

**LAS PLACITAS PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**

MISSION STUDY

2009

INTRODUCTION

The Mission Study Task Force (MSTF) was created in the spring of 2009. The purpose was to review the history, current status and the future vision of the membership discerned in a prayerful process to define the “story” that Las Placitas Presbyterian Church (LPPC) tells about itself. The effort will help to establish the characteristics and the vision to guide the new pastor to lead LPPC in fulfilling its destiny and aid the Pastor Nominating Committee to fulfill its mission.

However, the process started a long time before the MSTF was established. In the spring of 2008 leaders of LPPC gathered for “Vision” meetings of what the church should become. Dispersed into six tables dreams were dreamed. In this process there was a strong calling to reach out to the Village of Placitas with a food bank program and make the village the major outreach mission. Other areas included emphasis on youth and LPPC’s continued growth as the community’s base and spiritual center. Poverty, environmental and social issues also had high priority. Additional visioning information was gathered through a series of meetings entitled “Coffee And Conversation”.

A second effort, that lasted the rest of 2008 and well into 2009, was to determine LPPC’s current status and projected needs. This was accomplished through a series of task forces that continuously interfaced with the congregation to solicit opinions. There was a Communications and Technology TF to review and correct, as much as possible, communications between the membership and within the physical church. A second TF addressed the appropriate organizational structure for LPPC. Committees/groups were clustered into three core areas with Elders and Deacons acting as liaisons to ensure a coordinated effort. A third TF addressed the long-term needs of grounds and building maintenance. The fourth addressed stewardship.

The MSTF met from May through September 2009. The members were assigned the following tasks: summarize LPPC’s history; define the demographics of the greater Placitas area and within the church, and structure and administer a survey, entitled “What Makes LPPC be LPPC”, to small groups, followed by a discussion on the results to define major themes.

From these various activities the following major themes emerged:

1. LPPC is a unique community (heritage/ setting/ identity)
2. LPPC is diverse and inclusive
3. LPPC holds worship and music in high regard
4. LPPC has a heart for mission
5. LPPC has a strong sense of community
6. LPPC supports its youth and families

Using all of the information from the visioning meetings, task forces, congregational survey, demographics, LPPC's history, and the major themes the mission statement was created.

The attachments contain detailed results at various points of the effort outlined above. Included are more expansive demographics, more details concerning Casa Rosa Food Bank, detailed results of the various task forces and the visioning session.

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LPPC HISTORY (1894-2009)

Las Placitas Presbyterian Church is unusual in many ways, but perhaps most especially in that it was an exclusively Spanish speaking church for more than half of its long history. The transition from a Hispanic mother tongue and cultural tradition to the present day bilingual and multi-cultural complexion of the congregation has not always been easy. But a recurring theme in its history is the congregation's ability to adapt to change and to embrace new populations, new missions and new challenges. Even so, LPPC holds dear and continues to celebrate its Hispanic heritage.

Early church history is necessarily linked with the history of the original land grant families and their struggle to preserve their lands granted by the King of Spain. Some of those families were responsible for bringing Presbyterianism to this tiny village. The Presbyterians in turn brought the outside world in the form of teachers, education, new opportunities beyond those of the formerly self-sufficient, farm based economy.

One downside of the opening up of Placitas to the outside world was the exposure to wars, depressions, and claims on the younger generations. Many descendants of the founding families left to serve in the military and to find work outside the village and deeply held conservative traditions began to fray. New Anglo Americans moved in to enjoy the peaceful valleys of Placitas. As depopulation increasingly impacted the founding families of LPPC, new families arrived to stake their claim on the little Presbyterian Church in the village. Financial realities and changing demographics led to major adjustments on everyone's part.

Having grown throughout its early history as a mission church under the Board of National Mission, Las Placitas Presbyterian Church became, with her sister church in Alameda, independent and self-sufficient on January 1, 1963. A wrenching change for the old timers came with the introduction of the Presbyterian wide system of rotating Elders. Gentlemen who had held these prestigious positions for a lifetime were now expected to make room for newcomers. Pastors who came to serve Las Placitas in the 50s and 60s were known to switch back and forth between Spanish and English during worship, depending on which members of the congregation showed up. Unfortunately it was increasingly difficult to find Spanish-speaking pastors at all. Increasingly, retirees from Albuquerque filled the pews as well as new arrivals that had moved to Placitas as a bedroom community, and even a few "flower children" from nearby hippie communes.

Clearly, the Placitas church was experiencing many of the cultural upheavals that had disturbed the wider communities. Yet, the congregation survived, adapted, grew, and continued to preserve its cherished traditions.

In 1971, LPPC independently called its first half-time pastor, who moved to the village. In 1980, its first full-time pastor was called. Recognizing the necessity of congregational growth for financial sustainability, he led the church in its first major building expansion since the 1930s. The new sanctuary built in large part by volunteer labor from the congregation and financed in part by community enchilada dinners, soon led to many positive changes for LPPC. The church was now able to host a Mother's Day Out program, community meetings such as homeowners' associations, AA, cub scouts, as well as a new and exciting music and arts program known as The Placitas Artists Series.

Newcomers to Placitas were consistently finding occasion to visit the church, and many of them began to attend services. Membership grew as well as financial stability.

All this was not always easy for the old timers. As Suzanne Forrest, in her book Century of Faith said, "...growth meant mainly bad things" to folks who had lived through the challenging changes of the last decades in Placitas. Growth might mean the "...loss of intimacy...cohesion...connectedness...sense of being a family." Yet, the church has adapted and continues to thrive as in the past.

More recently, LPPC expanded its building again. It now has a five-day Mother's Day Out program in the new nursery, new Christian education rooms, offices, choir rooms, expanded kitchen facilities and space for its visual art shows. Since the church is now able to afford paid professionals, there is less reliance on volunteer efforts for such roles as choir director, accompanist and office staff.

New programs have blossomed as new folks brought new ideas for its Christian mission. The Session signed an "Earth Covenant" and committed to environmental stewardship. Casa Rosa Food Bank now serves the needy in the community. Adult Christian education nearly every Sunday seeks to widen horizons and open hearts and minds to new ideas and commitments. There is a beautiful Memorial Garden, columbarium and a Jubilee Garden for the dedicated gardeners in our midst.

The church continues to embrace and celebrate its diversity in all its modern connotations including cultural-ethnic, sexual orientation, and political point of view. While fundamentally Presbyterian, Las Placitas welcomes members and friends of many different religious backgrounds.

In addition to the above-cited book about LPPC history, the church maintains in its library a rich collection of photographs, videotapes and audiotapes of its activities over several past decades. Newcomers have become old-timers and increasingly enjoy the sense of being a part of the rich tapestry of LPPC history.

LPPC & COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

This discussion is based on data in the Precept composite from the 1990-2006 U.S. Census Bureau data and from congregational surveys.

The people of the greater Placitas Community served by LPPC are older and have a higher income than the national average. The majority of the household heads in the community and LPPC are professional or white-collar workers. LPPC members are more likely to have bachelors or higher degrees, with 47% having advanced degrees. Because the makeup of the LPPC membership includes many retirees and low-income families, the approximate average income of church members is lower than the community average. Residents of the Village of Placitas (where the church is located) have greater concern about meeting basic needs than does the greater Placitas area. The primary interest of the community is toward fulfilling hopes and dreams and retirement activities while LPPC members are more concerned with spiritual and personal growth. LPPC and the community believe in the importance of preserving the family structure.

Of great concern is the lack of a commitment to Christian community in the greater Placitas area. A high percentage of the community believes in God, but a little less than half are not involved in their faith. LPPC members have much higher faith receptivity

LPPC generally reflects the diversity, needs and desires of the greater community. There is a significant component of low income and basic needs families in the village of Placitas where our church is located that require support. LPPC has focused a significant part of its mission commitment to meeting their needs.

Church members are happy with their personal relationships at LPPC. They have a strong commitment to God and fifty percent believe their faith has grown stronger over the last 10 years and want it to continue to grow. An overwhelming majority attends services weekly. LPPC members and friends are satisfied or very satisfied with their relationship with God, spiritual growth, health, career and family life. They are content with their marriages, relationships with their children and the church.

The congregation has the feeling of belonging to an extended family at LPPC. Nearly half of the membership indicated that three or more of their five closest friends are members of the church. LPPC has an excellent support structure (pastoral care, Deacons, etc.) for its members and friends. The worship services (music, preaching and sanctuary) are noteworthy. The congregation also has high regard for the Sunday services, adult education, communications within our community, preschool, welcoming activities, fellowship and service. But, church

members and friends express a desire to improve Vacation Bible School, expand women's groups and invigorate young couples activities.

While generally happy with their lives, relationship with God and their spiritual growth, the congregation identified the following seven greatest concerns in priority order: stress, social justice, spiritual teaching, fulfilling marriage, good church experience, day-to-day financial worries and personal health.

The community and LPPC congregation have a high interest in a number of programs offered in varying robustness at the church. The following represents the most significant ones:

Programs that are highly important to the community and church members:

- Youth social programs
- Family activities and outings
- Marriage enrichment opportunities
- Bible study and prayer groups
- Cultural programs (music, drama, art, etc)
- Environmental programs

LPPC IS A UNIQUE COMMUNITY

LPPC was founded on February 24, 1894 in the small village of Placitas, NM. Fifty people were in attendance at the first meeting held at the Mission schoolhouse. As years passed the membership grew. Everyone living in Placitas was related, so there was a close bond. Everyone helped each other in time of need. Ninety-nine percent of the members were Spanish speaking only, so worship was in Spanish.

In the 60's and 70's, Anglos began to settle in Placitas after retirement. At first there were a few original LPPC members who were concerned about the newcomers changing the traditions. With time the newcomers became like family to the village and LPPC. They honored the traditions, heritage, and learned to speak Spanish.

LPPC has seen so many changes; pastors and members come and go. One thing that has not changed is the Spanish speaking involvement in worship and the honoring of the Hispanic heritage. Hispanics and Anglos work hard together to keep church unique and welcoming. Many of the new members are transitional in nature, at a certain point in their lives they leave to be near children or better health facilities. However, the core LPPC is here to stay.

LPPC IS DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE

The blending of cultures and languages within the congregational family has given the church body a unique insight and appreciation for the vital role of diversity in strengthening the church community and its greater mission. LPPC embraces diversity, inclusiveness, openness, and respect for differences in attitudes, beliefs, and values. We believe Christ calls us, as we are, to be his people. As the only protestant church in the Placitas area, LPPC draws people from a wide range of denominations and prior church affiliations. Joined together with faith in God as the center and unifying commonality, and recognizing the opportunity afforded by multiple and sometimes differing voices, all are invited and welcomed as a part of this piece of the Body of Christ.

LPPC HOLDS WORSHIP AND MUSIC IN HIGH REGARD

LPPC conducts two worship services through most of the year--an early service at 8:15 a.m. followed by an adult forum at 9:15 and a later service at 10:30. During the summer there is one service at 9:15 a.m. The early service is somewhat shorter with a smaller attendance and of a more contemplative and informal nature.

In keeping with the history and tradition of LPPC, at least one lesson and one hymn each week are in Spanish. In addition, two communion services each year are conducted in Spanish—a lay reader often reads most of the communion liturgy on these occasions. A commitment to a bilingual service is a central piece of LPPC's identity and is strongly supported by the congregation.

God-centered worship focused by strong, biblically based preaching in a reformed liturgical style is the basis of LPPC's Sunday Worship Service. This encourages the strong prayer life of the congregation. Occasional liturgical teaching, integrated into the worship service, explains the theological rationale for various liturgical elements. Each Sunday at least two lay liturgists lead pieces of the liturgy and read scripture passages. Lay participation is also provided by two usher/greeters each week, a visitor host, and a sound technician. An entirely lay-led service is scheduled once or twice a year. In addition, youth-led services usually occur at least once a year, more often recently.

A strong choir and quality music program is enthusiastically supported by LPPC. During most of the year, the choir performs special music as well as an introit and benediction response. Twice a year, during Christmas and Easter seasons, the choir performs cantatas or other major choral works in place of a sermon. During the summer and periodically through the year, individuals and small groups provide special music. Some desire to develop a youth/children's choir has been expressed.

The congregation includes many visual artists. Las Placitas Presbyterian Church values its long association with the Placitas Artist Series, which shows visual art in the fellowship hall and provides musical performances in the sanctuary each month from September through May. Liturgical art such as banners and other seasonal décor are all part of the worship life of LPPC. The varieties of worship offered also include: an annual "Church in the mountains" on a summer Sunday;

Earth Sabbath, held the Sunday closest to Earth Day; and quarterly "Earth Vespers" planned by the Earth Care Fellowship of LPPC. The Earth Vespers are held near or on the equinoxes and solstices. Many of these events are

conducted outside. The winter solstice vesper is a poetry reading by the light of a single candle.

LPPC HAS A HEART FOR MISSION

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.....” Matt. 25:35

One of the strongest desires of LPPC is to serve the people of the community, the members and friends of the church, and the greater community of the world. As an outreach to the local community the church conceived and initiated Casa Rosa, a food bank for the hungry in Placitas. The congregation would like to expand the services to include some health care services. LPPC’s first concern is for our neighborhood.

The congregation also wants to stay involved with the greater community by continuing to work with “Building Together Sandoval County” and “Habitat for Humanity”. These programs work with those who need new homes and need help with their current homes to make them safe, weatherproof, and warm. We also express our heart with the “Comfort and Joy” shawl ministry that has served the needs and comforts members and friends. LPPC sells “Just Coffee”, a Fair Trade Cooperative from Mexico, the 2nd Sunday of each month. The committee promotes the coffee and is expanding into SERRV to help people all over the world who need ways to market their products. The church is in the process of developing a partnership with a Presbyterian Church in Cuba, New Mexico. As can be seen LPPC has many interests in the area of mission, locally and internationally. Las Placitas Church is committed to reaching out to the local community, identifying needs and providing solutions. In addition, LPPC desires to serve, encourage and make a difference in the surrounding communities.

A major thrust of LPPC is concern for the earth and the environment. There is a very active Earth Care fellowship with special worship services that honor the earth with vespers, poetry readings, hikes, and other creative ways to show concern for the environment and the care of God’s earth. The Jubilee garden grows food for the community. The church has a wonderful memorial garden that is designed to conserve water and grow plants that thrive in the southwest. There is a keen interest in learning more about “green and creation theology”. LPPC sets aside special times to study the earth and how to take care of it. Our desire is to continue to learn about the environment and how we can honor it, as God would have us do.

LPPC HAS A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY

In the last 50 years, Placitas has grown from a Spanish Village to an unincorporated collection of subdivisions. It is home to commuters who work in Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, and Santa Fe as well as retirees who have relocated far from family. While the elementary school and some volunteer organizations provide opportunities for getting to know other residents, Las Placitas Presbyterian Church provides the most important sense of community for many of its congregation. This important role is evident from the questionnaire responses received from friends and members of the congregation. This theme of the church providing “a strong sense of community” is characterized by the respondents who cited an atmosphere of genuine caring about others, appreciation for being part of a group that prays together and works together, and finding the church to be a source of fellowship, support, and acceptance.

Activities that contribute to this “strong sense of community” include fellowship dinners (large fund-raisers and small get-acquainted soup suppers), retreats, service on the fellowship committee, the many activities of the Deacons, the after-worship coffee time, working together on the gardens and the grounds, singing in the choir, sharing time and talents, participating in Christian adult education opportunities (Women’s Bible Study, Monday Night Discussion Group, and Adult Forum), and getting involved in hands-on projects.

A loving atmosphere is cultivated during the life of a member’s or friend’s affiliation with this congregation, from the friendliness extended to first-time visitors, to the emotional support given to those experiencing illness or loss of a loved one. Celebrations involve the entire congregation. Easter brunch and the Thanksgiving potluck give those who are far from family a place to share the simple pleasure of a meal with others on these special occasions.

In summary, Las Placitas Presbyterian Church provides a sense of community to many who would not otherwise know one.

LPPC SUPPORTS ITS YOUTH & FAMILIES

Las Placitas Presbyterian Church has a deep appreciation for its children, youth, and young families (CY&YF). The church community recognizes the vital role that children, youth, and young families provide in our continued growth and development as a body of Christ.

LPPC is a diverse body of friends and members and it is understood that CY&YF are an important part of our diversity. LPPC has for many years supported the church body and surrounding community through children's Sunday School, youth groups and after church activities, camp activities including Ghost Ranch, youth participation in Sunday morning worship, children and youth choirs, vacation bible school, nursery care, and Mothers Day Out programs.

LPPC FACES THESE CHALLENGES

Although LPPC is a strong and vital church it faces some challenges as it looks to the future. The following are the most important:

1. The Church's struggles to attract new members

Nearly half of the greater Placitas community has no faith receptivity and another twenty-two percent have only occasional contact with a church. Despite the fact that LPPC is the only Protestant church within the community, the center of most community activities, and the only source of pastoral care, membership growth has been difficult.

LPPC accepts the important challenge of reaching the un-churched through an active program of evangelism by both word and deed. Casa Rosa, through its activities along with an outreach program has brought some new members into the congregation.

2. Expansion and enrichment of LPPC's children and youth ministries

Currently there are only 6 -8 youth who regularly attend Sunday service. When specific youth activities are scheduled, friends of these youth are invited and frequently participate, expanding the group size to 20 or more. Seldom do these attendees return to participate in the Sunday youth fellowship. Generally, their parents are not supportive and are indifferent of their participation.

For the Christian growth of the children and youth and for the continued long-term growth and life of LPPC this challenge must be overcome. LPPC is seeking leadership and direction in redefining its mission to these groups. Pastoral and congregational leadership and support will provide the means necessary to address these concerns. Possible areas of renewed focus may include Christian education, youth ministry and outreach, children and youth music, nursery and childcare services, and young family outreach and involvement.

3. Integration of diverse perspectives of the congregation

The community is seeing a significant change as the area attracts retirees who come with differing perspectives on issues and often differing financial resources than those of the predominately Spanish local community. It is a challenge to integrate the ethnic and philosophical diversity of the members so all can continue their life journey and be welcome and honored within LPPC. To promote harmony, it is important for the church to maintain balance in its activities, ministries, and messages.

4. Increase the financial stability of the church

LPPC pledges were down 10% in the 2008 budget. Historically the church has also contributed approximately 15% of its annual budget to the local Presbytery for use in the need of the greater church. The loss of jobs, the devaluation of assets and investments, and perhaps a fear for the future, have severely impacted LPPC's ability to create a balanced budget and maintain the stewardship commitment to the Presbytery.

LPPC faces financial challenges more significant than in past years, and these have been exacerbated by the 2005 church expansion, which left the church with a substantial mortgage. The debt must be reduced so LPPC will have sufficient income to sustain and expand its current programs, staff, activities, and increase its evangelism outreach. To address this challenge, LPPC anticipates engaging in a financial campaign in the near future aimed at substantially improving the church's financial health and LPPC's ability to overcome many of the other challenges.

In essence, these are questions of stewardship. How can we deepen our commitment to taking care of our children, our community, and our mission to share the Good News of Christ here and throughout the world?

MISSION STATEMENT 2009

Las Placitas Presbyterian Church is an inclusive Christian community gathering for worship, prayer, learning, fellowship, and spiritual growth for people of all ages. As members of the body of Christ, we celebrate God's grace in our lives and seek to extend God's love and promise through service, outreach, education, music, arts, and witness. We are committed to peace and justice in the world, and to care for the earth as God's gift to humankind.

We cherish our origin as an early Spanish village mission church and honor this heritage in all of our activities.

We are Presbyterian in theology and governance, but welcome and support all people as they explore their personal life paths, emphasizing Christ's word, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

- Matthew 18:20