

Combines history of the Bible with application to today's world	80%	17%	3%
Dedicated leader	86%	11%	3%
Morale builder with a healing patient personality	57%	29%	14%
Resolves conflicts calmly and efficiently	57%	40%	3%
Caring, compassionate	72%	28%	0%
Good listener	82%	18%	0%
Friendly	72%	25%	3%
Sense of humor	39%	47%	14%
Communicates well with church boards	75%	19%	6%
Communicates well with congregation	86%	14%	0%
Works well with church staff	77%	17%	6%
Reaches out to the ill, shut-ins, those in need	81%	19%	0%
Supports the Preshcool	50%	44%	6%
Reaches out and becomes involved in the community	50%	44%	6%
Creates and encourages group Bible study	47%	44%	8%
Encourages congregational feedback and participation	69%	31%	0%

What do you see as strengths/weaknesses of our church?

	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Weakness</u>
Pastoral leadership	74%	26%
Historic congregation & building	95%	5%
Friendly congregation	87%	13%
Strong music department	92%	8%
Christian Education	63%	37%
Preschool	100%	0%
Community outreach	62%	38%
Youth Group	84%	16%
Communication among boards	21%	79%
Communication between boards & congregation	22%	78%
Communication between pastor & boards	55%	45%
Financially sound/debt reduction	54%	46%
Use of facility for outreach groups	91%	9%

What do you feel is important for a healthy congregation?

	<u>% of respondents selecting item as important</u>
Pastoral leadership between boards & members	88%
Youth group program and leaders	100%
Healthy music department	83%
Preschool program	75%

Outreach to the community-evangelism-programs such as RAMM, Back to School Picnic, Choice Pantry	96%
Junior Church, Sunday School	100%
Friendly, welcoming church family	100%
Fellowship-family nights, picnics, coffee hour, Gotta Eat Club	79%
Vacation Bible School	96%
Facilities	50%
Mission outreach to the community	92%
Bible study -day & evening classes	50%
Congregational growth	88%
Address financial issues	75%

What would you like to see for our church five years from now?

	<u>% of respondents selecting item</u>
Outeach to fill membership goals	92%
Community meeting place for organizations	61%
Multipurpose center to encourage awareness of our church - Meeting place for seniors, singles, sporting activities	50%
Multi services	19%
Outreach/Mission work	81%

Vision for Ministry

Reaching God through: Enrichment, Education and Extending Our Hands

Goals:

To enrich our congregation and community through dynamic worship and fellowship and to provide a place for community gathering.

To provide resources and facilities for education within our church family and community.

To extend our hands in compassion and mission through creative use of time, talents, and gifts.

Objectives:

To enrich our congregation and community through dynamic worship and fellowship and to provide a place for community gathering.

- Maintain and diversify our traditional worship with new music and the use of technology.
- Provide spiritual and intellectual enrichment for all ages through preaching, teaching, and mission.
- Welcome all people by providing facilities for meetings, gatherings, education, and fellowship.
- Publicize through social media the availability of the Fellowship hall for community meetings and other events.
- Develop and begin to implement new landscaping and signage.

To provide resources and facilities for education within our church family and community.

- Strengthen and equip our membership to lead and contribute, resulting in improved and increased stewardship of time, talent, commitment, and resources.
- Maintain and develop opportunities for spiritual and personal growth.
- Continue efforts to update resources and facilities to create a modern country church environment.
- Participate in annual community worship services such as Thanksgiving, Good Friday, Easter, and Memorial Day.
- Improve internal communication through newsletters, e-mail, telephone chains, and personal contacts.

To extend our hands in compassion and mission through creative use of time, talents, and gifts.

- Establish a place in which to welcome, listen, comfort, and encourage our neighbors and ourselves in seeking faith and purpose.
- Provide opportunities for involvement in local missions – Ross and Morgan Ministries (RAMM), Matthew 25 worldwide disaster relief, Haven House shelter, Community Meal Center, One Way Farm children’s shelter, and church food pantry.
- Participate in Presbytery missions such as One Great Hour of Sharing.
- Maintain and update social media presence with our website and facebook page which provides links to RAMM, food pantry, prayer requests, preschool, and Bible study.

- Strengthen our traditional community presence through Vacation Bible School, Country Christmas luncheon and craft show, Rummage Sale, and Choir Spaghetti Supper

Potential Landscape Improvements

In looking toward our future, a Landscape Committee was formed to generate possibilities and varying ideas for consideration. The committee members are Tad Adams, Becky Berling, and Lee Steenken.

VPC Landscaping - Preliminary Thoughts and Possibilities

Goals:

To increase the church's presence and recognition in the community as a focus for community gathering and fellowship, as well as a place of worship, by:

- Offering appealing spaces of varying character, atmosphere, and sizes that can accommodate larger and smaller events and activities from festival size through personal contemplation.
- Maintaining the historical character while accommodating contemporary needs and expectations.
- Drawing people into the church itself by clearly identifying and highlighting the entry areas as well as optimizing both vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow.

Consider handicapped accessibility

Consider impact of probable future facilities expansion

Outdoor Functions, Activities, and Events:

Larger Scale:

- VPC/community rummage sales
- Parade marshalling area
- Charity running events
- Community or VPC festivals
- VPC picnics
- VPC games/sports:
 - Turf area – corn hole, horseshoes, volleyball, badminton, croquet, portable mini-golf
 - Solid surface – basketball

- Blessing of the Animals service
- Musical events/concerts

Smaller Scale:

- Study groups
- Lunch/small picnics
- Personal contemplation, i.e. prayer labyrinth
- Concerts
- Small conversation groupings
- Wedding photo shoots

Miscellaneous:

- Youth garden plot to grow food for needy
- Community bulletin board
- Community water fountain

Potential Landscape Design: