

MISSION and MINISTRY STATEMENT

Bethany Presbyterian Church
3000 Dewey Ave, Rochester, NY
October 22, 2006

LONG VERSION

1. CONGREGATIONAL DESCRIPTION

Two worship services await you every Sunday at Bethany. As you enter our spacious Clark Entrance you are cheerfully greeted at the door. If you need assistance, a deacon offers you a ride in the elevator up to the sanctuary. Children are scampering up and down the stairs while people enjoy friendly conversation and fellowship in the parlor.

A deacon offers you a bulletin. You see people smiling as they take a seat in the sanctuary. There is visiting among the pews before the service and a time for quiet reflection before worship begins. On any given Sunday you are likely to see over 200 people in worship. Typically, two-thirds will be female. Two-thirds will be age 45 or older. A quarter of those attending have children who are under the age of 23. Sixty-seven percent of our worshippers are married and seventy-five percent are present each week.

One fourth of those in church on Sunday serve on a Bethany committee. Twenty-five percent of our people have been members of Bethany all their lives. Two-thirds transferred from another congregation, half of those from a Presbyterian church.

Bethany has very little racial diversity and most people who attend worship are solidly middle class.

Children as well as adults offer Joys and Concerns before the Prayers of the People. Children are participating members of Bethany, are comfortable being in the church, and enjoy serving as acolytes. Youth and children help lead worship and walk out with the pastors at the end of the services.

When we pass the Peace, you see smiling faces as people cross the aisle, reaching out to each other. Adults make a point of shaking hands with children. Sometimes you will see hugs between members or couples exchanging a kiss. Our Director of Music enthusiastically runs down from the choir loft during the early service to share the Peace with members.

Our Director of Music will be playing our Holtkamp organ or our fine grand piano. During worship you might hear anything from Baroque to Bobby McFerrin. Members of all ages participate in our multiple vocal and bell choirs. You may see liturgical dancers. Sometimes there are musicians from the Eastman School of Music or the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra.

Between our two worship services we offer Christian Education classes for all ages.

2. BETHANY'S CURRENT STRENGTHS

Bethany has a sizeable number of dedicated people who are loyal attendees. In fact, several families have three generations of Bethany members. Many of our people are active in community organizations. We have an abundance of talent that shines when a task needs to be done. When a problem arises, there is a willingness on the part of many members and the Session to solve it, rather than step back and hope that it goes away.

Our Session was deliberately reduced in size, enabling each elder to take a more active role in the decision-making process. This has begun to generate greater openness in discussion and more positive energy in session meetings. Our hope is that these qualities will progress through committees to the congregation as a whole.

Some of our leaders and members have studied The Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren and are exploring ways to apply its philosophy to our needs.

Children's role in worship has grown in recent years. In addition to the weekly Children's Sermon, they are included in Communion and are in the front pews during baptism. Because of their increasing visibility, acceptance and affection for children has grown within the congregation. In turn, the children are responding with a feeling of belonging and are learning appropriate worship behaviors.

Bethany has a large number of programs that keep involvement high among members and help build strong relationships among them. Our Wednesday Night Live includes a meal, Bible study for all ages and choir rehearsals. Groups such as Shipmates, Shepherding, and Bethany Youth Fellowship appeal to various ages and interests. Stephen Ministry began at Bethany in 2005. The Bethany Mission Workers help our fellow members and take a mission trip annually

Bethany has long been known for its excellent music program. A variety of instruments is used in worship along with many styles of hymns and anthems. Our professionally trained music directors are passionate about both music and their Christian faith. We have special music Sundays in spring and fall and frequently offer concerts to the community with guest artists.

We worship in a beautiful, traditional church building that is well maintained by our sextons as well as our own BUMS (Bethany's Unbelievable Maintenance Squad) and BUGS (Bethany's Unbelievable Gardening Squad). Though we have experienced a reduction in membership in recent years, our active members make strong financial contributions which partially offset those losses. Over the years, when we have faced financial adversity, Bethany has found ways to keep going.

During this period of transition, Bethany has managed to maintain its energy and its programs. In addition, there is a new air of experimentation.

3. THE CONGREGATION'S CURRENT VALUES

Among the concepts we hold dear are the following: We feel it is essential to have children and teens participate actively in worship. We have an emphasis on encouraging families to engage together in worship and communion.

In the past year we have streamlined our organizational chart and committee structure to better fit our current situation and needs. We value a high level of involvement, engagement, responsibility, and participation of our session members. Our philosophy has become, "less time in meetings and more time for mission and ministry".

Our style of worship could be described as "blended" in that we have a traditional foundation and format while being willing to add new ideas to our liturgy. For example, we hold an annual renewal of baptismal vows, we have tried different ways of celebrating the Lord's Supper, and we occasionally use audio-visual technology during our worship.

Outreach into the community and the world is vitally important to us. We support the PCUSA and have many members who participate in hands-on work in Bethany-related and community programs. Among these are Greece Foodshelf, Cameron Community Ministries, Habitat for Humanity, Dimitri House, CROP Walk, Adopt-A-Highway and others. Our building is used by AA, Al-Anon, NA, Boy and Girl Scouts, and a senior lunch program. Bethany was instrumental in establishing Two Doors Community Outreach with its after-school tutoring program.

In all of these things, we remind ourselves that it is OK to try something new and that if it doesn't work we can try something else.

4a. WE FEEL CALLED TO:

- Build a stronger and more connected congregation while maintaining a traditional base. We want to explore new avenues for faith, worship, and ministry and strengthen, continue, and extend our outreach programs.
- Become more comfortable with who we are. We are a congregation of many retired people who worked their entire careers at large corporations such as Eastman Kodak Company and who are not accustomed to change. On the other hand, many of us are experiencing the social changes that come with the new economic realities. We need to look at who we really are and recognize the strengths in that identity. At the same time, we feel an urgency to explore new things and approach the future with a less cautious attitude.

- Enable and encourage committees to support each other, care about their work, and see the interconnectedness among us, and work together.
- Involve more members in the work of our congregation so that our active people do not feel overburdened.
- Grow as a church, a session, and as individuals, not necessarily in size but spiritually. Being a large church may not be in our future but we can be a strong, vital, lively, and faithful presence in our community.
- Continue our role as a part of the community with our mission outreach and welcoming community groups into our building.
- Wait with anticipation and readiness for the arrival of a new pastor or pastors who will be excited to walk with us on our faith journey.

4b. **THEREFORE, WE INTEND TO:**

Improve and thrive, not merely survive!

- Continue to enrich the spiritual education of all members.
- Continue to provide meaningful worship experiences that speak to our members' needs.
- Further explore our unique identity so that we can use our strengths effectively.
- Expand our outreach to the hungry, poor, and inadequately housed.
- Remain involved in each other's lives in Christian love.
- Increasingly recognize God's mercy and grace in each of us.
- Coordinate our committees and congregation into a cohesive group working to achieve what God has in store for us.
- Listen to Holy Spirit with trust and let Holy Spirit work through us.