



## **ST. MARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

### **2020 MISSION STUDY REPORT**

This Mission Study was conducted by St. Mark Presbyterian Church as the first step in the process of calling a new Pastor/Head of Staff. The study was led by the Transition Team, an ad hoc committee appointed by Session in September 2019 for that purpose. Interim Pastor Joan Watson served as convener/facilitator for this committee. The Transition Team sought to explore with members the story of St. Mark – our past, our dreams for the future, and our gifts and callings that are at work in the present. In doing so, the Team has identified qualities that give St. Mark its unique mission in the world.

The topics addressed in this report are:

- Transition Team Process
- Boerne and the Surrounding Region
- St. Mark Presbyterian Church
  - Who We Are
  - Where We've Been
  - Where We Hope to Go
- Listening Sessions – What We Heard
- Listening Sessions – What the Questionnaire Data Said
- What Kind of Pastor Will Help St. Mark Reach Our Vision and Mission Goals?
  - Characteristics & Traits
  - Specific Tasks & Program Areas
- Appendices

#### **Transition Team Process**

After introducing itself to the congregation in early October, 2019 (see Appendix I), the Transition Team invited all St. Mark members to participate in a time of reflection and sharing through listening sessions. In an effort to better capture our institutional memory, several of the listening sessions were organized by “eras of joining St. Mark” (see Appendix II). All members received the overall list of dates/times for sessions which ran from November 24, 2019 to January 12, 2020. Members from a particular “era of joining” also received individual email invitations to the session designated for their era. However, it was made very clear that

members were welcome to attend any or all sessions if they chose. Those who could not attend the meeting for their “era” were encouraged to join any other group. An option was also provided for anyone wishing to talk with members of the Transition Team outside a group setting. Information on upcoming sessions was presented during worship announcements and in the weekly Happenings E-news email, emphasizing that all were welcome to attend, even non-member participants of St. Mark. One session was held specifically for active nonmembers.

In all, fifteen (15) separate listening sessions were held through February 2020 with members and active nonmembers of St. Mark Presbyterian Church. The sessions were facilitated by Interim Pastor Joan Watson and 2 or 3 members of the Transition Team who took notes that were shared with all Team members. Additionally, phone discussions were held with former members, former pastors, Mission Presbytery Committee on Ministry members, and other friends of St. Mark. Those notes were also shared with the entire Team.

Seven of the fifteen listening sessions were open gatherings of members – congregational conversations if you will. Additional sessions were held with active elders, deacons, trustees, church staff, teen members, parents of youth, and St. Mark’s two most recent pastor nominating committees.

The response to these sessions was extremely positive. Listening sessions had a total of participation of ~150 with some people attending more than one session.

General Session Participation	104
Church Officers/Staff/PNC’s/Former Members	42
Former Ministers/COM conversations	5
<b>FINAL TOTAL</b>	<b>151</b>

All who participated in a listening session were asked to complete a common questionnaire at the end of that session (Appendix III). That questionnaire was also made available to the entire congregation after the conclusion of all listening sessions. Completing the questionnaire was optional. Sixty-one (61) questionnaires were completed. The quantitative analysis is included in Appendix IV.

## **Boerne and the Surrounding Region**

Boerne is a bedroom community located in the Texas Hill Country about 10 miles northwest of the San Antonio city limits via Interstate 10. St. Mark is a regional church, serving the southern half of Kendall County where Boerne is located, the city of Fair Oaks Ranch and portions of northwest Bexar County (where San Antonio is located). Over 80% of church members live in Kendall County and Fair Oaks Ranch.

The region is growing in population, being located in the desirable Texas Hill Country and nearly bordering San Antonio, the nation’s 7<sup>th</sup> largest city with rich multicultural history and great diversity. Kendall County is the 3<sup>rd</sup> fastest growing county in Texas and the 7<sup>th</sup> fastest nationwide. The area is predominantly rural with increasing areas of urbanization. Kendall County has a population of over 46,000, with approximately 18,000 in the city of Boerne and about 10,000 in Fair Oaks Ranch. Since 2011, Kendall County has grown 25%, and it is

expected to grow another 25% by 2023. Boerne ISD covers about the same region as St. Mark and is known as one of the best school districts in the state. This year the district has about 10,000 students and is forecast to grow to 19,000 by 2030. New single-family homes are projected to double in this period. The percentage of students eligible for the free/reduced price lunch program is 18%, compared to 60% statewide. Boerne ISD ranks 7<sup>th</sup> out of 134 state larger school districts with the lowest percentage of economically disadvantaged students. People are drawn to this area by the quality of life and the quality of the schools. Young families and retirees are forecast to be the two fastest growing demographics. See Appendix V for regional demographics.

**St. Mark Presbyterian Church – Who We Are**

The following is the St. Mark Mission Statement:  
***To glorify God, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, provide opportunities for all people to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ.***

We pray we live this mission through the following vision for ministry:

- to gather as a community of believers who are passionate about Jesus Christ;
- to glorify God through Christ-centered worship, which is central to our corporate life; and,
- to grow the Kingdom of God through opportunities for education, service, mission, fellowship and witness as the life-renewing Spirit leads us.

St. Mark is a church

- which stands firmly in the heart of Reformed Tradition;
- where spiritual growth is abundantly nurtured, bringing members closer to God; and,
- with members embracing each other and those in need through genuine acts of kindness, support, sharing and caring.

Our many ministries enable us to live into these words. These include but are not limited to the following ministries, programs, and activities.

<p><b>Worship:</b> Contemporary &amp; traditional worship services each Sunday, with combined single services on 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays and for special occasions such as Youth Sunday, Easter and Christmas Cantatas, All Saints Day.</p>	<p><b>Worship:</b> An uplifting and diverse music ministry that includes an 8-10-person praise band &amp; vocalists offering contemporary music and a 12-20-person choir with organist/ pianist sharing traditional hymns.</p>	<p><b>Worship/Congregational Life:</b> A Parish Associate-led prayer ministry that offers reflective prayer and soaking prayer services, and a Deacon-led active prayer chain with over 100 participants and an average of 3 prayer requests weekly.</p>
<p><b>Education:</b> A vibrant weekly Sunday School program with classes for children &amp; youth, four adult classes, a parents group and a class for adults with special needs. See Appendix VI for participation &amp; curriculum details.</p>	<p><b>Education:</b> A teen Sunday School class and weeknight Youth Group that actively participates in the life of St. Mark, does local &amp; national mission work, and is active in Presbytery &amp; PC-USA youth initiatives and service projects.</p>	<p><b>Education/Congregational Life:</b> Eight to 10 weekly small groups and bible study classes and service/ fellowship groups such as Compassion in Action sewing group, the Chronologically Gifted/ Empty Nesters, and a Men’s Basketball Fellowship.</p>

<p><b>Outreach/Education:</b> Hosts the first and still the only accredited Christian preschool in Boerne that was started in 1996. The Early Learning Center served 100 children in nine classes with 24 regular staff in 2019.</p>	<p><b>Outreach/Education:</b> Offers one of the largest Vacation Bible Schools in Boerne serving over 120 children Pre-K – 5<sup>th</sup> grade with the help of more than 60 youth/adult volunteers from St. Mark &amp; the community.</p>	<p><b>Outreach/Education:</b> Collaborates with the Boerne Community Coalition to offer Kids Can afterschool mentoring/tutoring program; and offers a free First Friday parents' night out for Pre-K – 5<sup>th</sup> grade youth in the community Sept–May.</p>
<p><b>Outreach/Worship:</b> An older adult visitation ministry led by a Commissioned Pastor/Parish Associate who visits homebound members &amp; leads three worship services monthly at Morningside Ministries' senior living centers</p>	<p><b>Outreach:</b> Making the Family Life Center gym &amp; classrooms available to community groups such as the Boerne YMCA, Newcomers Club, men's basketball groups, youth basketball and volleyball teams, etc.</p>	<p><b>Outreach:</b> Leading monthly Bunco at a local nursing center, volunteering for Habitat for Humanity work days, supporting a monthly food collection for the local food bank, buying Christmas gifts for children through the Boerne Community Coalition</p>
<p><b>Congregational Life:</b> All embrace fellowship activities like the annual all-church retreat at Mo Ranch, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday luncheons, all-church Olympics, GEM (Greet/Meet/Eat) nights, annual chili cookoff, etc.</p>	<p><b>COVID-19 Response:</b> Overwhelming engagement by members to create and embrace new modes of worship and fellowship. Offered worship via video online and classes for children/youth/adults within 1 week of the first restrictions; quickly set up zoom meetings for “support” groups, as well as for meetings of staff, committees and ministry areas; shared daily updates &amp; inspiration via website, emails &amp; social media; launched Care Groups to keep members connected; kept focused on prayer through the Prayer Chain. After 12 weeks, the church resumed a single service of worship in the sanctuary on May 31, live streaming for the first time with the video posted for later access. A Come Back Together team advised Session on the process for meeting health &amp; safety guidelines as the church slowly reopened the campus; the group continued to monitor the reopening process to ensure that the established protocol was followed and to amend procedures as warranted.</p>	

St. Mark is comprised of hard-working individuals devoted to sharing the love of Christ and the Word of our Lord within the congregation and in the community. Our members are a body of generous, faithful, and engaged followers of Christ. We have a strong commitment to serving the community with significant, purposeful and meaningful missionary efforts that help others and bring the Gospel of our Lord to those in need.

### **St. Mark Presbyterian Church –Where We’ve Been**

Established in 1965, St. Mark has several charter members who are still active in the church. Those members said St. Mark was started because there was no Presbyterian church in Kendall County. Those who wanted to start a new church in Boerne asked Alamo Presbytery, which was part of the Northern church (UPCUSA), to sponsor it, and it did. However, many early members transferred from Leon Springs Presbyterian Church which was part of the Southern Church. Eighty-one people signed the membership charter, with seven of those under the age of 15. St. Mark’s charter members emphasized that fellowship was a key characteristic of this church in the early years. It was a big family that was very social and caring. See Appendix VII – Boerne & Boerne Church History.

Major construction projects included the first worship building in 1967; a new Sanctuary, classroom and office area in 1981; new administrative spaces and fellowship hall in 1992; and finally, the bold expansion undertaken by the congregation to build the Family Life Center and remodel other campus buildings in 2007. Completed one year later, this project was a highpoint in the life of the church. It positioned St. Mark for growth, but also saddled it with a very large mortgage. In 2010, the Session worked with Interim Pastor David Evans to launch a bold effort to eliminate that debt. With the prospect of soon being debt free, the church began searching for a new, dynamic pastor. Boerne was growing rapidly, and St. Mark members were dedicated to harnessing that potential for growth as well. In 2011, Rev Michael Brundeen was called to serve St. Mark as Pastor, Head of Staff. With a very gifted preacher and teacher, and with newly inspired congregation members, the church underwent a period of growth both in members and finances. The mortgage was retired in early 2015. Church membership grew from 338 in 2009 to 420 in 2015, and the budget grew from \$500,000 to \$740,000. The church marked its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in May 2015 with a Jubilee Celebration.

However, Pastor Brundeen abruptly resigned in July 2015. His letter of resignation cited “actions that were in violation of his ordination vows.” He acknowledged the effect his actions and sudden resignation would have on the congregation, and he accepted full responsibility for his sudden departure. This development, the circumstances surrounding it and the resulting sense of loss and grief, impacted St. Mark members immensely – an impact that is still being felt by many members.

After Pastor Brundeen resigned, Rev. Dr. Bob Malsack was Interim Pastor through June 2017. Pastor Malsack was well received by members and provided the stability needed in this two-year period. He was a strong preacher and teacher. He kept the church together during this time, but he did not encourage Session to address the issues and feelings of many members related to the circumstances of Pastor Brundeen’s departure or to take any specific actions to address them and promote healing.

Rev. Dr. Kevin Boyd was installed as Pastor, Head of Staff in late July 2017. The Boyds experienced a stressful move to Boerne and additional stress over Hurricane Harvey one month later which impacted their selling of property and caring for family still living in Houston. Conflicts with some church leaders and staff emerged in the fall of 2017 and early 2018 that were not resolved. The Treasurer resigned and left the church, the Finance Elder resigned from Session and the Office Administrator retired due to these unresolved conflicts. Tension in Session and among staff was high. Pastor Boyd resigned to take a call at another church in October 2018. Pastor Boyd and St. Mark were not a good fit, as evidenced by broken relationships and unsuccessful attempts by Session and Mission Presbytery to resolve the conflicts.

Over the last 25 years, St. Mark has averaged 350 members and an average Sunday attendance of about 215 (about 60% of membership). This fell off slightly in 2019 to 279 members and average attendance of 141, after an intentional scrubbing of the membership rolls and other attrition due to changing pastors and contentious actions taken by the PC-USA in 2014 and 2016. Regardless, on average, 50% of members are still attending regularly, and the church budget for 2020 is \$490,000. Church members are predominantly white, with 44% of members over the age of 70 and 14% below the age of 25. See Appendix VIII – St. Mark Membership & Church Attendance History.

## **St. Mark Presbyterian Church –Where We Hope to Go**

Moving forward, members hope to build on St. Mark strengths to serve each other and the growing Boerne community. These strengths include: a welcoming atmosphere for visitors; a feeling of fellowship and family for members; both contemporary and traditional worship services with a Biblically-based message; a strong Christian Education program for children, youth and adults where spiritual growth is nurtured; an on-campus Early Learning Center that provides a Christian-based education for Boerne preschoolers; an uplifting and diverse music program; an active local mission program; and a compassionate pastoral care program. Members have stepped forward to keep the church active through recent transition periods.

At this time, the church continues to be proactive and innovative in meeting the changing needs of members and the community. During current Covid-19 restrictions, the church is reaching out to home-bound members to provide online streaming video of worship services. Zoom is being used for group meetings in lieu of face-to-face. The church is also checking on members more closely and providing additional pastoral care and support to members with needs, such as running errands or picking up groceries. Worship in the sanctuary resumed May 31 with small group and Sunday School class meetings being phased in during June. Health and safety procedures for all were established. Live streaming of services is continuing for those who cannot or choose not to attend worship.

Looking to the future, the congregation has expressed a desire to:

- Achieve stability with a new Pastor, Head of Staff who provides vision, leadership and relatability;
- Increase membership to levels recognized in the past (~350), thereby retaining the advantages of a medium-sized church;
- Attract younger families with children and youth;
- Reach out beyond the church walls to do more in the Boerne community;
- Help church members grow in spiritual maturity and discipleship, and
- To quote a church banner: “Re-ignite the Passion!”

## **Listening Sessions – What We Heard**

The listening sessions held by the Transition Team as part of our mission study did not follow a set agenda, although questions asked and topics discussed were similar. The qualitative discussion of what we heard in the 15 separate listening sessions follows here. All who attended were asked to complete a common questionnaire at the end of each session. The quantitative analysis is discussed in the next section with data tables provided in Appendix IV.

Questions asked in the listening sessions included but were not limited to the following:

- **Why St. Mark?** Origins of the church. Evolution of the Church. What drew you to St. Mark? Why did you join? Why did you stay? Is St. Mark the same place as when you joined the church? What aspects of St. Mark are most life-giving to you? What is life like for you at St. Mark? What do you like least/most about St. Mark?

- **Character of St. Mark.** How would you describe our personality? What is the 'ethos' of St. Mark? How is 'ethos' determined? What is the church's identity? What is life-giving about St. Mark?
- **Significant turning points – Positive & Negative.** Most important times of the church. Where we are with healing from our painful moments? Does having two services divide or broaden the church? What would you like to see changed at St. Mark?
- **Why Presbyterian?** What part of being Presbyterian is good/proud? Is the theology of the church important?
- **What is the future for St. Mark?** What is your hope for the future? What's important for the next era? What are challenges you see facing St. Mark? This is my prayer for the church...my one thing.
- **Who should lead us?** What types of leadership does St. Mark do best under? What is ideal for a new pastor? What do you hope for in the next minister?

At the conclusion of all listening sessions and information gathering, Transition Team members individually reviewed all notes and comments gathered. They then met to share key observations and impressions from these sessions. The following are key observations noted.

- St. Mark Ethos -Spirit of the Church: This church is very much like a family. Caring, friendly, and welcoming were used over and over to describe St. Mark.
- Participants' comments in general were very positive. There were not many negative comments made.
- There was very little comment about issues with the PC-USA.
- The information gathered from the eras of joining groups was very similar, i.e., it seems things didn't change much over the years.
- Many members are here because we are a Presbyterian Church. St. Mark seems to be distinctly Presbyterian in how we see ourselves and how we do things.
- The worship experience is very meaningful at St. Mark. Music is very important.
- BIG DEALS in the history of the church were creating the Family Life Center (FLC) which was positive, and circumstances associated with Pastor Michael Brundeen's resignation in July 2015 which were negative. Some members feel this issue needs to be addressed.
- It was surprising to see that the 2018 resignation of Pastor Kevin Boyd did not have the impact on congregation members that Pastor Brundeen's 2015 resignation had. There was much more discussion of Pastor Brundeen's tenure than Pastor Boyd's tenure in the listening sessions.
- St. Mark has many involved and engaged small groups.
- The youth of the church shared very openly in their listening session. St. Mark is important in their lives. They "like the church." They want more intergenerational activities. They experienced dramatic changes in the church, first when Pastor Brundeen left abruptly and then two years later when the youth director they were very connected to left as well. "St. Mark was a safe place and then wasn't."
- In a session with the Breakfast Club (a Sunday morning group comprised of parents of school-aged youth), better communication with members was a concern.
- Key issues noted in discussions with former members who have left the church since 2015 were too much PC-USA and too much change/instability.

## **Listening Sessions – What the Questionnaire Data Said**

Quantitative analysis of the Listening Session questionnaire supports the belief that St. Mark has a loyal, devoted, caring congregation. A majority of members (87%) feel closer to God after worshipping at St. Mark. Members reported that we care for each other in times of need and that kindness is part of our church culture (86%). We learned that most of us are devoted Presbyterians who embrace the reformed theology of St. Mark (87%). This positive feedback highlights many strengths that St. Mark possess as a church family. By far, members wrote, there are plenty of reasons to celebrate at St. Mark. And most (87%) said that they would recommend St. Mark as a church of choice to their friends or family. Those responding to this questionnaire felt extremely positive in these areas.

Just as any family has areas to grow, our St. Mark family has challenges before us as well. This was clear from the feedback we received. First, we learned that we need to better articulate how we define our church mission moving forward. Only 59% responded positively to the statement “St. Mark has a clear sense of its identity and mission.” Fortunately, many ways to address this can be found in the feedback comments that were provided. Second, we need to communicate better in times of conflict to keep members informed about what is going on within the church. Only 58% responded positively to the statement about how we deal with disagreements. Simply put, members feel that sweeping things under the rug is hurting us and prevents us from being understood. The circumstances under which Pastors Michael Brundeen and Kevin Boyd left are particularly hazy as many members indicated. Finally, we found that we need to learn how to heal after conflict. The statement “St. Mark has healed from its past issues” only received 56% positive responses. For some, moving on is easy while for others, the process takes time and support. The Transition Team believes that these issues members have shared must continue to be addressed as we move forward.

## **What Kind of Pastor Will Help St. Mark Reach Our Vision and Mission Goals?**

Questions regarding what is wanted in a new pastor drew varied responses, but these attributes were central: relatable, caring, and community involved. When asked about specific skills, preaching, teaching, and pastoral care were most often noted. People mentioned wanting a pastor who is collaborative rather than authoritarian; a spiritual leader who will inspire and love the church; someone who truly wants to be part of this church and this community.

The questionnaire also had a section on the most important characteristics of pastoral leadership in two areas: skills and personality/character traits. Below are the characteristics most often chosen, with the number of times chosen as a measure of importance:

<b><u>Skills</u></b>		<b><u>Personality/Character Traits</u></b>	
Preaching	40	Approachable	26
Teaching	29	Spiritually Mature	24
Pastoral Care	29	Good Listener	20
Communication	18	Sense of Humor	15
Worship Leadership	15	Honesty	15
Theological Knowledge	12	Wisdom	15
Bridge Building	7	Open Minded	14
Administrative	6	Kind	10
Counseling	3	Loving	9
Group Leadership	3	Insight	5

The next Pastor, Head of Staff at St. Mark will supervise a staff of seven and provide guidance to a Session of twelve elders and a Diaconate of ten deacons. The staff positions are as follows.

- An Office Administrator who is the office secretary.
- A Director of Christian Education responsible for coordinating a comprehensive Christian Education program for all ages and directly responsible for child/youth Sunday School and all Youth activities.
- A Financial Administrator responsible for handling church finances.
- A Sexton responsible for church cleaning and maintenance.
- A Nursery-Childcare Coordinator responsible for childcare during worship and special activities and events.
- Two Music Directors, one for Contemporary and one for Traditional worship services.

The Session is responsible for the following ministries:

Christian Education	Outreach (Mission/Evangelism)
Communications	Personnel
Congregational Life	Property
Finance	Stewardship
Host	Worship

The next Pastor, Head of Staff will be expected to provide leadership and vision to the church and to engage and excite church leaders in that vision. After having two called pastors leave in a 5-year period, the next pastor will be expected to continue the stability established by the current transitional pastor Rev. Dr. Joan Watson. St. Mark is in good shape with no building programs planned, no debt, and with reserve funds to help ride out any economic crisis. With internal stability, the congregation will need to reach out beyond our church walls to support the local Boerne community. It is desired that a new pastor continues to support two established programs at St. Mark: providing frequent spiritual support to the Early Learning Center preschool housed on campus and teaching a Wednesday morning Bible Study of the next Sunday's scripture lesson with 12-20 members attending.

No matter what their strengths, a new Pastor will be welcomed by the congregation. This welcoming characteristic is one that defines our church.

In selecting the next Pastor, Head of Staff, these focus areas are paramount.

- Has a deep devotion to this calling that is demonstrated by enthusiasm, cheerfulness, and optimism as personality traits.
- Demonstrates extensive knowledge of scripture, translated into sermons that teach in a relatable manner to the congregation.
- Reaches out to our church in critically important ways such as personal engagement, questioning, willingness to learn, and showing sensitivity to our history.
- Leads a carefully crafted vision for our church that identifies us and leads all members in that direction.
- Possesses a pleasant but effective skill in working with staff, Session, Diaconate, and Church standing committees.
- Shows compassion and outreach for all who are in need. Is able to relate, encourage, and buoy up spirits, showing true caring – as a shepherd to the flock.