

Dunnellon Presbyterian Church Plan for “Setting Our Sails” synopsis

For the past year, the Session has been discussing the need to establish a new strategic direction for the **Dunnellon Presbyterian Church**.

Many mainline churches in America, including the Presbyterian USA, have experienced financial and membership challenges over the last ten plus years. The situation has been exacerbated by the economic collapse of the last few years.



Churches with historic buildings like ours have the challenge of current and deferred maintenance costs, and in some cases, preservation. As the demographics of the church change, ministry and program needs and opportunities require reconfiguration, renovation and/or retrofit of facility and space assets.

More than one-third of the membership is 62 years or older, whereas young adults 25-45 make up less than 20% of our membership. Based on these statistics, our membership is stagnant and our financial base is insufficient.

First of all, we need to look at the current situation for our Dunnellon Presbyterian Church:

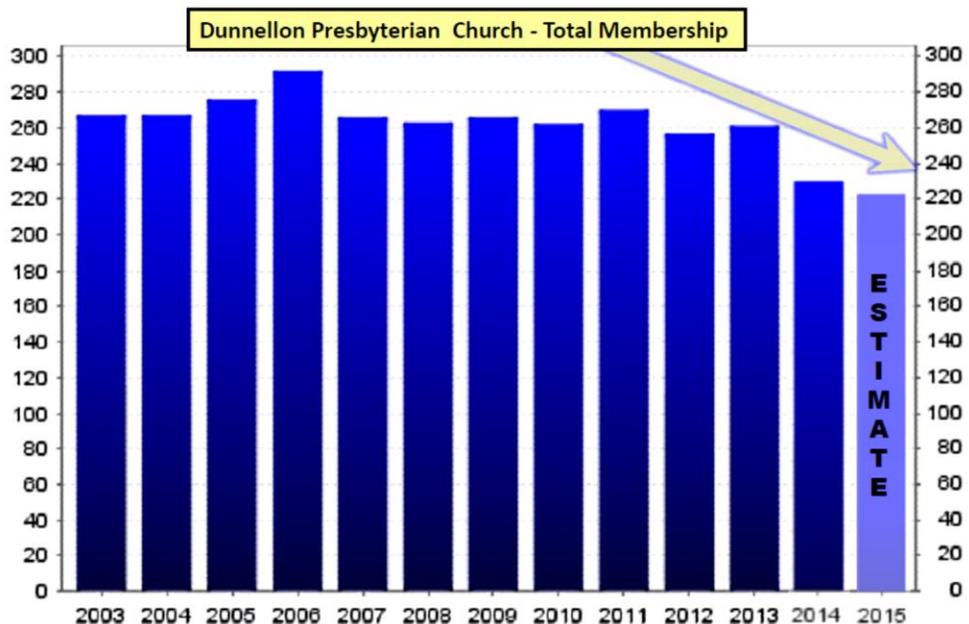
To do this, we’re going to use the Presbytery’s “Ten Year Trends” information to guide our inquiry:

1. **Congregation numbers** – Church Membership
2. **Financial situation**, and
3. **The Need for Change** (Not change from our strengths, but adapting for the future and growth?)

Congregation numbers – Church Membership

After a surge in 2004 and 2005, membership had typically been steady until the last few years.

2015 and 2016 has seen a decrease in membership for various reasons which cause us to ask several key questions as to why this has happened.



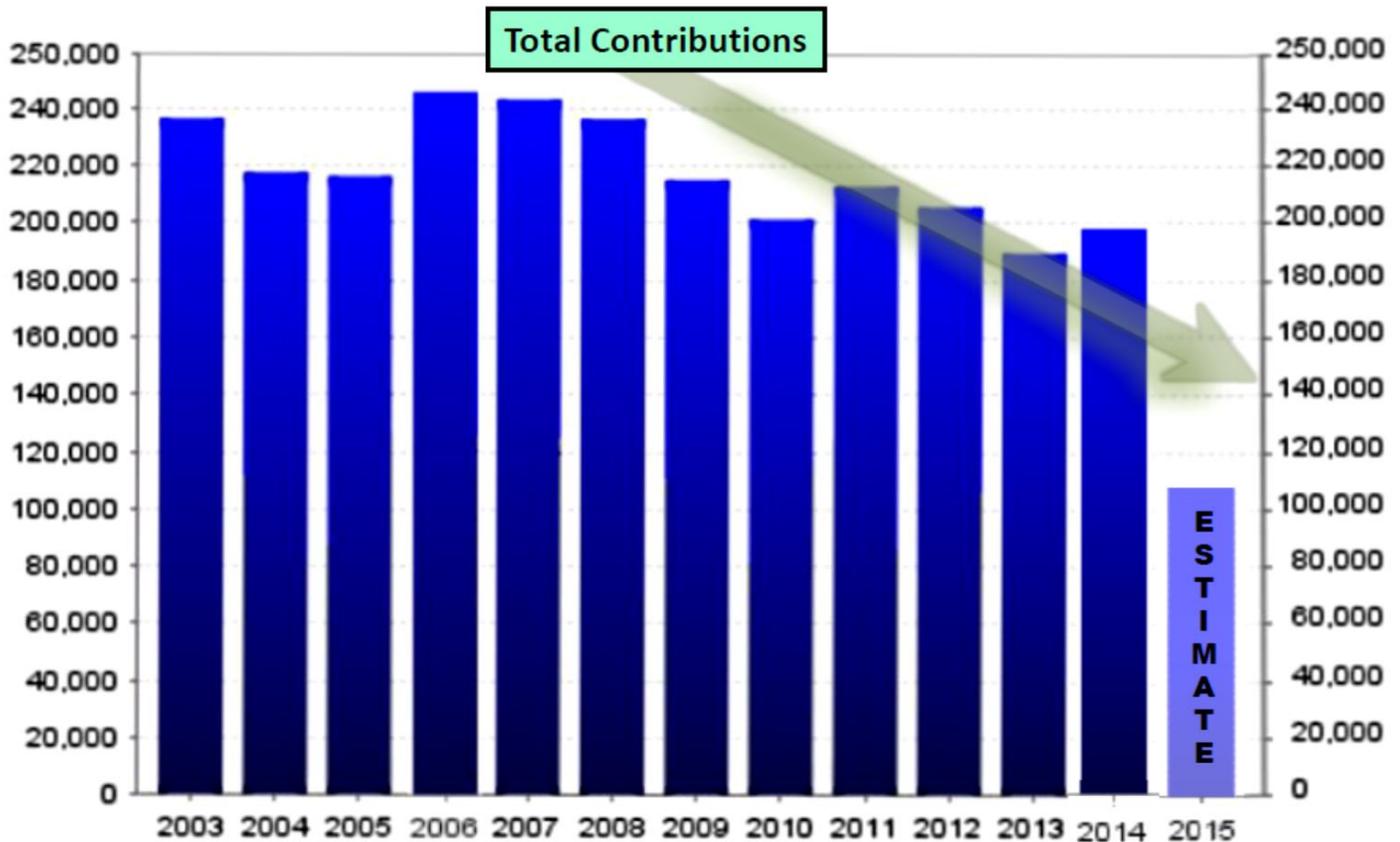
KEY QUESTIONS:

- *What is the relationship between total losses and total gains in our congregation?*
- *Have membership gains been large enough to offset membership losses?*
- *What type of gains are characteristic of our congregation?*
- *What type of losses are characteristic of our congregation?*
- *What steps can our congregation take to increase membership gains and to decrease membership losses?*
- *Is our congregation's worship attendance increasing or decreasing?*
- *What is the ratio of our worship attendance to our membership (i.e., is it above or below the current average of 50%)?*
- *How would you describe the people who regularly attend worship services?*

Church Financial Situation

KEY QUESTIONS:

- *What are the significant trends in our congregation's contributions?*



- *Given this era of intergenerational transfer of wealth, how can our congregation increase the number of bequests?*
- *What factors are influencing the congregation's investment income?*
- *What is the level of our congregation's giving to mission?*
- *Has mission giving increased or decreased as a percentage of all contributions or expenditures?*

The Need for Change

Essentially, there are two options identified for the future open to America's traditional mainline churches:

1. Remain a Sunday/unilateral church whose focus is on success measured by attendance at Sunday worship OR
2. Make a paradigm shift to a "multichannel" church that is intentionally inclusive and encourages widespread participation in multiple forms of worship, education, mission and gathering. We believe *remaining a Sunday unilateral church will result in an inward-looking, declining and further aging congregation.*

Learning from our own research and the insights into church member's comments, this plan will embody the following principles:

1. That the Church should build on what we have learned by making the paradigm shift to a church that fully reclaims the values of a movement, and that...
2. We should attempt to become a church that embraces change and seeks creative ways to grow disciples... Helping people deepen their faith in a rapidly changing, and spiritually challenging world.
Why... You might ask?

In essence, based on our review of national analysis of ecumenical faiths, it is apparent that strategic change will be necessary for mainline churches such as ours to survive, much less flourish.

To survive in our economic situation, Congregations will need to be...

- ***Relational,***
- ***Encouraging, and***
- ***Flexible,***
- ***Forward-thinking.***

How will we accomplish this? We propose that we will:

- **LISTEN and RESPOND** - communicate with members and friends in ways that draw them into our congregation and give them a real sense of belonging
- **CONNECT and ENGAGE** - make it easy to be engaged in the work and worship of the church
- **GROW and BECOME** – be more intentional about welcoming new people into our congregation while nurturing and retaining existing members
- **MEASURE and SUPPORT** - live the best practices of accountability, transparency, generosity, financial planning, maintenance and flexibility of facilities and organizational effectiveness
- **LEAD and TRANSFORM** – carry out ministry in multichannel ways providing a variety of options for worship, gathering, education, sharing, outreach and spiritual formation.

Implementation and Timeline

Implementation of this plan requires commitment from the Session, other leaders - current and future and staff. Accountability is linked to implementation.

Upon adoption of this plan by the Session, the **Session** will have worked itself out of a job. We propose that operation of the plan be coordinated by an Implementation Team, appointed by Session. The Team will be composed of a combination of Strategic Planning members, for continuity, and others with leadership and organizational talent (for example First Wave participants who embraced the assignment).

We strive for both accountability and flexibility in implementation of this plan. Much of the detail will evolve since we are treading new ground. Our aim is that this plan will set the stage for leaders, staff and congregation to think strategically – an approach that emphasizes methods, learning and results.

As noted by Dr. Deborah Coe of the Presbyterian Mission Agency...

The Top 10 Characteristics of Thriving Congregations include:

10. *Are not afraid to try something new*
9. *Understand and use systems thinking*
8. *Have a strong congregational identity*
7. *Have moved into the 21ST Century*
6. *Support new worshiping communities such as minority or immigrant fellowships.*
5. *Have leadership that fits, and a healthy organizational structure*
4. *Help people become better disciples*
3. *Have inspiring worship*
2. *Friendliness... And the number 1 characteristic is:*
 - 1 *Being a congregation that is Looking Outward ... Not "Inward Looking."*

The primary question for each of us, and for all of us together, is ...

How we are we going to respond to the challenges ahead?

It helps to remember that what might have been in the past, or appear to be stumbling blocks...
May turn out to be stepping-stones!

It helps even more for us to realize that we do not face these challenges alone.

God is with us, gathering and guiding us in company with the whole people of God.

Never-the-less, the future of the
Dunnellon Presbyterian Church...

It is up to US...

As we attempt to change...

To the Church we want to become!



Thriving Congregations: What Are They Doing Right?

Big Tent 2015 workshop

Deborah Coe, Ph.D.

Research Services

Presbyterian Mission Agency

presbyterianmission.org/research