

Beulah Presbyterian Church

A Mission Study

2017

*Embracing friendship in Christ, as we reach out in mission,
and run the race of faith.*



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Introduction

The Mission Study Team (MST) for Beulah Presbyterian Church was tasked with discerning a clear sense of identity and purpose for the church and presenting our results and methodology in the following document.

The team approached this process with these three questions at the outset:

- Who is Beulah Presbyterian Church in 2017?
- Who are our neighbors in the community and the world?
- What is God calling us to do and be in the next few years?

To answer these questions, the team used information collected at congregational cottage meetings in the Fall of 2017 as a starting point. We then set out to collect external and internal data by engaging in conversations with established groups within the church, representatives of groups that use our facilities, and members of the Fern Creek/Highview Community.

On our journey to discernment we took part in the exercise, "Finding Our Biblical Story" from the book *Holy Conversations* by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann with the members of the Session. The challenge was to identify a story or passage from the Bible that best captures the sense of Beulah today and into the future. After spirited discussion, the passage from Hebrews 12:1-3 taken from *The Message Bible* resonated with the group. In this passage the writer encourages readers to honor those saints who have gone before, while also extolling them to get on with the business of living out their faith. The writer encourages them to do all this while keeping the example of Jesus' life and sacrifice in mind. We have tried to honor this spirit of faithfulness to the past with an eye toward the future throughout our process, all while looking toward Christ.

As a church celebrating 150 years of faith and service in 2018 we embrace the rich history of Beulah and recognize the evolving nature of our mission and place in the community and world.

Beulah's Mission Study Team

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Beulah: 149 Years in the Making
A Brief History of Beulah Presbyterian Church

- 1786 Pennsylvania Run Presbyterian Church was organized.
- 1865 Southern services held in home of Miss Margaret Guthrie by former Penn Run members sympathetic to the southern cause.
- 1868 Beulah Presbyterian Church was organized.
- 1870 Church building built on present site. The original building remains today, incorporated into the current facility.
- 1925 Junior Sermon (today's "Time with Young Disciples" during worship) began, demonstrating Beulah's long commitment to raising children and youth in faith.
- 1928-1930's The original building was remodeled. Many members signed personal notes to finance the remodel, but the builder misused the \$20,000 and the entire project had to be refinanced. Members put their homes up for collateral, fundraising dinners were held, and quilts and handicrafts were sold to pay off the debt, as well as selling the old stone house property for \$4,000. The faithfulness of these members who risked their families' security for the good of the church continues to inspire generous giving today.
- 1950's-1970's Beulah reflected the transition of the Fern Creek community from rural to suburban. Membership grew from around 400 to 1,000.
- 1950's-2015 Emphasis on education by having a seminary student for a year's experience of field placement.
- 1950 As the congregation grew, a new Christian Education building was added.
- 1961 Men's group helped build cabin at Cedar Ridge Camp; support of Cedar Ridge continues today.
- 1963 A half-day kindergarten was established; the precursor to today's Preschool.
- 1967 Session passed resolution supporting Equal Housing.
- 1967 A new, contemporary sanctuary was dedicated with a time capsule in the cornerstone. The congregation will open this stone during the 150th anniversary celebration and fill it with items from 2017-2018 to be opened in the future.
- 1975 Beulah provided meaningful leadership during the turmoil that resulted from the desegregation of Jefferson County schools by busing.
- 1977 The Ramsey Christian Activities Building, including meeting rooms, kitchen, gym, and locker rooms was completed and named in honor of the Reverend William A. Ramsey, one of 16 ordained and installed pastors to serve Beulah
- 1990-2017 Beulah's membership declined, reflecting the trend of mainline denominations nationwide.
- 1994 The first female co-pastor is called. Subsequently, several prominent and influential members protested the hiring of a woman and tried to use their power to oust her. The Session stood firm to Beulah's conviction of equal rights for women and renounced these actions, resulting in the secession of some long-standing members.
- 1998 The Director of Christian Education was hired in November to expand the church's offerings to children and youth. This ministry impacted families and the church as a whole for 18 years, instituting

- travel to Montreat conferences and summer mission trips. The DCE departed for another call in 2016.
- 2008 A new facility for Fern Creek/Highview United Ministries was built on property provided by Beulah. The church supports the Ministries through partnerships, financial gifts, and the volunteer efforts of members.
- 2010 Open Table ministry was begun, providing a free meal to anyone on Tuesday evenings. The ministry has grown and now partners with the Fern Creek United Methodist Church, Trinity World Outreach and Southeast Christian Church, providing around 125 meals per week to both homeless folks and working poor families. Open Table has created a community of people that supports and encourages one another, in addition to providing a free meal.
- 2013 The kitchen renovation in the Ramsey Building was completed, transforming it into a full, commercial kitchen. A Capital Campaign was begun to help raise the funds to pay for the major renovation. Denominational loans also helped cover the costs.
- 2015 The boiler in the church building needed to be replaced. Funds were raised in just three weeks in December to cover the full costs of a new boiler, keeping preschool and Sunday school children warm.
- 2016 Pastor of 22 years departed in January, leading to a season of discernment about Beulah's mission and identity for the present and future years.

Internal Data: Who is Beulah in 2017?

Current Membership

The membership of Beulah Presbyterian Church is primarily white, with roughly 3% consisting of black and Hispanic members. While this picture is not out of sync with the majority of Presbyterian churches across the country, we strive to have an open mind, open heart policy, where all are welcome.

Despite a lack of racial diversity, we have some economic diversity in our membership. Our former ESL classes and Open Table ministry mean that we receive some visitors who have fewer financial resources. Those in the middle to upper-middle class make up the largest percentage of our membership.

In recent decades, the congregation has had more female members than male and our largest age group has been age 50+. This, again, reflects the Presbyterian Church as a whole and shows the trends in church membership decline over the years, as many long-time members age and fewer younger folks join. Specifically, the ages of our members break down in the following way: 17% of our members are age 25 or younger, 17% are 26-45, 9% are 46-55, 14% are 56-65, and 42% (our largest group) are over 65 years of age.

With regard to membership longevity, 14% have been members here for 50+ years, 14% 40-50 years, 11% 30-40 years, 4% 25-30 years, 11% 20-25 years, 9% 15-20 years, 12% 10-15 years, 10% 5-10 years, and 14% less than 5 years. Of note is the significant drop in the number of members in the 25-30 year category, but we imagine this has to do with the transition in leadership between 1993-1994, as the church was going through a similar process, at that time, in finding a new pastor.

Building & Grounds

The Buildings of Beulah Presbyterian Church "Campus"

Beulah Presbyterian Church has a main sanctuary with narthex, lobby, and building attached. The attached building includes a Library, offices, and a room dubbed "The Bride's Room," off the lobby. A Christian Education wing was added in 1950 which houses the Preschool and children's Sunday School classes. The Choir Room is located in a section of the old sanctuary, near the education wing. At the back of the church building proper is the Ramsey Building, named for a former Pastor at Beulah. Opened in 1977, the Ramsey Building is a 2-story supplemental activity space with a full, commercial kitchen, gymnasium, locker rooms, restrooms, and rooms for meetings, classes, activities, etc.

At the far back of the property is the Fern Creek/Highview United Ministries Association (FC/HUM). The Ministries are a partnership among 23 faith communities to provide food, resources, and services to the surrounding community. In 2006, Beulah provided part of our land for FC/HUM to build a facility, as they had previously functioned out of borrowed space at a local church. We lease this land to FC/HUM for \$1 per year as a measure of goodwill, mission, and outreach. The Ministries offers a fully-functioning food pantry, an Adult Day Center, offices, and areas for processing people seeking services.

Condition

The church grounds and buildings are in good shape for their age. General clean up is needed for the Ramsey Building but no pressing issues are apparent. To increase the building's usage and make it more appropriate to different community

groups, locker room renovations and a renewal of the gymnasium ceiling and floor would need to be addressed. Adding central air to the gym would also increase its potential usage.

There are some cosmetic issues that can be addressed with paint and new carpet. In the Christian Education wing, bigger items will be needed such as a new roof and new windows to help improve energy efficiency. A recent roof repair to the Christian Education wing is holding, which pushes the need for a new flat roof over that area several years into the future.

Usage – Beulah Church - Sanctuary & Christian Education wing

Beulah has one hour of Sunday school classes, for children and adults, on Sunday mornings during the school year, from 9:30-10:30 am. Some of these classes meet in the Church building. There is also one weekly worship service that starts at 10:40 am; the services are traditional in nature. Beulah Preschool functions during the school year for half days during the week and Beulah's choir, handbell choir, and instrumental ensemble practice in the Choir Room weekly during the school year, as well. Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts meet in the basement of the building on several evenings. The Church at Louisville uses the sanctuary for their worship services on Sunday afternoons. A Marriage and Family Therapist has recently used space in the building to meet with her clients. Throughout the year, commissions, committees, the Book Club, and others meet in the church on a regular basis. The church office is open daily from 8:30-4:30pm Monday through Thursday and from 8:30-12:00 on Friday. The office remains a hub of activity during these times and church members frequently come and go as they engage in various ministries and activities.

Usage – Ramsey Building

Despite the need for some cosmetic updates, the Ramsey Building gets regular use by the congregation of Beulah and the surrounding community. Monthly, our two Presbyterian Women's circles, commissions, and Session meet in the Ramsey Building; weekly, there is Open Table, Youth Group, and Sunday school classes held there. Annually, Beulah has the Presbyterian Women Valentine's Luncheon, Christmas Dinner, Homecoming, and Chili Cook-Off as major potluck and catered events. The Church/Preschool Yard Sale happens twice a year. Outside our buildings, the youth host an annual Pumpkin Patch fundraiser selling pumpkins on the property, for which Beulah is widely recognized in the community.

As far as community groups utilizing the Ramsey Building, there are monthly meetings of the Fern Creek Women's Club and there have been, until recently, seasonal basketball practices. Occasionally there are wedding receptions held in the Ramsey Building and other group meetings, such as a grief support group. The Ramsey Building serves as a polling place for 2-3 precincts each year. Sporadically, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts use the building for their ceremonies and activities.

Our building usage rates have remained steady for the last 5 years and the number of groups/individuals utilizing the space has stayed about the same in that time frame. On average, in the past 10 years, Beulah has received \$7,686.00 annually in Ramsey Building Fees/Donations. There is great potential to make the building more usable for community groups with some of the upgrades mentioned previously.

Valuation of Property

Beulah is located at a busy intersection in a suburban area where lots of development is occurring. Beulah received a Broker Opinion of Value for its property and buildings in March 2017. Based on current zoning, the Opinion stated that if another church were to purchase the property and continue to use the building as a worship space, the sale price would likely be \$45-\$60 per square foot. Using this approach, one might expect the property to sell to another church for around \$2.25 to \$3 million.

Alternatively, the church's property and land could be sold for commercial use. A sale of the entire lot to a developer planning to pursue zoning approval and redevelopment for retail use or subdivided parcels could bring \$450,000 to \$800,000 per acre. Due to an existing deed restriction on the 1.79 acres where Fern Creek/Highview United Ministries is located, this might mean that only 4.33 acres would be able to be sold. This approach suggests that a land transaction of this size might yield \$3.0 to \$3.5 million.

The MST did not hear a strong desire to sell the property throughout their conversations, though the idea was raised in several settings. However, we felt it was important to obtain this information so that the Session and congregation could be aware of it as we continue to discern God's call to us for the future.

Church Finances & Generosity History

As our membership has declined in the past few decades, so, too has our income from pledges and regular donations. The team noticed that even though our financial resources have dwindled, we have maintained a fairly large staff. On several occasions in recent years, the church has come close to not meeting our financial commitments. However, the members of Beulah have always been known to come through when most needed and we have always remained current on our loans and been able to pay our staff.

Of particular note is the way our congregation provides in times of great need. For example, in the winter of 2015 the Boiler stopped working, effectively leaving the Preschool and Christian Education wing without heat. Within 3 weeks, enough money had been donated, cash-in-hand, to pay for a replacement; this is just one of many examples of the generosity of Beulah members.

Nonetheless, we need to take a serious look at the fact that we don't always have sufficient funds in the bank to feel safe in paying our commitments in the weeks and months ahead. Many of us have heard the sage advice that one should have at least 6-12 months of expenses saved in the bank as a security net. Would it not make sense then, that Beulah should strive to have this same financial security, readily available, should the unforeseen occur? This would require a great deal of sacrifice and increased generosity on the part of our members, but it would show that we are forward thinking in our financial stewardship. Ensuring that Beulah's mission and ministry can be sustained, regardless of what comes our way, would be a testament to both our historical past and our hoped-for future.

Financial Breakdown of the last 10 years at Beulah

Year Noteworthy Events	Total Income	Total Expenses	Salary Changes (excluding Pastor)	Staff Employed
2006 New parking lot	\$390,114.24	\$383,986.11	(Data in 2005 Annual Report)	*P, DCE, S, FS, DoM, Acc, DXC, C, RA, CC
2007 Replace complete A/C	\$375,562.47	\$381,225.70	3% raise for CED, S, FS, DoM, Acc, C	P, DCE, S, FS, DoM, Acc, DXC, C, RA, CC
2008 FC/HUM building added	\$415,188.24	\$397,902.32	2% raise to all but RA	P, DCE, S, BK DoM, Acc, Dx C, C, RA, CC
2009	\$370,359.94	\$380,499.92	No salary increases	P, DCE, S, BK, DoM, Acc, Dx C, RA, CC, LC
2010 Replace sewage pump	\$356,868.24	\$370,061.50	1% raise for CED, S, DoM, Acc, CC	P, DCE, S, BK, DoM, Acc, Dx C, RA, CC, LC
2011 Endowment Fund opened	\$354,669.06	\$352,675.40	No salary increases	P, DCE, S, DoM, Acc, C, RA, CC, LC
2012 Hail damage: roofs replaced	\$353,936.79	\$347,890.44	1% raise for all staff members	P, DCE, S, DoM, Acc, C, RA, CC, LC
2013 Renovate Ramsey Kitch.	\$384,050.80	\$381,239.65	1% raise for all except DoM & Acc	P, DCE, S, DoM, Acc, C/RA, CC, LC
2014	\$364,622.11	\$355,083.13	1% raise for DoM & Acc only	P, DCE, S, DoM, Acc, C/RA, CC, LC
2015 Boiler replaced	\$354,493.28	\$354,249.11	All staff get 1% raise	P, DCE, S, DoM, Acc, C/RA, CC, LC
2016 Departure of P, DCE, and DoM	\$310,859.24	\$308,390.01	2017, 3% raise approved for S, C, Acc	P/IP, DCE, S, BK, DoM, Acc, C, RC, LC, CC

*P=Pastor, DCE=Director of Christian Ed., S=Secretary, FS=Financial Secretary, BK=Bookkeeper, DoM=Director of Music, Acc=Organist/Pianist, DXC=Director of Cross Cultural Ministries, C=Custodian, RA=Ramsey Gym Attendant, RC=Ramsey Custodian, CC=Child Care Provider, LC=Lawn Care

ANNUAL PLEDGED & REGULAR GIVING

	Pledges/Regular Giving Budgeted	Pledges/Regular Giving Received
2006	\$317,500	\$324,891.85
2007	\$329,304	\$317,562.47
2008	\$326,500	\$332,997.01
2009	\$335,000	\$326,218.96
2010	\$306,093	\$321,052.65
2011	\$297,651	\$312,256.58
2012	\$309,459	\$318,895.98
2013	\$305,189	\$310,480.30
2014	\$291,586	\$299,098.72
2015	\$292,170	\$296,562.07
2016	\$275,412	\$274,146.78

Cottage Meetings & Small Group Highlights

As part of the Fearless Generosity campaign in October 2016, our congregation took part in “Cottage Meetings.” Members were divided into groups of 8-12 people and invited to a host’s home for dessert and discussion about the church. These meetings kicked-off Beulah’s conversation about where we have been as a church, where we are now, and where we would like to go in the future. Many wonderful discussions took place at these get-togethers and some trends emerged as a result.

Most people mentioned the friendliness/fellowship aspect of Beulah as our most enduring value - what we find most essential to who we are. Second only to this, was the feeling that our endeavors in mission and outreach are highly important. From there the responses about Beulah’s most enduring values were the youth ministry, the music programs, the preaching, and Christian Education offerings.

When members were asked to describe an experience when they felt most alive or engaged at Beulah, many responded with personal accounts of activities that they had shared in: the Praying Hands Ministry (making comforters/blankets for those who are sick, injured, or in need of a warm, loving touch), youth and adult mission trips, being asked to serve on a committee, commission, Session, etc., the Chili Cook-off (one of two annual “Fun”raisers for our Ben Watson Youth Memorial Fund), and so many more.

Looking to the future, unsurprisingly, many members want growth in our numbers, including growth in diversity, growth in the number of families with young children, and a desire to better use our facilities.

While the Cottage Meetings provided lots of conversation, we realized that not everyone was able to attend these gatherings. Therefore, the MST met with many of the groups who meet at Beulah on a regular basis. This sparked more conversations and still more trends began to develop. In total, we met with 13 groups that are a part of the church membership or use the building regularly including adult and youth Sunday School classes, the Book Club, the Presbyterian Women (PW) Circles, the Choir, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Girl Scouts, as well as the church and Preschool staff. Despite the wide and varied nature of the membership in each of these groups, overwhelmingly one theme seemed to materialize: fellowship.

At the forefront of many of these small group discussions was both a sense that fellowship is what makes Beulah special, as well as a need and desire to strengthen fellowship and deepen relationships among our current membership. There was a palpable sense that we can fortify the ways we share this faith journey; strengthening relationships and becoming more like a family through a multitude of fellowship opportunities. Things like a summer movie night, game nights, monthly potlucks, etc. were suggested. Some pointed out that there used to be more activities to participate in at church in previous years. In general, it seemed as though a culture of staff-driven activities had taken over in the past several years, leading to a decline in the number and variance of activities hosted by and for members. There is a strong desire to change this culture and see new and different kinds of programs, activities, and fellowship opportunities come to fruition. In addition to nurturing current members, these kinds of activities provide a way to reach out to potential new members who may be able to more easily find their place in the church and develop friendships, in addition to simply attending worship.

One area of concern that was mentioned in the groups and that continues to challenge the church are the homeless individuals who frequent the property, as well as signs of drug-use happening on church grounds. In the past, homeless members were welcomed to stay on the property for periods of time and though this policy has been changed, there are occasionally people who make a residence in the creek area beside the Ramsey Building. This location beside our playground makes some feel unsafe, particularly our preschool staff who are responsible for so many young children. Drug use is also a major concern in the whole Fern Creek community and due to our location on a busy corner with much foot traffic, we are not immune. These issues have caused some tension in the church and remain a challenge for leaders to address with compassion, while still keeping members and children safe.

Members lifted up Beulah's commitment to education. This commitment is clear through the long established preschool housed in our building, our educational opportunities for adults, and youth ministries. The church's initial leap of faith in hiring a Director of Christian Education in 1998 paid many dividends in the lives of children and youth. The DCE created new opportunities for faith development and relationship building such as mission trips, Montreat youth conferences, and middle school retreats. At the current time, Beulah is relying on its pastor and many volunteers to resource the educational ministries of the church.

Usage of the building came up in many discussions, as well. Some raised the concern that we have a very large sanctuary compared to the number in attendance

on any given Sunday. Some felt that we should sell the property and move to a new location; others thought such a move would be the “end of Beulah” as we know it. There is an awareness among the congregation that we are a smaller church compared to previous years, but are still functioning like a large church. This has an impact on our finances, to be sure. There was no consensus on these issues, but there was a general feeling that we can do more to put our building to use throughout the week and on Sundays, whether by inviting other groups to worship in our space or by increasing community use of the buildings.

As expected, many of these small group discussions eventually hit on the topic of membership, and the desire for new members to come to Beulah. Lots of people said that they thought an increase in the number of activities offered would bring in new people. However, the MST is clear that we as a church need to hone our interpersonal relationships so that when a visitor comes to see us, they will see this sense of family present before them and want to join in. We also understand that Presbyterians are sometimes jokingly referred to as “the Frozen Chosen,” alluding, in part, to a collective fear of evangelism. We recognize that in order to bring in new members, many of them will have to be invited by those of us who already worship here. Having a leader that could embolden us and teach us to do just that is what we, as a team, feel is necessary to achieve the continued vitality of the church. While necessary, such a pastor may encounter some hesitancy in asking us to share our faith stories and invite others to join us on our journey.

A Biblical Story Exercise with the Session, and the Congregational Event

To ensure the MST had contact with the whole church in our discernment process, a congregational event was planned. To form the basis of this event, the team attended a meeting of the Session to participate in a Biblical Story Exercise.

The Session members and members of the MST were broken up into three smaller groups and tasked with finding a story, or stories, from the Bible that speak to where Beulah currently is, or to where Beulah is going in the future. When the three groups reconvened, they shared their ideas and, surprisingly, the first story shared grabbed our attention.

Hebrews 12:1-3, particularly the version in *The Message Bible*, seemed to get everyone in the room excited. There was a unanimous decision to present these verses to the congregation during Sunday worship to allow them to reflect on it and discuss how it does (or doesn't) speak to where Beulah is and is going.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's *there*, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

From The Message (MSG), by Eugene H. Peterson

The very next Sunday, Beulah's worship service and congregational event was a bit, dare we say, radical?! With fair warning, those seated in the pews were divided using colored flags on their bulletins into 6 groups, each led in a conversation about this scripture reading. Leaders asked group members how the passage made them feel, what it made folks think about, and how this story illustrates specific aspects of Beulah's life together today and the direction Beulah is going. We also discussed what in this scripture gives people hope.

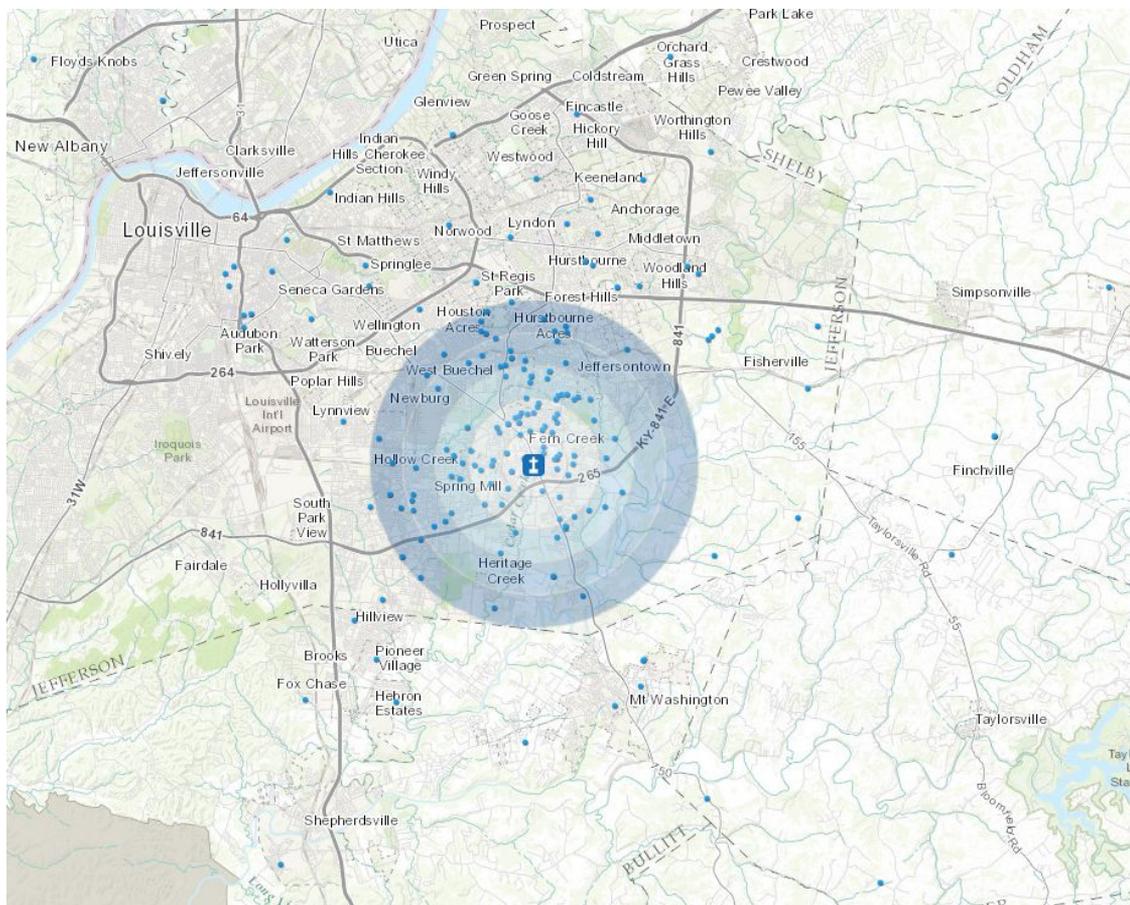
One group highlighted our need to know what it means to be Presbyterian, looking to the practices laid out by the General Assembly and Presbytery to guide our membership. Also mentioned was the need to reach out to the disenfranchised groups in our midst: specifically, the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and Questioning/Queer (LGBTQ) community, as well as refugees in our community. While the team senses that the general feeling in the church is that we want to welcome everyone and anyone, we have not taken the necessary steps to establish where our congregation truly sits on certain social justice issues. In the future, our leadership will need help in discerning how our church embodies the concept of "open hearts, open minds," to ensure that all who come through the doors truly do feel welcome.

Following the break-out session, the congregation was invited to meet together in the lobby for refreshments and to share their group's findings, and the shock of having such a different service on a Sunday! Overall, the feeling was that this Hebrews scripture does an excellent job of honoring Beulah's rich and extensive history, while also showing a path for the future. The passage lifts up Jesus' life, trials, and successes, which are the perfect comparison for our own "races of faith." This is a message Beulah definitely needs to hear in 2017 and remember in years to come.

External Data: Who Are Our Neighbors in the Community and the World?

Fern Creek, Kentucky, the community where Beulah is located, is about ten miles southeast of downtown Louisville, the home of the Kentucky Derby and the largest city in the state. The church has stood on the same site for the past 149 years since its founding, at the corner of Bardstown and Beulah Church Roads, a major four lane artery and a smaller cross-county road named for the church itself. Fern Creek experienced a surge of growth in the 1950s when General Electric opened its largest manufacturing plant nearby. At its peak, Appliance Park, as it was called, employed 25,000 people and many of Beulah's members who joined in the 1950s and 60s were among these employees. Unlike some other nearby communities, Fern Creek never became an incorporated city and transitioned from being a rural, agricultural community to a suburban neighborhood of Louisville Metro. Recent growth has been accelerated by the construction of the Snyder Freeway, which intersects Bardstown Road about a half mile south of the church and allows fast access to other parts of the city. Many of our members live nearby in the communities of Jeffersontown, Okolona, Highview and Buechel.

Map of the Homes of Current Beulah Members



An interactive version of this map can be found at

<http://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=ad5ffc0afb6e432ab10a72512bc78748>

Demographic Statistics

ALL DATA BELOW WERE GATHERED IN THE THREE MILE RADIUS AROUND BEULAH AND WERE COMPILED IN THE 2010-2015 TIME FRAME.

- Within the 3 mile radius of Beulah, families as a percentage of all households is above 54%. In most neighborhoods within the radius, the percentage is in the 64 - 80% range.
- The highest percentage of families are married couples without children (32%) with the second highest percentage being married couples with children (23%).
- A third significant portion of the population is non-family, living alone households, accounting for 25% of the population.
- The growth rate of the area during this time was 1.3%, which is above the national average of 0.08%.
- The age distribution of the area is what would be expected in an area of married couples, the adult population being fairly evenly distributed in age groups 21- 64, with the 45 - 54 year group being the highest. Age distribution among children and seniors is evenly distributed. The percentage of young adults 25-34 is about 5% greater than the national average, which may be accounted for by reasonable housing costs.
- The area has above the national average of college educated individuals with over 21% holding a Bachelor's degree and over 11% with a graduate degree.
- Household income is above the national average with 29% in the \$75,000-\$124,999 range and 16% above \$125,000. Households below the poverty level is well below the national average.
- The population is predominately white collar, around 65%, with blue collar at 22% and services workers at 8%.
- The population is 79% white non-Hispanic, 12% black non-Hispanic, and 4% Hispanic.

Getting to know our neighbors

To learn more about our community and its needs, members of the MST visited local organizations and hosted visits from others on our campus. We visited the James H. Bates Elementary School (named after our former Clerk of the Session), the Fern Creek-Highview United Ministries, which is located on our own campus, the President of the Fern Creek Chamber of Commerce, while the director of the Southeast YMCA in Buechel visited our campus.

During these interviews, we were happy to hear Beulah receive favorable reviews for being an outward-looking church for our mission and outreach activities in the community. However, we were told that there are still unmet needs where our church could help. These include:

Assistance for low-income Bates Elementary students by

- Providing school uniforms,
- Volunteering for the "Every 1 Reads" program,
- Assisting new English speakers in filling out forms and applications and
- Christian instruction/encouragement for elementary students.

At the Fern Creek/Highview United Ministries there have been more people coming for food and assistance with their utilities/bills in January-March 2017 than there

were for the same time last year. This has been the trend almost from the beginning of the FC/HUM – the need is ever present and ever growing. We were told that instruction in basic life skills for area adults is also needed. This includes:

- Household budgeting,
- Automobile maintenance and repair, and
- Cooking and nutrition,

We could also help the immigrant community by working with Catholic Charities to teach

- English,
- How to shop in American stores, and
- Reading for illiterate individuals.

The Chamber of Commerce president complimented the curb appeal of our campus.

Finally, the visit to Beulah by the Buechel YMCA proved to be very exciting as they are open to partnering with us to use the Ramsey building facilities and possibly to assist with some repairs and updates. This partnership would be a service to the Fern Creek community. It is a way to put our facilities to use in a larger way and to increase our visibility in the area, which might provide opportunities to invite neighbors into our fellowship. Additionally, there is potential for generating usage fees through this partnership.

To reach out to neighbors who live beyond Fern Creek, Beulah participates in a number of worldwide missions by joining in the PC(USA) special offerings - One Great Hour of Sharing, Peacemaking, Pentecost, and Christmas Joy; Cents-Ability/3 Cents a Meal; and Living Waters for the World. Members have also traveled to Mississippi to assist in Hurricane Katrina recovery and worked on Habitat for Humanity houses. Opportunities abound in our community to get involved in new projects that reach neighbors both nationally and globally and we seek to respond when our members feel called to these kinds of ministries.

**A Vision for Beulah: What is God
Calling Us to Do and Be in the Next
Few Years?**

The following three areas of focus emerged throughout the MST's discernment about God's call to Beulah for the future. We offer these as suggestions to the leadership of the church and the whole congregation as our dreaming and discerning about the future continues.

Fostering Fellowship and Community in the Congregation

We believe the congregation will benefit from developing fellowship, friendship, and deeper relationships among our current membership.

- We encourage the leadership to foster a change in the culture of staff-driven activities to one of new and varied activities and fellowship opportunities. Rather than being led only by commissions or committees, we urge current members to come forward and share their talents to develop and enjoy more fellowship activities. Some suggestions we offer are open-air movie nights, hikes, a dog walking or playing club, Zumba classes, a Bible study group in a member's home, game nights, and pot luck dinners. These activities will provide a way to reach out to current members, potential new members, and the community to allow them to more easily find their place in the church and develop a connection to our church family.
- As we focus on establishing new activities, we cannot leave behind our care for homebound members and those aging in the congregation. We might find new ways to reach out to members who decrease their attendance or stop coming altogether to let them know they are missed and to discuss where we as a church may not be meeting their needs.

Opportunities for Membership Growth

There are many opportunities for Beulah to worship, learn, and serve today, and yet so much more potential with the increased members with whom we are striving to connect. Our missions such as Open Table, FC/HUM, and the Beulah Preschool, although vital to who we are and what we are to accomplish in God's world, are not a major source of new members. History has shown this to be true. Looking at our potential membership growth in the next ten years, the MST believes Beulah may be a more natural fit for those people in the area who occupy the higher education and income demographics. The church could identify and market itself to this group who may be more naturally drawn to the theology and mission of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and particularly Beulah. It is the conviction of the MST that we are situated among citizens who are likely to share our sense of mission and be open to the Word as confessed by the Presbyterian Church. Our calling as a church is to find them, connect with them, and keep them engaged in ministry. This focus should not jeopardize our service to the whole community or our hospitality to visitors and members of all kinds.

Some suggestions on how to accomplish this outreach are as follows:

- We can do a better job of broadcasting our current programs, ministries and assets. One way this might be accomplished is by investing in a modern, electronic sign where we could advertise upcoming events, thereby taking advantage of the major intersection outside our door to inform the thousands of people sitting at the red lights everyday.

- Another step that Beulah is already taking is a redesign of our web page. Along with our Facebook page, this will provide information for people using online resources to research churches.
- We could sponsor programs on the local NPR public radio stations. Some churches in the city currently do so, however none of them are in our area of southeast Jefferson County, although many of the listeners live here. This is a demographic that will likely be receptive to our open minded theology.
- Members should invite friends, neighbors, and even co-workers to join in our activities and worship.
- We heard consistent expressions of openness to the LGBTQ community throughout our conversations. Being clear about our conviction could be another way of opening ourselves to the wider community. However, the Session and congregation have not yet explored and discerned whether this is a public witness the church wishes to engage in. We encourage the leadership of Beulah to engage in a process of discernment related to the church's hospitality to LGBTQ members of our community. Beulah has tiptoed around these issues for many years, through denominational policies and education classes, but might benefit from a more in-depth discussion that takes the pulse of the whole congregation and incorporates that sense into the church's future vision.
- We also encourage the leadership of Beulah to continue discussions about race and ethnicity and the ways that the congregation can shape its ministry to meet the needs of a variety of individuals and families. We have heard that the church seeks to be open to all, but the congregation may not always know how to enact this welcome or communicate it to the community.

Community Outreach & Mission Opportunities

Reaching out to help others has been a core tradition in Beulah's history. Through personal experience and financial giving, many in our congregation have felt the joy, pride, and unity in Christ that comes from serving others. There are lots of opportunities right near our church that are ripe for hands-on mission. We feel excitement about these opportunities, but also want our church to follow the lead of members who have a specific passion for particular missions, which leads to increased involvement and commitment among the congregation.

Opportunities in our own "backyard" include:

- Volunteering with the "Every 1 Reads" Program at Bates Elementary School
- Hosting a collection of needed items for Bates Elementary School, such as school uniforms or socks/underwear
- Hosting a monthly worship service at Traditions retirement home, where several church members live
- Offering classes to the community on general life skills such as cooking, household budgeting, home repair/maintenance, etc.
- Offering mentoring for students at Open Table on a regular basis
- Partnering with local immigrants and/or refugees to help them gain skills in English language and daily living in America (shopping, cooking, job skills, etc.)