

2025 Mission Study
Trinity Presbyterian Church Hendersonville, NC
By Transitional/Interim Pastor David Garnett

Background

In September 2024 Mark Stanley stepped down after nearly 20 years as pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Hendersonville, NC. Mark's long tenure necessitated the calling of a transitional/interim pastor to help maintain and shepherd the life of the Trinity church through the transition between pastors; to lead the church through a mission study process; and, along with Trinity's Presbytery liaison, Tom Phillips, resource the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) in their search for their new pastor. I was called to be that transitional pastor and began my work in February 2025.

Mission Study Defined

My first task was to lead Trinity through a mission study process. A mission study, during the time between installed pastors, is an opportunity for a church to say anew who it is (identity), what it believes (ethos), and what it resolves to do in the future (mission). Answering these questions for itself, before it searches for a pastor, typically reenergizes the congregation and helps the church's PNC to know what kind of pastor to look for as it goes out to search for a spiritual leader who will help the church get to the future the church envisions for itself.

Mission Study Process Described

Mission studies differ according to the transitional pastor leading them. My own approach to a church mission study relies heavily on personal research, including lots of extended conversation with elders, deacons, other church members, and church staff.

Phase One of my mission study is doing personal research on a church, which includes reading everything about the church I can get my hands on, and inviting church members and staff to sit down with me one-on-one so I can get to know them each better and hear their perceptions of the church. I keep going in this phase as long as church members and staff keep coming to talk. Once my one-on-one conversations come to an end, I summarize what I learned from all of them, especially the repeated themes I heard.

Phase Two is the organizing of small focus groups of six to eight members each to talk to each other about the things discovered in Phase One and to talk to each other about

the future of their church. I moderate each of these groups and take extensive notes. Our group conversation begins by reviewing my summary of the one-on-one conversations and soliciting feedback on it and seeing where the conversation goes from there. Once these focus groups come to an end, I summarize what I learned from those.

Phase Three is presenting to the Session all that I have learned from personal research, one-on-one conversations, and from the focus groups, and using these as the basis to set the direction of the church for the years ahead, coming to a general agreement of what kind of pastor it will take to get them there, and making any decisions that need to be made before starting the search for the next pastor. All of this is discussed and decided at a Session retreat organized for this purpose.

Also during Phase Three I call a town hall meeting of the congregation to do a Powerpoint presentation of all that we learned and all that was decided by the Session about the church through the mission study. This is an effort to get the whole church on the same page as we get ready, through the PNC, to search for the next pastor. Church members are given an opportunity to offer feedback on the mission study.

Trinity Mission Study Results

Results of Phase One (Personal Research and One-on-one Conversations).

Personal Research—The Church’s Self-Understanding

My personal research revealed that Trinity Presbyterian Church was founded in 1965. In 1967 the church formally stated its vision for its future for the first time in this way (taken from the church history on the church website):

- (1) To proclaim the gospel in word and deed;
- (2) To nurture the members of Christ’s church;
- (3) To provide a ministry of compassion in the name of Christ.

The following mission statement for Trinity was adopted 36 years later on June 8, 2003 and quoted in the 2024 annual report:

“Trinity is a family of faith called to make the Word known to all ages, to grow in faith together, to minister to those in need, and to do all these things with joy, love, and compassion.”

More recently it has expressed on its website this vision for Trinity:

“Trinity is a family of faith, trusting and following Jesus Christ, welcoming and nurturing all people, reaching out to serve the needs of our communities near and far; and doing these things humbly and joyfully, believing that the greatest commandment is LOVE. “

The following welcome statement, which appears on the sanctuary screens during the beginning of worship, in the weekly worship bulletin, and on the website, is also reflective of the church’s own understanding of its own vision and mission:

“Trinity Presbyterian Church welcomes you without regard to race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, education, economic circumstance, your place of origin or any other issue that divides God’s family. We are Christ’s people and this is Christ’s place with its doors wide open.”

This welcome statement was given a particular concrete expression when the Session voted in recent years for Trinity to become a “More Light” church, which encourages the full participation of the LGBTQ+ community in church and in society. Trinity, as an expression of being a More Light church, has since hosted the Atlanta Gay Men’s Chorus and supported the annual Hendersonville Gay Pride event from its inception with a church presence at the events.

Taken together, all these vision, mission and welcome statements describe Trinity as a welcoming, inclusive church centered in Jesus Christ, a church growing in faith together, and a church reaching out in love and compassion to meet the needs of others, both within the church and in the immediate community, and in God’s wider world. From what I have seen and experienced, the church has lived up to its own understanding of itself in a wide variety of ways over many many years. All these expressions collectively reveal that Trinity aligns well with our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Personal Research–Trinity’s long history of mission activity

Al Kissling, who served as Trinity pastor from 1979-97, was especially gifted in getting Trinity connected to the real needs of people living in Henderson County. Al helped start a half-dozen nonprofits in Hendersonville that were focused on meeting the real practical human needs of people in the area. Some of these nonprofits, including IAM (community crisis ministry), SAFELIGHT (an outreach to victims of domestic violence) THRIVE (an outreach to those navigating mental health and housing crises), and BLUE

RIDGE HEALTH (a healthcare provider that provides compassionate, affordable, quality health care), continue operating to this day.

Trinity continues to be involved in local missions, providing financial and volunteer support to a wide variety of helping organizations, as well as global missions, including specific outreach to Guatemala, Madagascar and Malawi. A recent church-wide time and talent survey revealed that 98 Trinity members volunteer at a total of 36 local agencies.

According to the 2024 church annual report, Trinity gave away \$253,000 in total mission giving from all sources in 2024. This year Session made a commitment to tithe to mission (5% local and 5% global) on all future unrestricted bequests.

As part of its ongoing commitment to mission, the Trinity Session within the last few years voted to become a denominationally-designated “Matthew 25” church, inspired by the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 and committing itself to (1) build congregational vitality; (2) dismantle structural racism; and (3) eradicate systemic poverty.

Concrete expressions of the Matthew 25 commitment have been realized in Trinity taking a leading role in the establishment of a local chapter of “Circles”, a nationwide program to eradicate poverty, as well as the “Accompaniment Church”, which provides assistance to local immigrant families anxious about recent governmental immigration policy changes.

Trinity’s local mission ministry has recently become part of “CarePortal”, a national effort made up of local chapters to keep kids in intact families.

“Circles”, “Accompaniment Church” and “CarePortal” grew out of a church environment nurtured by Trinity that allows and encourages individual members to incubate new mission ideas, test them with other members and receive feedback and support, and explore ways of bringing them to fruition.

Trinity has also extended its understanding of mission to include the stewardship of all of God’s creation through the Earth Care ministry. This environmental focus has led to Trinity receiving special recognition by our denomination as an Earth Care church, which involves the celebration of God’s creation in worship; education about the threats to creation and ways to heal it; managing our church facilities in ways that respect and cherish God’s creation; and outreach that encourages public policy and community involvement that protects and restores the earth. One outstanding expression of

Trinity's care for the creation was to fund and install solar panels on its church roof and to advise other local churches on installing them on their churches.

In January of this year Trinity was granted the 2024 *Restoring Creation Award* by the group Presbyterians for Earth Care, which has bestowed this honor on one church every year since 1998. Trinity is one of only 28 churches out of 330+ Earth Caring Congregations nationwide to receive this special honor.

Personal Research—Trinity's History of Pastors

History of Trinity's Pastors

Hugh Eichelberger 1965-1973 (8 years)

Alexander Sandy McGeachy 1973-1978 (5 years)

Albert Kissling 1979–1997 (18 years)

Tom Blair 1999-2004 (5 years)

Mark Stanley 2005–2024 (19 ½ years)

History of Trinity's Associate Pastors

Jonathan Brown—1988-94 (6 years)

Margie Boyd—1995-96 (1 year)

John Odom—2002-2005 (3 years)

Dwight Christenbury 2008–Present (17 years)

Trinity has had five pastors in its history and four associate pastors. Trinity has been blessed to have had two long-term pastors, Al Kissling (18 years) and Mark Stanley (19 ½ years), and one long-term associate pastor, Dwight Christenbury (17 years). These long-term pastorates speak well of Trinity and of the pastors they have called. Long-term pastorates are typically a positive for a church, revealing a certain stability and contentment in the relationship between the pastors and the congregation. In a long-term relationship both the congregation and the pastors see mutual benefit in continuing the relationship between them and encourage its continuation.

Personal Research—Trinity's Organizational Structure

Boards and Organizations

Session (15 elders)

Board of Deacons (16 Deacons)

Board of Directors of the Corporation (The Session)

Presbyterian Women (includes three PW circles)

Staff

Pastor (Vacant)

Transitional Pastor (David)--temporary full-time

Associate Pastor (Dwight)--full-time

Minister of Visitation (Sally)--volunteer

Church Administrator (Katie)--30 hours/week

Maintenance Facilitator (Jim)--15 hours/week

Music Director (Stephen)--20 hours/week (retiring in August after 42 years at Trinity)

Choir Section Leaders (4)--Katie, Claire, Tim, Eric

Bookkeeper (Lynn) (stepping down end of August 2025)

Nursery Workers (Trinity is currently trying to fill all 3 positions)

Ministries

Administration

Building & Grounds

Christian Nurture and Library

Earth Care

Endowment

Fellowship

Finance & Stewardship

Global Missions

Local Missions

Matthew 25

New Member

Personnel

Worship

Committees

Nominating

Endowment

Technology

Church Interest Groups

Choir

Learning Hour Classes (Lectionary Class, Issues and Concerns, Youth Class, Children's

Class, special speakers)

Friends in Christ (men's group)

Wednesday Night Live (every other week meal and program)

Annual Vacation Bible School (with two other local churches)

Coffee Group

Tai Chi Group

Origami Group

Prayer Shawl Group

Luopad Sewing Group (makes reusable feminine hygiene products for women in Malawi)

Wise Women Network (a new group offering practical assistance for widows)

Community Interest Groups Meeting at Trinity

French Conversation Group

Book Clubs

PFLAG (Parents/Friends of Lesbians and Gays supporting, educating, and advocating for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them—Trinity helped found PFLAG and houses the library of the local PFLAG chapter)

Death Cafe (discussion of death and end-of-life issues)

Mankind Group (men's group)

Cub Scouts

Toastmasters

Musical groups—Musicke Antiqua, Swing Band

Local HOA meets at the church

Trinity's deacons, dividing members up into 15 "parishes", do a wonderful job together of checking in with and taking care of members of the congregation in their parish. It is the kind of deacon work I have always envisioned for all the churches I have pastored but never really saw it in action until I got to Trinity.

Trinity's Presbyterian Women group, divided up into three active circles, provide good opportunities for women in the church to meet together, form friendships, learn and grow in faith, support missions of various kinds together, and support each other through the joys and challenges of life.

I marvel at the wide variety of human needs that are met by Trinity through its various boards, ministries and interest groups. Some refer to Trinity for this reason as a "one-

stop shop." But sometimes I wonder, when I see some members taking on multiple roles in the church, if perhaps the church might be trying to do too much right now.

Personal Research- Statistics

My personal research of the church revealed that the church was founded in 1965, which makes this year the 60th anniversary of the church.

The first 30 years of Trinity's history the church drew in all ages, and then, after a series of unfortunate conflicts in the mid-1990s, became mostly a retiree church for the last 30 years.

The average age of church members is now 75 (up from 66 in 2012, according to a study done that year). This makes Trinity an older congregation, but not in any stereotypical sense. There is definitely a youthful, learning, adventuresome spirit in this older congregation. Nevertheless, the age trend is concerning for the future of Trinity.

According to data gathered from annual statistical reports since the last Trinity church study in 2012, membership and attendance in recent years have been on a long, slow decline, while giving to the church has remained strong.

Year	Membership	Worship Attendance	Annual Income
2012	367	201	\$560,000
2013	356	152	\$592,000
2014	335	199	\$604,000
2015	331	193	\$602,000
2016	322	191	\$587,000
2017	308	175	\$580,000
2018	305	170	\$587,000
2019	285	173	\$565,000
2020	282	43 (COVID)	\$635,000
2021	297	77 (COVID)	\$753,000
2022	293	129	\$587,000
2023	298	133	\$754,000
2024	296	140	\$584,000
2025	250*	157	N/A

*We are in the process of cleaning the active membership rolls and should be finished with that within the next month. The 250 figure for 2025 membership is an educated guess as to the active membership we will end up with.

Personal Research–Church Finances

The church finances seem to be in good shape. The church has no debt and is paying its bills. Financial controls are in place to prevent a theft of funds. There have been several generous bequests given to the church in recent years. The church has a number of funds and endowments to draw on for things it needs and for causes it wants to support. There is generous support of mission.

One-on-One Conversations

Ninety-one people associated with Trinity came to talk to me one-on-one from February to April 2025 (over a third of the congregation and a good cross-section of the whole). This was a record for me as a transitional pastor when I consider the number of respondents as a percentage of membership.

Below is my summary of the most repeated themes in those conversations:

What I Learned About Trinity From Conversation and Research

Make-up of the Congregation

*Most members are transplants from the Midwest, Northeast, and Southeast. Not many grew up here. Many still have family outside the area.

*Denominational Background: Variety (Most did not grow up Presbyterian.)

*Socio-economic class: mostly retired professional class

*Education level: mostly college educated and postgraduate study

*Theological, Social, Political Positions: mostly left of center (progressive)

[Note: Though Trinity comes across to me as being mostly progressive, not all members describe themselves as progressive. Some are more conservative, and some more middle of the road, but I have not picked up on much tension, conflict, division or lack of care in the congregation brought about by these differences.]

*Average age: 75 (up from 66 in 2012)

*Race: White

*Generation: Mostly Boomer (ages 57-79) and Silent (ages 80-97)

*Ratio of Women to Men (3:2)

Strengths of the Congregation

- *Members love the church just the way it is
- *Friendly, welcoming and accepting
- *Mission Oriented (actively working in the community and world to meet practical human needs)
- *Lots of caring for one another within the church, and lots of good friendships
- *Progressive Orientation (e.g., More Light Church that embraces LGBTQ+)
- *Stewardship of Creation (Earth Care, solar panels on church, denominational recognition)
- *Strong lay leadership and involvement in the congregation
- *Strong financial giving and strong financial support of mission
- *Church meets many of the varied needs of members.
- *Plenty of building space and parking, and a willingness to share it with community groups

Main Challenge of Congregation: aging/demographics/slowly decreasing membership and attendance/few young families with children

- *A central tension in the church is that most members love Trinity the way it is, but worry that it will eventually age out.
- *A Trinity church study identified this same demographic challenge back in 2012.
- *Trinity has been a vital, active retiree church since the 1990s (30 years), but it was a church of all ages from 1965–1995 until several conflicts within the church led to a church split that caused many under 50 to leave the church.
- *Currently 81% of the congregation is 56 and older, while half are 70 and over.
- *The average member is now 75 years old (up from 66 in 2012).
- *1990 was the high point of membership (547) and worship attendance (300) at Trinity. Today the church has less than half the membership (250) and about half the average weekly worship attendance (157).

What Members Are Looking For in the Next Pastor:

- *Good preacher/teacher/communicator
- *Assertive leader

- *Empathic pastoral caregiver
- *Effective administrator/head of staff
- *Progressive
- *On board with all the existing ministries of the church
- *Help us grow the church
- *Help us lower the average age of members
- *Personable, with a sense of humor

In my view, the most important finding from the one-on-ones was that church members are generally pretty happy with the church as it is now, but worry that the church may just age out sometime in the future. I judged both their enthusiasm for the church and their concern about its future as legitimate based on my conversations with members and other research.

Some churches I've known have waited too late to address their aging challenges and reached a point of no return. Trinity has an opportunity to address them now.

I frequently heard members comment positively about associate pastor Dwight Christenbury, affirming him for the way he has stepped up as a leader in the aftermath of Mark Stanley leaving, as well as for the quality of his preaching.

Results of Phase Two (Focus Groups). Seventy-seven members participated in a dozen different focus groups, each averaging between four and nine members, gathering to talk to each other about the future of Trinity. Here are my notes from those groups:

What I Learned About Trinity From the Mission Study Focus Groups

During the month of May 2025, 77 church members participated in 12 focus groups of four-nine people each. We began each group by reading my two-page summary of my 91 one-on-one conversations with church members and reacting to it, and then seeing where our conversation led from there.

Most of the focus groups ended up talking about three main things:

- (1) Which model for doing church together is best for Trinity in the next five years?
- (2) The need to better promote, publicize and market the church and its activities to the surrounding community and how best to do it.

(3) Revisiting the question of what we wanted in a pastor based on this new discussion of church models and the need for promotion

(1) Church Models

I got feedback in the focus groups about various church models for Trinity that had been previously proposed by individual church members in the one-on-one conversations. Below is a summary of the church models we discussed and how members reacted to each:

Model #1–"Leaning Into the Retiree Church Model"--This model of doing church is essentially what we do now. This model would maintain the Trinity status quo. Trinity has been basically a retiree church for the last 30 years. Since the mid 1990s Trinity has mostly been a church run by and for retirees. Programs and schedules have been developed over the years mostly with retirees in mind, that is, led by considerations of what would be of interest to retirees and what days and times would be convenient for them to attend.

There were mixed reviews on this model from our membership. Some are very enthusiastic about it; to others it seemed limiting.

Members who support this model note that the membership is currently very satisfied about what is happening at the church right now and are not asking for a lot of big changes right now. This retiree model is what the church has known and has been familiar with for a long time. It was noted several times that Trinity is a retiree church in a popular retiree community that brings in a steady stream of new retirees.

Others miss having a lot of young families with kids around the church. Most of us grew up in churches of all ages and that kind of church seems more normal for many of us than a retiree church. The few kids that are in the church miss having other kids with whom to interact. Some members just want more variety of groups in the church, whether young families or other groups, and not just retirees. Some note that the retiree model of doing church does not really address in any practical way the anxiety many of our members feel about the church eventually just aging out.

Model #2–"Leaning into the Retiree+Generation X Church Model". (Generation X is the generation of Americans that were born after the Baby Boomers.)

This model is not much different from Model #1 (above), only a little bigger.

Some members see Generation X as the most logical generation for Trinity to reach out to after retirees. We already have some of this generation in the church. They are not that much younger than those in our church. They are beginning to think about retirement. Many Generation X are empty nesters. It would not be much of a reach for a retiree church to seek out Generation X.

There is a difference of opinion among members as to whether Generation X generally is as progressive as our current membership and whether or not most of them would be attracted to our church. Some think of Generation X as a more conservative generation. Some thought Generation X would be attracted by our environmental emphasis.

If Trinity did pursue this model, the church would have to schedule night and weekend activities to include Generation Xers who are still working, and night scheduling could be a problem for some of our retirees.

Model #3—“Redevelop Trinity Into A Church For All Ages”--It was noted that Trinity was a church of all ages for the first 30 years of its history and could be again.

I heard a number of members express the dream of having more young families with youth and children in the church. So many of us grew up in churches of all ages and that seems the norm for many of us. Some of our older members were at Trinity when it was a church of all ages.

But even some of those who expressed the desire for young families also expressed doubt about how a mostly retiree church with very few children would be able to attract young families and keep them and meet their needs. It was noted by several members that you have to have a good core group of young families to attract other young families, and we really don't have that core right now.

Another issue is this: while I sense a desire among some members for more young families, I am not sensing much desire or energy among the existing church family to be directly involved with those young families and provide all the things that young families would need from our church, and this could be another challenge in embracing this model.

Model #4—“Develop a Church of More Racial Diversity”--Though this was mentioned by a few members in one-on-one conversations, it never really got much traction in the focus groups. Most who commented on this possibility noted the difficulty of white churches attracting Hispanic, Black and Asian members. It was noted that we live in a community that has a large majority of white people and a relatively small number of

non-white minorities. Moreover, we still live in a world where people like to be with their own religious/racial tribe, whatever that happens to be, and usually develop a unique religious/racial culture within that tribe that is difficult to reproduce in other settings, and it is probably unrealistic to think that Trinity would end up attracting many non-white visitors.

Model #5—“Focus Not on Age or Race But on our Common Trinity Mission, and Better Promote Our Mission in the Community.” The idea here is that a common mission could transcend age and race as a unifier for Trinity. The argument is that if we better promoted our common mission within our larger community, we might well find people of all ages and of all races who would be interested in joining us in that mission if they only knew what we were doing. This model was introduced late in the focus groups and got limited play, so it is hard for me to assess how our members reacted to it.

(2) Promoting, Publicizing and Marketing Trinity and Its Activities in the Community

In response to the challenge of having an aging and slowly declining church, there was much discussion in the focus groups about how to better promote, publicize and market the church.

I found good support in the focus groups for ramping up our efforts at publicizing and promoting the activities of the church in our community.

We seem to know what to do with visitors when they come to the church. They receive a warm, friendly, accepting welcome. They are directed to information about the church. We provide a variety of programs at the church to meet a variety of needs of visitors.

But we could use some more help in actually getting more people to visit the church, which members think could happen through better promotion, publicity and marketing of Trinity and its activities in the community.

There was some brainstorming in some of the focus groups about how to better publicize the church, and a lot of it centered on using online resources better, including the church website, Facebook and other forms of social media. It was noted that the church website, especially, has become the front door of the church for so many, the way a lot of folks find their way to Trinity these days, and it is essential to have it constantly updated.

There was discussion as to whether we ought to rely mostly on in-house resources for our publicity, or whether we ought to seek outside professional help, or both.

We were reminded that publicizing church activities through internet resources has become a greater part of our church administrator's (Katie's) new job description.

One of our members suggested finding a marketing student at one of the local colleges to take on Trinity as a marketing project, for which there was much unexpected enthusiasm among members in subsequent focus groups.

It has come to our attention that Summit Marketing, a professional marketing group in the area, helps nonprofits get their name out in the community and helps them tell the community who they are, what they do, and where they are. One nonprofit that Summit does marketing for is the Hendersonville Rescue Mission. We might benefit from a marketing professional advising us on what kind of publicity would work best for us.

I learned recently that our own Presbytery, the Presbytery of Western North Carolina, is offering \$5,000 church grants to encourage outreach projects of various kinds by churches in their community. The Presbytery seems to have a broad understanding of what constitutes outreach.

It all makes me wonder if we ought to form an ad hoc committee within the church to research and recommend ways to better publicize the church and its activities, and then make sure that the recommendations which are accepted are actually carried out.

(3) New Thoughts on the Next Pastor

- *Want the next pastor to be experienced, not someone fresh out of seminary
- *Don't want a pastor coasting into retirement
- *Want a collaborative, democratic leader, not a dictator
- *Don't pressure the next pastor to increase membership or lower the average age
- *Good listener
- *Willing to be very involved in the greater Hendersonville community
- *Able to get along with all kinds of members
- *Should bring new energy, enthusiasm and optimism
- *Comfortable with modern technology
- *Really flexible in order to promote change
- *Not ego driven

The big surprise for me in the focus groups was to hear all the discussion about the need for better promotion in the community of Trinity and Trinity's activities.

Results of Phase 3 (Session decision-making retreat and Town Hall meeting with the congregation to present a summary of the mission study)

A summary of all I learned about Trinity from personal research, one-on-one conversations and focus groups was handed over to the Session in advance of a five and a half hour elder retreat at the church on June 9 called to discuss particular issues that came out of the mission study and make decisions about them.

At the retreat the Session broke into two separate, evenly divided elder focus groups. Though the two groups deliberated separately, there turned out to be a remarkable unanimity between the two groups on the issues when the two groups returned to the one big group for discussion and decision-making.

Here are the five issues Session discussed at the retreat and what it decided on each one:

Church Model—The five models suggested by church members for doing church together over the next five years (described in pages 12-14 of this report) were discussed at length by the elders and #5 was chosen. While acknowledging that Trinity is, and has been for 30 years, a church made up mostly of retirees, the elders decided that they did not want Trinity defined or known in the community by age or race, but by what it is doing in terms of mission.

Promotion and Publicity—The elders decided unanimously that Trinity needs to be more intentional about promoting and publicizing the church and its activities in the community, and wants to draw on both in-house and outside resources to do this. The elders are open to seeking limited advice from professional marketers on how best to publicize the church and its activities in the community, and open to having a student marketing intern take on the church as a class marketing project.

Next Pastor—The Session decided that the following three things were of prime importance in its next pastor: good preacher/teacher/communicator; effective administrator/Head of Staff; and someone who is on board and supportive of all the existing ministries of Trinity.

The Session also listed the following as of secondary importance for the next pastor: someone with energy, enthusiasm and optimism; personable, with a sense of humor;

empathic caregiver/good listener; experienced pastor; collaborative, democratic leader; assertive leader, but not too assertive, and certainly not a dictator; flexible in order to promote change; strong faith and ability to nurture spiritual growth in others; progressive.

Clergy Staff—The Session revisited the issue of how many clergy the church should have on the church staff. The Session, while acknowledging how unusual it is for a church of Trinity's size (250) to have two full-time pastors, nevertheless decided to stay with two full-time clergy, one lead pastor and one associate, as long as the church is able to pay both.

Worship Services—The Session revisited the issue of worship service offerings and decided to stay with the current offerings of two services nine months of the year (one at 8:30am and one at 11am) and one service at 10am over the summer.

The Trinity Session understands that these decisions are not necessarily cut in stone. Any decision can be revisited and sometimes reversed at any time by the Session as changing circumstances demand.

The Mission of Trinity Going Forward

This is a *mission* study, so what is the mission of Trinity going forward?

The answer is that the mission of Trinity going forward will not be essentially different from the mission now. I heard no call during the mission study for any big changes in what Trinity does now. Members are proud of the church they have now and proud of its long mission focus, which continues right up to the present day. Trinity will continue to lean into being a mission-oriented church.

Trinity will continue to offer weekly worship, as well as other activities which help nurture the Christian faith of its members, regular attenders and visitors.

Trinity will continue to provide thoughtful learning and study opportunities through classes, groups, book studies, library, camps and special speakers.

Trinity will continue to care for its own membership in their variety of spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, social, financial, aesthetic and vocational needs.

Trinity will continue to be known as one of the progressive churches in Hendersonville.

Trinity will continue to provide a warm, welcoming, accepting, supportive and safe place for LGBTQ+ persons in our community, and continue to encourage their full participation in church and society.

Trinity will continue discovering, and responding to, the practical human needs of those in the greater Hendersonville area. The church will continue to provide volunteers and financial support for those in our community needing food, housing, furniture, clothes, health care, medical equipment, school supplies, legal help, and a host of other things.

Trinity, through its participation in “Circles”, will work to eradicate poverty in our area. Through the “Accompaniment Church”, we will meet immigrants among us at their point of need. Through “CarePortal” the church will help to keep area families intact.

Trinity will continue to be politically involved and some of its members will continue to lobby legislators and publicly demonstrate against governmental policies that are not in line with the church’s moral commitments.

Trinity will continue to support mission efforts around the world, including those in Guatemala, Madagascar and Malawi.

Trinity will continue to nurture a church culture where members’ new mission ideas can be freely shared and supported and encouraged in a way that may bear fruit in the form of new ministries.

Trinity, through its Earth Care ministry, will continue to focus the church’s and the community’s attention on our divine calling to practice responsible stewardship of the whole of God’s creation.

Trinity will continue to make its building space available for community groups.

The big difference going forward is that Trinity will be on a mission to be more intentional about promoting, publicizing and marketing the church and its mission activities in the community. Going forward, Trinity wants to get the word out in a more active way about who it is, what it does, and where it is located.

Session Approval of Mission Study

This final mission study report went through several drafts. Elders were invited to read the first draft of the report and suggest edits, revisions, corrections, additions, and clarifications, and they suggested a number of changes and just about all the changes

were made. There was some back and forth as we worked our way from draft to draft until we got to this final draft. When no more changes were forthcoming, we voted on this final draft, and this final draft was accepted by the Session, and permission was given to share the report with Presbytery's Commission on Ministry (COM) and with the congregation, and it will be shared with the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) once they are elected.

Town Hall Meeting—On July 27, 2025 we held a Town Hall meeting to share with the congregation the highlights of the 2025 mission study in a Powerpoint presentation. We set up chairs in the fellowship hall for 80 and we had a full house. We called this meeting to try to get the whole congregation on the same page.

There was a time after the presentation for questions, comments, and possible pushback on any of the details of the study. Among the questions asked and answered were clarifying questions about the titling church (the church titling to mission on unrestricted bequests to the church), about the chances of drawing young families to the church (answer: difficult for a retiree church), about promoting the church and its activities in the community, and about how open the church is to different candidates (answer: open to any candidate of any gender or race who best fits the profile of the pastor described in the mission study.)

The Town Hall meeting officially concluded the 2025 Trinity mission study.

