

# ***MISSION STUDY REPORT***

## **FLORA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

May 2015

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## Table of Contents

<b>Part One</b>	Explanation of Process Current Ministry Setting	Page 3
<b>Part Two</b>	History of Flora Presbyterian Church	Page 4
<b>Part Three</b>	Gathering on the Past	Page 6
<b>Part Four</b>	Gathering on the Present <u>In Search of the Unchurched</u> Power Point slides	Page 9
<b>Part Five</b>	Gathering on the Future	Page 13
<b>Part Six</b>	Session Summary -- A New Direction	Page 15
<b>Appendix</b>	Demographic Study	

# **PART ONE**

## **Explanation of Process**

Following the retirement of the Rev. Chuck Compton after 25 years of faithful service to the Flora Presbyterian congregation, the Commission on Ministry of the Presbytery of Wabash Valley recommended an extended mission study process and a two year interim period. The Rev. Mary Ann Banning, newly hired transitional pastor, worked with the Session to develop the process for the congregation.

It was agreed that the process would include a set of three congregational gatherings spread out over the year . . . the Gathering on the Past, the Gathering on the Present, and the Gathering on the Future. Each gathering would include a presentation, time for discussion and comment, and an invitation to provide comments privately to the Session and/or transitional pastor.

## **Description of Current Ministry Setting**

Flora, Indiana is a town roughly equidistant from Lafayette, Kokomo, and Logansport. Some people who live here commute to work in these larger communities. The population of Flora is 2,036 people according to the 2010 census, with 858 households. The median age is 40 years old.

There are approximately twelve Protestant churches of various denominations in Flora, with an active ministerial association that plans community worship and the High School Baccalaureate service. Several churches have closed in the last few decades, and some have experienced schisms. German Baptists, both conservative and liberal, are a significant group on the religious scene, and horse and buggy transportation is a common sight in town.

Flora has a consolidated K-12 school system, a medical practice, three dental practices, an optometrist, police and fire departments, its own utility company, three banks, a community center and city park, 4-H fairgrounds, realtors, insurance agents, and various restaurants and shops. Businesses include an IGA grocery store, a Chevrolet dealership, a farm co-op and equipment dealership, a seed company, and a shrimp farm, among others.

Members of this congregation live in Flora, Delphi, Lafayette, and the surrounding rural areas.

## **PART TWO**

### **HISTORY OF FLORA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

In the early part of the twentieth century there was no Presbyterian church in the town of Flora. Several Presbyterians lived in the village and on the surrounding farms. They felt a need to have a Presbyterian church in Flora.

A small frame building was built close to downtown Flora around 1860 which served as a house of worship for the Lutheran Church in the 1860's. In the history of the Northern Indian Synod of the Lutheran Church are these words: "Rev. Guard organized the St. Paul's Lutheran Church in the village of Flora with 18 charter members. It was the first church in the village." This congregation was disbanded by the Lutheran Church in October of 1895.

At this same time there were two forward-looking pastors, Rev. O. L. Prentice who served the Cutler Presbyterian Church and Rev. H. W. Steen who served the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Wheeling. Due to their efforts the Presbyterian Church was organized in Flora. Rev. Prentice and Rev. Steen preached in Flora on alternate Sundays beginning in October of 1905.

In February 1906 Rev. H. M. Roger, Stated Clerk of Crawfordsville Presbytery was invited to come to Flora to hold a worship service. He suggested that the people petition the Presbytery to organize a Presbyterian Church in the town of Flora. On this day 49 persons united with the church by certificate of membership from other churches and 14 were received into membership of the new church on profession of faith. They elected Elders, Deacons, and Trustees. Those received into the church by profession of faith were baptized and the elders and deacons elected at the afternoon service were ordained and installed.

The offer of the organizing Presbyterian group to lease their building was welcomed, and on October 18, 1907 the last council of St. Paul's Lutheran Church met with their trustees to deed their building and grounds to the First Presbyterian Church of Flora (later changed to Flora Presbyterian Church) who assumed all assets and liabilities of the St. Paul's Lutheran Church.

The church struggled in the early years. Incomes were not large, and neither were the salaries of the pastors. The church has gone from a wood burning store to coal, oil, and now natural gas for heating. In the early years the church was cooled in the summer by opening the windows. Now when it is hot outside, we enjoy central air conditioning, which was a gift to the church.

The present church building was erected at a cost of \$14,000 and was dedicated on January 15, 1911. Many improvements have been added during the years, including upgrading the basement, a new kitchen, upstairs kitchenette, and an additional restroom on the upper level of the church. A new back entrance and lift were installed for handicapped access. A quality sound system, an LCD projector and screen were added to the Sanctuary and two televisions with VCR and DVD capability are available. The office now includes a computer and high speed wireless internet service for the

building. Musical instruments were upgraded from a pump organ to a piano and electronic organ. Hand bells are also available.

On Sunday mornings, worship has been led by both an organist and pianist and a full choir directed by a church member. Worship begins with praise songs and continues with a blended traditional worship service. Current employees of the church are the Transitional Pastor, part-time Secretary, and part-time Custodian.

The congregation has been active in local mission work, including the Flora Community Thrift Shop run cooperatively with other churches by Presbyterian Women, the Food Pantry, Christmas Baskets, and Kokomo Rescue Mission. The congregation has sent members on mission trips to Mexico and has built buildings and a church in Haiti.

The congregation began the Oasis program in 2001, an outreach to unchurched children on Wednesday nights, which is still serving 35-50+ children a meal each week and teaching them the basics of the Christian faith in a fun setting throughout the school year.

#### Pastors

Rev. O. L. Prentice	1907-1912
Rev. W. D. Cole	1912-1914
Rev. Jay F. Davenport	1915-1918
Rev. B. L. Steffey	1918-1920
Rev. Paul G. Luce	1921-1922
Rev. A. G. Anderson	1923
Rev. J. T. Boyer	1924-1927
Rev. H. C. Chapin	1928-1936
Rev. John Menoch	1937-1939
Rev. Dr. C. M. Rauch	1940-1951
Rev. William H. Myers	1951-1954
Rev. Elbert A. Smith, Jr.	1955-1961
Rev. Glenn Ramsey, Jr.	1962-1965
Rev. John Menoch, Pastor Emeritus	1966-1970
Rev. James A. Kutz	1970-1973
Rev. Allen R. Sager	1974-1979
Rev. Charles S. Denison	1980-1986
Rev. Harry D. Collier, Jr. (interim)	1987
Rev. Charles R. Compton	1988-2013
Rev. Mary Ann Banning (interim)	2014 to present

## PART THREE

### GATHERING ON THE PAST

The congregation's Gathering on the Past was led by the Rev. Stan Kessler of the Presbytery of Wabash Valley's Commission on Ministry after worship on Sunday, September 21, 2014. Rev. Kessler began the process with his sermon during worship. About twelve members stayed for the presentation.

After a carry-in meal, Rev. Kessler began his presentation by referring to the extensive timeline that had been posted on the walls of fellowship hall. It began with the first pastor, Rev. Prentice in 1907 and continued through the last called pastor, the Rev. Chuck Compton who retired in 2013 after a twenty-five year pastorate. The ministry of the church was then discussed from the most recent first, demarcated by the time of service of each pastor back as far as attendees could remember. This discussion would help the congregation identify patterns in their choice of pastor and their ministries.

Kessler encouraged the congregation to speak about the strengths of **Pastor Compton** (1988-2013) and his leadership. Members commented that he carried out a quiet outreach. He was reliable and taught members that they were the church. He was an encourager, not a pusher. He provided good, loving pastoral care. During his time, Ben Lipscomb started the practice of having a song leader for congregational singing. The congregation enjoyed cantatas and a bell choir for many years. Oasis was begun in 2001 and has provided a meal and Christian education and unconditional love to community children every school year since then. Many people were invited to church during his pastorate and became steady attenders and members. Pastor Chuck was actively involved in Via de Cristo and later the Great Banquet movement and encouraged other members to be involved and take leadership roles. He encouraged the church to be active in missions and accompanied groups to Mexico and Haiti. Pastor Compton was very active in the national Wee Kirk (small church) movement and encouraged the congregation not to be dismayed by its size. Then Kessler invited the attendees to name what they viewed as Pastor Compton's weaknesses. Some commented that Pastor Chuck was a self-professed introvert, and that the congregation would have benefited from a more vibrant leader and example. Some stated that he did not do routine pastoral care or visiting; others noted that he could be counted on to make hospital calls. He worked from home, and so communication with the church secretary and members could have been better. During this period of the congregation's life, there was a steady slow decline in membership, with fewer and fewer children in Sunday morning worship. This was also a national trend during this time.

Next, Rev. Kessler asked the attendees to talk about the strengths of **Rev. Denison** (1980-86). He and his wife were a young couple who started their family while in Flora, attracting many other young couples to join during his pastorate. He had a wild

background and a powerful story of redemption. He was a gifted preacher and guitar player, and taught about the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. His parents generously provided the money to remodel the basement of the church. He had an evangelical faith and became involved with Cursillo, which later became Via de Cristo, and encouraged many others to be involved as well. Flora was his first call. The congregation grew during this time.

Next, the group discussed several earlier pastorates. **Rev. Kutz** (1970-73) is remembered for his love for the youth. The church was their family, since both had just come from the mission field in Brazil. Quite a few young people were active in the church during his pastorate. During **Rev. Glenn Ramsay's** pastorate the church started the Thrift Shop. **Rev. John Menoch** was a traditional, conservative, Scottish Presbyterian pastor. **Pastor Myers** was thought to be "very good," and encouraged one resistant member to go into the ministry. **Rev. Rauch** de-tasseled corn to earn extra money.

#### **Rev. Kessler's questions:**

##### ***What qualities does a faithful member of the church need to have?***

Responses were: attends, gives, participates, is here to serve, is here for the congregation, and has the quality of perseverance.

##### ***How you been transformed by membership in this church?***

Responses were: Lucille Brown's influence was alluded to -- she was a saint, loving, forgiving, worked hard, and was teachable. Women moved into leadership positions in the '50s. Marie Clark led a big Sunday School Class. Freida Langston led a church camp at Hackberry Hill. Joan Moss is known for her determination to invite new people to church. The women have done a lot of missionary work through Presbyterian Women. The experience of joy seemed to be pervasive.

##### ***In what ways is God pushing us? Where is our inspiration, where does the Spirit bubble among us today?***

Responses were: Christ is at the foundation of what we want to do; we do everything for Christ. We want to continue outreach to the community through Oasis in bigger and deeper ways. The Spirit is challenging us to find an inspirational leader to challenge and push us. Society is not encouraging people to be faithful members, so we need to find other ways to make disciples. We are missing the boat with getting kids to attend worship on Sunday. Oasis has made our hearts bigger, has taught us how to serve, how to love more and be less judgmental.

##### ***What is the congregation's destiny -- where is God lighting the fire under you?***

Replies were: The congregation must find a pastor who can bridge the fine arts and public culture. Ways must be found to deal with the culture of central Indiana. The six Carroll County Presbyterian churches that have been meeting for a year to find ways to

work together need urgently to reach out to the many, many unchurched people in our County.



**Written questions included in Sunday bulletin:**

***What are the most memorable events that have happened in the past since I have been a member?***

Responses: Portraying Mary and Joseph with our own baby, Sunday School breakfasts, VBS with Cutler, teen trips to Acquire the Fire, Oasis, Women's weekends at Geneva Center, Chuck and Myra's 25th anniversary, children's baptisms, Pentecost balloon launch, preparation and participation in the Seder meals.

***How did I come to join this church?***

Responses: Parents were members, Joan Moss called and called and wouldn't take no for an answer.

***What do I like most about this church?***

Responses: The people, the opportunity to serve, friendliness, familiarity, family, keeps trying, faithful through the years, the unity of God and family, loving people, caring and supportive people.

***What do I think needs to be improved or changed?***

Responses: More young families; we need to be responsive to the unchurched so they want to come and belong; while Scripture never changes, how we present it to the lost probably had; for those who have been here for years, how do we deepen people's understanding and commitment to Jesus; involvement of the called minister with church members, shut-ins; the church web-site. Increased pastoral visits by out transitional pastor have been appreciated.

## PART FOUR

### GATHERING ON THE PRESENT

To encourage greater participation of the congregation in the gatherings, the Session decided to hold the Gathering on the Present on January 18, 2015 as part of the Sunday morning worship service. This time we had about 35 people who participated in the gathering.

Pastor Mary Ann Banning introduced the two presenters, Barbara Mayfield and Jay McMillin, and gave an overview of the three part process for the gathering. First, a summary of pertinent insights from the book Session has been reading, then a presentation of the demographic report gained through the Mission Insite program, then a discussion of the import of these statistics with the gathered congregation.

Ruling Elder and Session member Barbara Mayfield presented a summary of the main points in the Alban Institute book In Search of the Unchurched by Alan C. Klaus, which the Session has been reading as part of their leadership preparation. The slides for the presentation are attached to this document. It is clear to everyone that the ministry setting of Flora Presbyterian Church has changed substantially in the twenty-five years since the congregation has searched for a new called pastor, and there are many more unchurched people living in our community than ever before.

Ruling Elder Jay McMillin distributed copies of the demographic report to everyone attending, and it was also projected on the big screen at the front of the Sanctuary. Jay walked us through the results, section by section, with questions and comments from the congregation welcomed. Pastor Mary Ann added additional information during the Mosaic Lifestyle Segmentation Types chart, calling attention to the fact that about half of the segments on the pie chart consisted of retired people, people nearing retirement, or older couples and singles. Young families in differing circumstances made up about a third of the chart. The rest were middle-aged persons and families, immigrant families, and empty-nesting couples. A significant part of the pie chart was people who lived in rural areas or on farms. The demographic report has been attached to this mission study.

Following the demographic study presentation, there was a lively discussion of ways that our congregation could be more aware of the hidden barriers to visitors and church growth that we erect. Here are the suggestions:

- Have designated parking spots for visitors in the parking lot.
- Be sure all the doors are unlocked.
- Have a greeter at the back door, especially in the winter.
- Have better signage for rest rooms.
- Greeter could guide people to child care for families.
- Post names for rooms.
- Clean up the appearance of the outside of the building -- paint trim.
- Send cards to visitors, make further contacts.

- Our location is a drawback, how can we be more visible?
- Be present and visible as a church at public events in town.
- Are we friendly just to each other on Sunday mornings?
- Post information about our Library on public bulletin boards.
- Improve the web-site.
- Initiate summer-time activities and invite the neighborhood.

It was mentioned that our greatest opportunity to reach the unchurched may be before they even come to church. What are our entry points? It was suggested that ministry to younger people might happen where they gather. Someone else commented that there really isn't a place for young people to gather in the winter when the weather is cold, and perhaps this congregation could provide a place for that.

Our current entry points other than Sunday morning worship are: the Wednesday Oasis program, encounters at the Thrift Shop run by Presbyterian Women, the Caregivers' Support Group. There is certainly room for more entry points, such as small interest groups (biking, hiking, knitting, cooking, meeting for breakfast at a local restaurant, etc.)

Another important point raised was personal contacts. It helps to be interested in people you don't know, to have conversations with them and get to know them. The most effective way to grow a church is through personal invitation. This also seems to be the most difficult challenge for many traditional Presbyterians, because in the past once the doors to the church were unlocked, people just came. Ministry was primarily to members and their families, providing experiences for education and spiritual growth. Many are uncomfortable with the idea of evangelism, and uncertain about how to reach out in appropriate ways to other people or initiate conversations about faith.

# In Search of the Unchurched

Alan C. Klaas

Alban Institute Publication

# GROWTH

- \* People join congregations, not denominations
- \* The key to growth is the attitude of congregation members
- \* When leaders and members pay substantial amounts of attention to reaching people who are not already members, the congregation moves beyond survival and begins to thrive

# INVISIBLE BARRIERS

- \* How could we improve a visitor's experience when they come to worship for the first time?
- \* Are we as friendly to them as we are to those we know?

# OUTREACH CONGREGATIONS

- \* Are motivated to extend mission beyond current membership
- \* Great Commission outreach involves the total life of the congregation -- it is everyone's "job"

## REACHING OUT

- \* How can our congregation become more of a "missional outpost" to the unchurched in our community?
- \* How can we reach out to build relationships with those who've had a bad experience with "church"?
- \* How can we reach out to build relationships with those who have never heard the good news of Christ?

## PART FIVE

### GATHERING ON THE FUTURE

The Gathering on the Future was held during worship on Sunday, April 12, 2015, which was the first Sunday after Easter. The focus Scripture reading was Matthew 28: 16-20: *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”*

Rev. Mary Ann Banning began the Gathering with an introductory statement summarizing the main points on the past from the Gathering on the Past:

- Churches used to just unlock the doors and people would come
- In the past, there was strong denominational loyalty
- There was a culture that encouraged church-going
- The ministry focus was to members and their families
- The majority of people worshipped at some church
- The mission field was in other countries, or just in poor areas of our country

Then she read Jeremiah 29: 11-13:

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”*

Next came a summary of the main points from the Gathering on the Present:

- A majority of the people today do not attend any worship, and regard themselves as “spiritual” but not religious
- Our culture competes with Sunday morning religious events
- There is a disparaging attitude toward Christians
- There is less denominational loyalty
- Congregations have a “locked room” mentality and resist change
- Ruling Elders serving on Session sat in chairs in the front of the Sanctuary and shared insights that they had gained from reading and discussing this book as a group. Some highlights were:
  - Change makes us uneasy, but the word transition is easier. How do we get from where we are today to where we want to go? Size doesn’t matter. Attitude and trust are most important. We must learn to communicate the faith differently.
  - We no longer live in a church society. We’re disciples like the ones in the Book of Acts. Because the reasons for being unchurched are so different, we

must listen to people's stories and be sensitive to them. Because of life pressures and our mobile society, families aren't going to worship. Traumatic life events often draw people back to church, so we must be open to healing the broken-hearted, forgiving and loving. Visitors won't know "church language."

- We must be open to change. The way it used to be is gone. Ben Franklin said that "The only person that's really open to change is a baby with a dirty diaper!" We must bring a friend or a guest to church and pray.
- The title of the book should be our church's goal; to follow Christ's Great Commission and go out and find people. Worship style is a lightning rod issue and outside of our comfort zone, but we must ask ourselves what might appeal to unchurched people as a worship style. Is this a church that is open to new people and new ideas? To reach out, we must have enthusiasm, because that is contagious.
- Scripture gives us a template for success in Luke 4: 18, Isaiah 62, and Acts. It is so important to reach out to the unchurched. Our long-standing Oasis outreach program to children and their families has given us glimpses of this. The future is bright, for Christ is with us. We can't have anybody sitting on the sidelines. Jesus commands us to go out!

Rev. Banning asked members to write this focus question on the note paper found in their Sunday bulletins. **How shall our congregation go out into our community in response to Christ's command?**

Many congregation members asked for their own copies of the Klaas book that the Session had been reading, and Rev. Banning agreed to order more and make them available.

It was stated that the church needs multiple entries to our congregational life rather than Sunday morning worship and other existing ministries (Caregivers' Support Group, Oasis Program, Presbyterian Women's Thrift Shop). Summer tailgate parties in our church parking lot were suggested, since Kevin Clark has a smoker.

Home Bible studies were suggested as a way to meet neighbors in a non-intimidating setting. Other small group possibilities were suggested: bicycling, knitting, breakfast Bible study, walking, cards, fellowship.

Mike Munson, our Transitional Care Consultant from the Deer Creek Presbyterian Church, told the group about six new members who had recently joined their congregation, each because of outreach ministries. Two had been involved in the library, two in a camping group, two from a card playing club. He also described the origin of the monthly Saturday morning community breakfast which helps needy people in their surrounding community.

Several members stated that they came here because Joan Moss invited them to come and would not take no for an answer. Her loving persistence resulted in their eventual decision to become active members of this congregation.

Another member shared the way she was ministering to and sharing the good news of the gospel with her neighbor in the senior housing here in Flora during a painful

situation for the neighbor. She suggested that her friend pray for the family that the person she was concerned about would be delivered from the situation. The prayers had a positive effect.

Contact with people outside the doors of the church is vital. About seventy-five percent of the people living in Flora are not attending a church. Members should be interested in people and willing to engage in conversation with them. No one can sit on the sidelines if our congregation is to grow. The efforts of all of us are needed and are vital in growing this church.

It was suggested that church t-shirts were being used with success as a way of raising awareness of churches within their communities.

Rev. Banning encouraged members to continue to think about and pray about this topic during the coming weeks, as the Nominating Committee meets to suggest names for service on the Pastor Search Committee that will be forming in June.

## **PART SIX**

### **SESSION SUMMARY: A NEW DIRECTION**

The congregation of Flora Presbyterian Church is Christ-centered and longs to be the hands and feet of Jesus, serving creatively and faithfully in the Flora community and to the ends of the earth. They seek to hear and carry out Christ's call to be salt and light to those outside the church.

Historically, the congregation has been characterized by generosity and a willingness to respond to community needs. The congregation has been very appreciative of each of their pastors and supportive of the pastors' initiatives.

One of the congregation's many strengths has been their passion for mission – not just raising money, but active participation in mission trips abroad as well as mission at home. The Session desires to build upon these mission experiences as plans for the future are developed.

Many members have attended a Great Banquet, or similar retreat experience, and remain active in supporting the Lafayette Great Banquet gatherings, serving on leadership teams, and encouraging members to attend. Members want to continue to grow and be challenged spiritually, including Bible studies at church and in members' homes.

The culture of the congregation is characterized by the warmth of the Passing of the Peace portion of the worship service, which envelops members and visitors alike. This congregation feels like a safe, welcoming, caring place to be. Fellowship after worship, regular carry-in meals, and other social functions, are all opportunities to build lasting relationships. The congregation prays for each other, extends care and concern, and celebrates together.



There is a strong, committed core leadership group that has grown in the ability to love others unconditionally through their many years of ministering to children and youth and their families through the weekly evening Oasis program. Many of the children in the program come from unchurched, struggling families with overwhelming issues to overcome.

Many in the congregation are now ready to extend that same love to others in the community, and hope to begin reaching out through tailgate parties in the parking lot, more visibility at public events such as the annual 4-H county fair, and building relationships one-on-one through small group events in people's homes. More outreach to older persons in the community would also be an opportunity to build relationships with that age group. They will need leadership and encouragement in these efforts from their new called pastor.

As part of the learning from the Session book study of the Alban Institute book In Search of the Unchurched, the leaders of the church have been educating the congregation about the shift in attitude that is needed to move from traditional Presbyterianism to the ability to encounter and love people where they are in their lives.

The Session has accepted the challenge to move into the future, and plans to eventually make changes in the Sunday morning worship service. The closing worship in the Oasis children's program has been designated an official worship service of the church in hopes that it will develop into another door into the church for people. The Session is open to offering worship at non-traditional times like Saturday or Sunday evening, and experimenting with non-traditional worship styles. Changes will be made not for the sake of change, but to be responsive to the Holy Spirit's leading to bring all people into fellowship with Jesus Christ, both long-time members and those who God is calling us to serve.

The Session of Flora Presbyterian Church