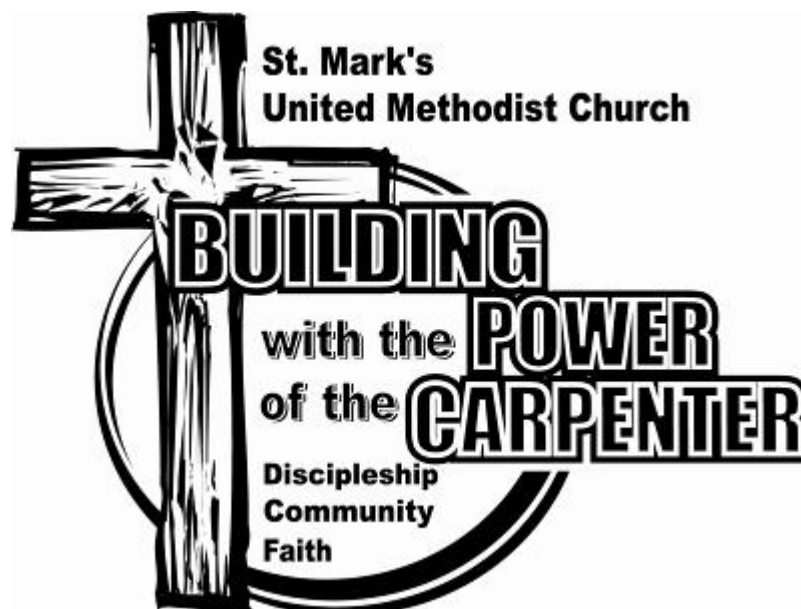


Charting a Course for Our Future

**Final Report of the Long Range Planning Team
2008**

Building faith, disciples, and community through the
love and power of Jesus Christ.



Introduction

From Then to Now: A Brief History of Saint Mark's United Methodist Church

In 1926 a group gathered in the Humble Oil Community Building in Baytown for an ecumenical church service. On December 9 of the same year, thirty-six people gathered in the home of C.C. Burgess, and the plans were made for the First Methodist Church of Baytown. The name was later changed to Saint Mark's United Methodist Church after the consolidation of Baytown, Pelly, and Goose Creek. On December 12, 1926, twenty-three adults and seven children met at the Sandlin Building on Minnesota Street for the first Sunday school, and then worship followed with fifty-seven adults attending. The next day another twenty-six people indicated their desire to join, and an eighty-three member church was born.

By the next summer, members were ready for a church building of their own, and Harry Weiss of Humble Oil and Refining Company donated two and a half lots on Louisiana Street in memory of his Methodist mother. Members put up their personal assets as collateral at a Galveston Bank, and soon the building was complete. The sanctuary was built for 200 members, and by 1937, Bishop A. Frank Smith and other church officials came to help burn the mortgage papers, and the church was debt free.

By 1945, the membership had grown to over 600 members, and the church desperately needed a new building. By October 1946, terms were reached with Sun Oil Company and Humble Oil Company to acquire a site on Oklahoma Street for a new St. Mark's Church and parsonage. The first building constructed was the parsonage, followed by a multi-purposed education building, where worship services were also held. A new sanctuary was built, and the first church service was held there on July 2, 1956. Many wonderful programs were sponsored at the site on Oklahoma Street such as scouts, Stepping Stones Preschool, and Breakfast Club. The congregation started a Hispanic Mission that grew into San Marcos United Methodist Church, which now has its own facilities. During this time, the peak membership of St. Mark's reached about 1400.

By the 1990's, membership was waning as Baytown spread north and east. After a monumental amount of praying, planning, and discussing of options, the church voted to move to the new site on North Main in the center of Baytown, where our new church was built. Church records show that the membership began to grow even before the move, and with a record attendance, the first worship service was held on Easter Sunday 2003. In 2006, a significant expansion to the new facility was completed, including additional classrooms, office space, storage, garage, and parking. By the fall of 2006, worship attendance was consistently approaching 300 and even exceeding comfortable seating capacity upon occasion. Early in 2007, a Long Range Planning Team (LRPT) was assembled to start planning for further growth of the church. At present St. Mark's is a thriving church with a bright future.

(Excerpted, with editing, from "A History of Saint Mark's on Oklahoma Street" by Tom Hebel.)

Beginning a Long Range Planning Effort

After completing a very successful move from Oklahoma Street to our new facility on Main Street, we have experienced exciting growth and seen a new spirit among our members – one of enthusiasm and optimism about our future. In 2006, our pastor, Reverend Michael Proctor, our Administrative Board Chairman, Scott Walding, and our Lay Leader, George Ward, began discussing the need to plan for that future to ensure that St. Mark’s would continue to grow, both in numbers and in ministry to the Baytown area. Late in 2006, the Administrative Board approved the formation of a team to develop a plan for the church’s future.

A Long Range Planning Team was formed, with Bob Buntin named as chairman. Other members of the team were selected by Chairman Buntin, with the concurrence of Rev. Proctor and Scott Walding. The members chosen for this task were: Bill Gammel, Celia Neal, Rob Buntin, Debby Burnham, Ellen Coombs, Bob Pickering, Tommy Harris, Gary Tschoepe, George Ward, and Pat Cauley. (Gary Tschoepe and Tom Harris later withdrew for personal reasons.)

Work began in early 2007, with the first meeting held on February 18, 2007. One of the Don Nations consultants had this to say, paraphrased: “St. Mark’s has done a great job in moving to a new physical location. Now it is ready to move to a new spiritual location,” meaning to a new level of spirituality and service. It is our hope and intention that this planning effort will help St. Mark’s do just that, grow in faith, discipleship and community.

Overview of the Long Range Planning Process

The major steps which have been taken in our planning effort are listed below:

- Developed a document formally stating purpose, scope, timetable which was approved by the Administrative Board
- Gathered Baytown community statistics and trends
- Gathered data regarding church membership, growth, attendance, visitor levels, and finances
- Developed and conducted all-member questionnaire to assist with the planning effort
- Held small group sessions to obtain member feedback
- Visited five churches and held in-depth discussions with three
- Expanded the vision statement to better guide LRPT in its work
- Developed a list of key issues for short range and long range consideration
- Developed a plan document with recommendations in key areas of opportunity and of concern
- Held preliminary reviews of recommendations with church staff, ministry area teams and Trustees/Finance to receive their inputs and concerns

Collection of Information

Baytown Area Demographic Information

Using published reports; we made a brief study of the demographics of Baytown to better understand the population which surrounds St. Mark's and to become aware of the trends taking place and projected changes which are expected. Key sources for this investigation were several major studies done by the City of Baytown, the school district, and other agencies. (See below for a list of sources used.) The following paragraphs summarize the results of our study.

The population of Baytown is growing, and is expected to reach 74,000 by 2010 and 84,000 by 2020 (up from 68,000 in 2004). Nearly 20,000 new residents are expected in the GCCISD in the next 5 years. Baytown, its Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) area, and Chambers County are considered good prospects for the continued explosive growth of Houston due to large amounts of undeveloped land; good access to downtown Houston, both airports, and the Ship Channel industrial area; perceived slower pace of life/friendly communities; and the population saturation of northern and western Harris County. Strong performing school districts (GCCISD and Barber's Hill) and highly-rated Lee College are also assets.

In general, Baytown is a predominantly blue-collar community (about 48% of workers have blue collar jobs) with a median income near \$43,000. The per capita income is around \$18,500. Major industries are manufacturing, service, construction, and retail. The median age is 32, with all age groups represented. An increase in the 45 to 64 year range is expected. There has been a recent decline in the 25 to 44 year range, but this may be reversed as more young families perceive this area as commuter and family friendly. Whites are the racial majority in the Baytown ETJ area; Hispanics are the majority within the Baytown city limits (43%). Nearly 30% of residents report some college, while just under 10% have a 4 year degree or more (not unusual for a manufacturing-based population).

Housing starts in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range have been inadequate, but the market is self-correcting. Residential building permits in 2003 numbered 396, up 400% in 3 years. GCCISD estimates that over 14,000 housing units (houses and apartments) will be constructed in the next ten years, with over 6,000 in the next five years. The average permitted residential value was \$128,000 in 2003, up from \$86,000 in 1998. Large numbers of residential units are being built along and near I-10, causing civic leaders to speak of a "New Baytown" that will be removed from the historical foundation and character of Old Baytown with an emphasis on separation of housing developments and travel by car (commuting). There is projected growth in housing starts in Chambers County as well.

As the population of Baytown increases, it is reasonable to expect more visitors to St. Mark's. St. Mark's attractive new campus on N. Main Street makes it accessible to the population growth centers of the I-10 corridor and Chambers County, as well as being highly visible to persons driving through town looking for shopping, entertainment, services, etc. Given the readiness of many people to drive fairly long distances in the Houston area to work, shop, and socialize, St. Mark's has, and will continue to have, a

large population from which to draw potential members and visitors. Of note is the planned construction of three additional, major churches along N. Main St. in addition to St. Mark's and Trinity Episcopal Church: Second Baptist, First Christian, and Faith Presbyterian. This speaks to the attractiveness of the location and offers additional "options" visitors might potentially choose.

The age distribution of Baytown's population suggests that programming for families and for older adults will be important to consider. An influx of families will bring children and youth of all ages to St. Mark's, and current research shows parents often choose a church by the quality of programming available for their children. The increasing number of senior adults will require activities and programming that engage today's active elderly population while not neglecting the frail and/or homebound. Staffing and facilities will be important to consider when addressing the needs of the various ages at St. Mark's, as well as balancing the preferences for traditional and more contemporary music and worship styles. Different maturity of faith levels must be expected as well, and St. Mark's will be challenged with nurturing a congregation of believers at wide-ranging positions along the Christian walk.

The working population of Baytown presents specialized needs for St. Mark's to consider, as a manufacturing-based work force inevitably means shift work. An interest in alternative days and times for worship and educational activities may exist, as well as preferences for more casual settings and less formal situations. Time is a precious commodity to today's families due to the many commitments of work, school, and community, and church must be relevant and timely to be included in the mix. St. Mark's must be continually sensitive to the demographics of the community and to the needs of the congregation to be a truly vital part of people's lives.

Sources:

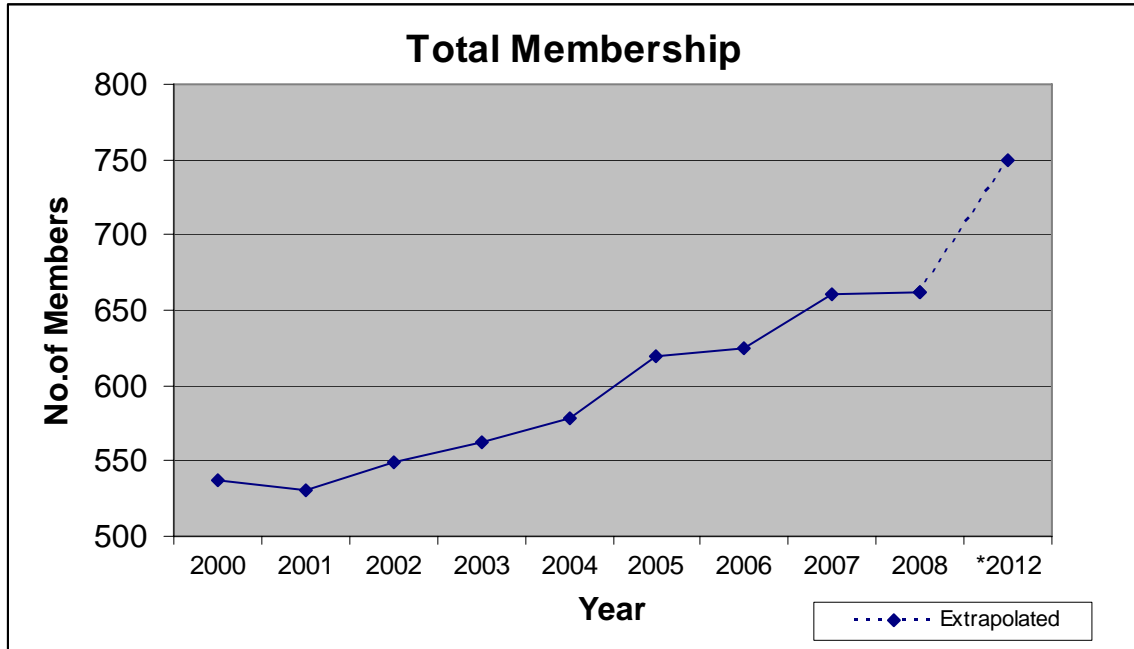
- Forecast 2007- Baytown Sun, February 2007
- City of Baytown 2025 Comprehensive Plan (Draft, Online, 125 pp)
- Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District Demographic Update, April 2006- Population and Survey Analysts, College Station, Tx. (Online, 284 pp)
- Discover Baytown 2006-Baytown/West Chambers County Chamber of Commerce
- City of Baytown Economic Development Strategy Plan of Action, October 2004- Angelou Economics, Volumes 1 and 2
- State of Texas Demographic Data Year 2000 (Online)

Membership

In order to better understand how our membership is changing, we looked at membership data for the last nine years, using our computer data base and the annual report data which is submitted every year to the Annual Conference office. Good information is available for the total number of members, date of joining, status changes due to transfers out, baptisms, deaths, withdrawals, etc. Other information such as marital status and birth

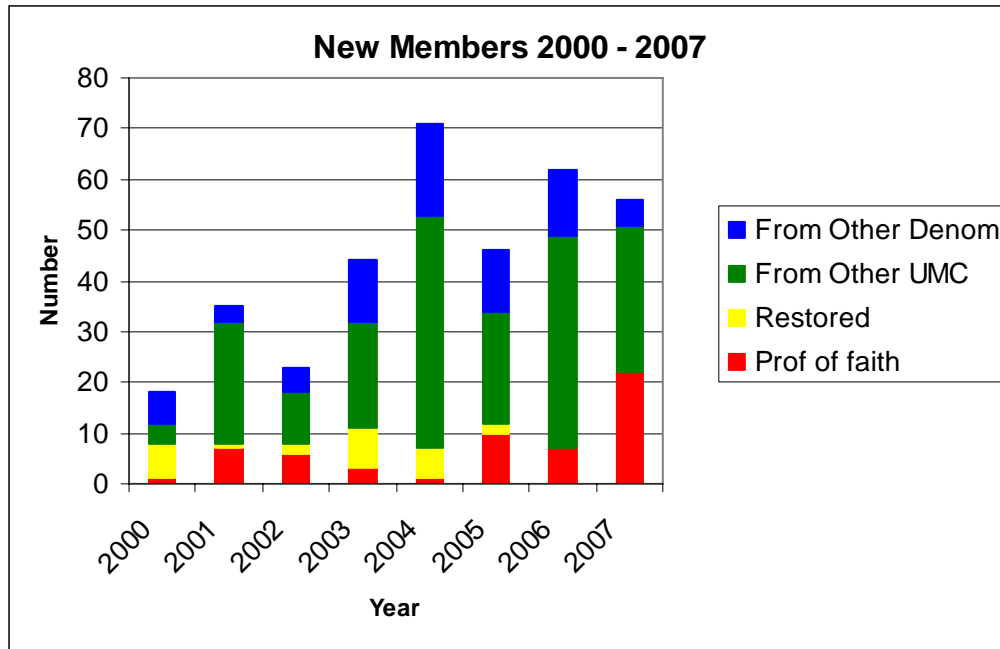
dates was found to be rather incomplete in our computer records and not as useful for our purposes.

Membership was in general decline prior to our move from Oklahoma Street to our new facility on N. Main Street. The decision to move was made in July of 1999. Membership began to increase in 2001, under the pastoral leadership of Reverend Michael Proctor and perhaps in anticipation of the move. The chart below shows total membership from the first of 2000 to the first of 2008. Net increase over this period was 124, or a gain of 2.5% per year.



Simple extrapolation of this data results in a projected membership of 750 members by 2012. If we are successful at increasing membership at an even faster rate by, e.g. additional programming, new worship services, and facilities additions, our membership, will be proportionately higher. The impact of this growth on attendance and required seating capacity is discussed in a later section.

The chart below shows the number of new members received per year broken down by source. In the years since we moved, the largest number of new members joining has been by transfer from other churches. In 2007 the number of professions of faith has increased, which is a healthy sign.



If we are to reach more persons not associated with a church, we will need programming and worship experiences that we do not presently offer.

Attendance

Soon after the Long Range Planning Committee was formed, work was undertaken to create a database to analyze church attendance data for a 15 month period from January 2006 to March 2007 in order to determine if there were trends in attendance by certain characteristics. The study included member age, length of membership at St. Mark’s, marital status, and the presence or absence of children within the family unit.

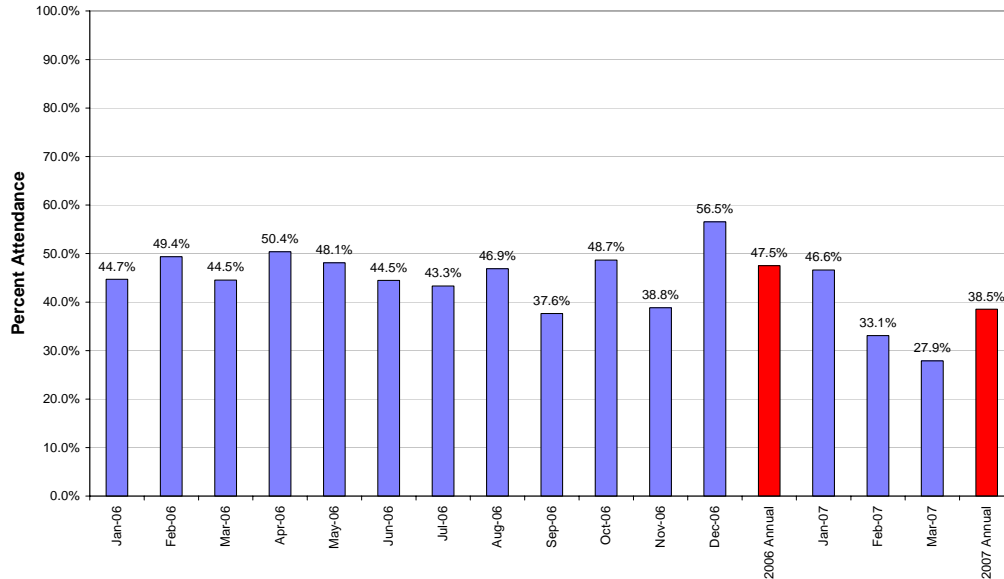
The study revealed that, in 2006, the average attendance (% of Sundays attended) for all active members, including children, was about 47% (see chart below). Members over 50 years of age, who comprise 55% of our adult membership, on average, attend more frequently than the younger age groups. There appears to be no connection between the presence of children at home (typical of younger families), length of membership, or marital status and attendance frequency, although widows/widowers appeared to attend more frequently than other single adults.

Attendance data for adults for all of 2007 was examined briefly and found to be similar to 2006 data, with the average attendance of active professing members to be 47%.

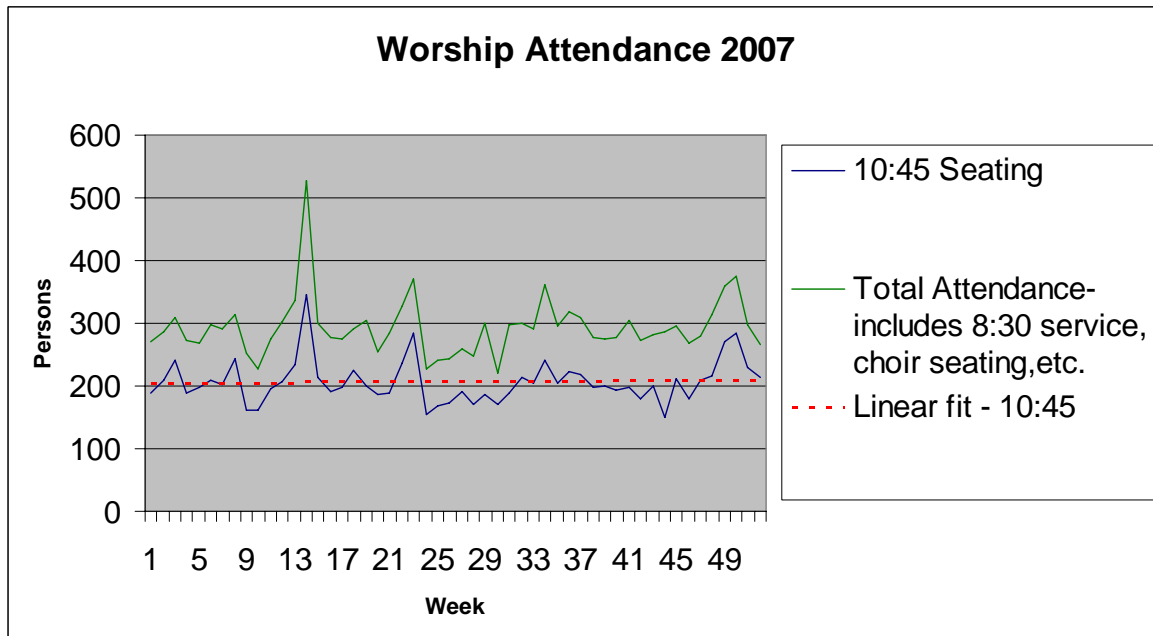
Another way to view attendance data is as follows. For the period January 2006 to March 2007, of active adult members, 51 attended less than one time per month, 148 attended two to three times per month, and 130 attended three or more times per month. None of these figures include inactive members who live in or near Baytown, 231 in all, and who have no record of attendance during this period.

There were no obvious patterns determined from the data. However, we need to determine why many members, especially new members, do not attend more frequently.

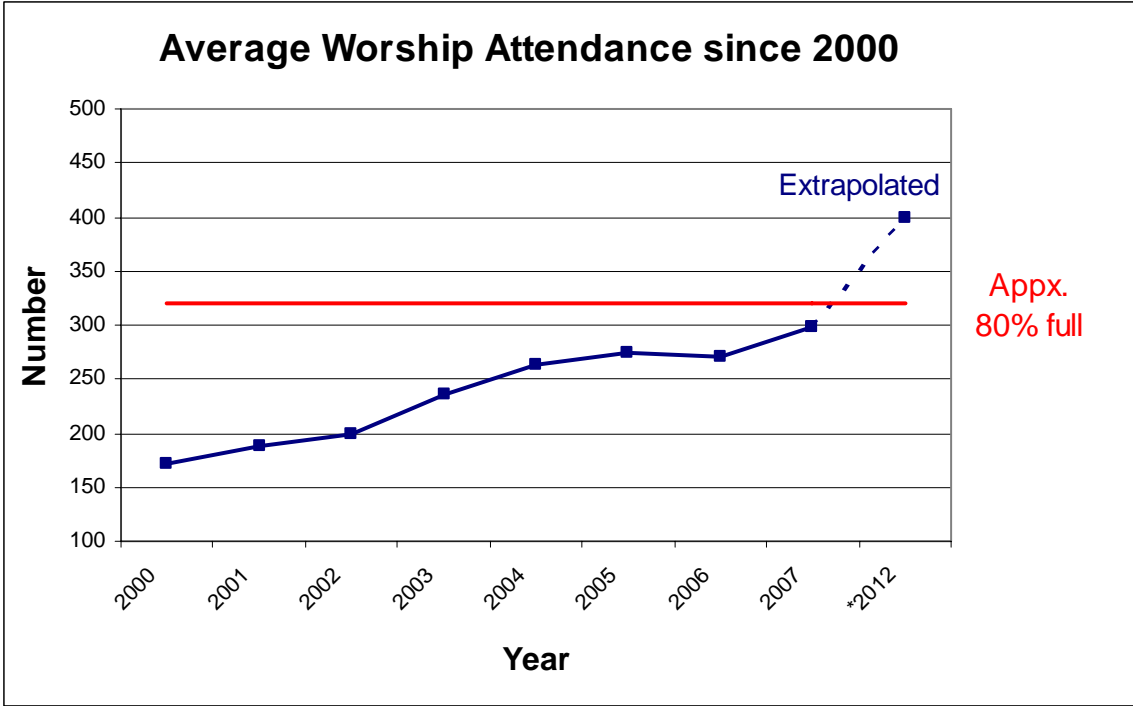
Church Membership Attendance by Month



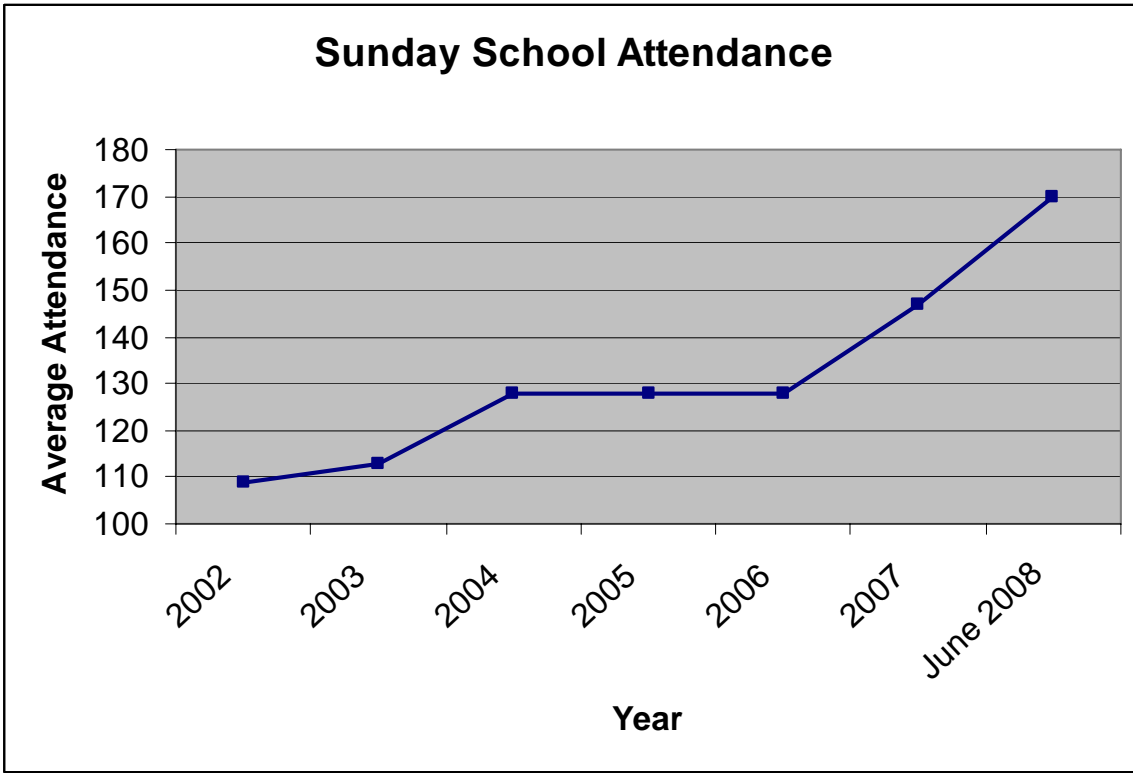
One of our concerns has been the approaching “overcrowding” issue at the 10:45 service. Consultant information tells us that as worship seating approaches 80% of capacity a decline in membership will occur. Our sanctuary comfortably seats 286 people—utilizing pews and side chairs. In 2007, the average attendance of persons seated in pews and side chairs at the 10:45 service was 204 (71% capacity), with 7 Sundays over the 80% capacity (>229). See the chart below.



The last several years we have experienced a net membership growth of ~35 people per year. If this trend continues we can expect to exceed the 80% capacity frequently within two years. This “overcrowding” could well slow our growth.



Sunday School attendance has also risen significantly, from an average of 109 in 2002 to an average of 170 for 2008, through June 1.



The steepest increase has been in the last two years. If this rate continues we will need additional classroom space very soon

Stepping Stones Day School

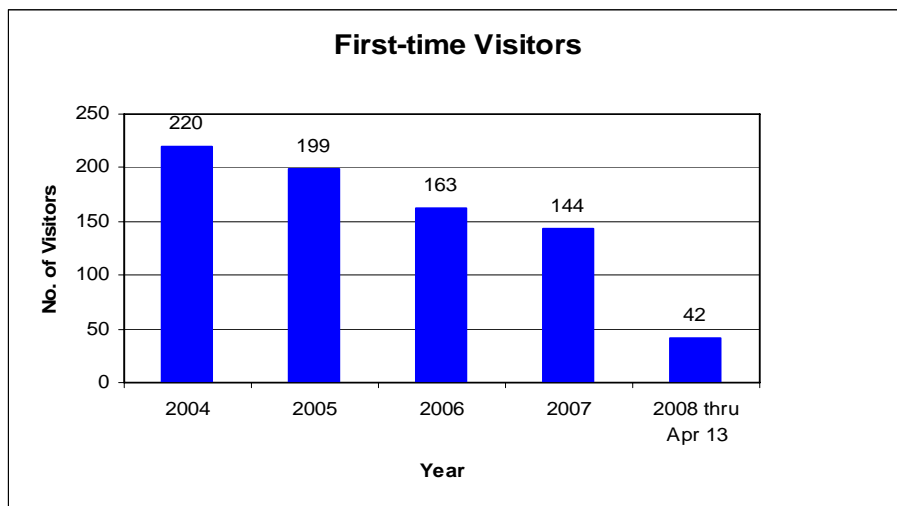
Our Stepping Stones Day School provides early learning and enrichment in a Christian environment for children ages fifteen months through four years old. Children enjoy the following activities each week: Chapel, Music, P. E., Center Time and Computer Lab. Stepping Stones is a level 3 school (the highest level) as determined by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. A high rate of our four year old children enter the GCCISD GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program.

The school has grown from fifty-five students in April of 2003 to one hundred students currently enrolled for the 2008/2009 school year. The school has no openings for the 2008/2009 school year with long waiting lists for each class. In order to serve more children, the school would like to increase enrollment by up to 25%. However, we currently have an insufficient number of class rooms for expansion.

Stepping Stones has served Baytown for more than forty years. It provides a quality school program for families in the Baytown area and is a major outreach program of our church. In the 2007-2008 school year, twenty St. Mark's families had children enrolled in the school, with about eighty others coming from the many parts of the Baytown community.

Visitor Information

The LAMP team has been tracking visitors since 2004. From their records we have looked briefly at the visitor data to see if any information there would be helpful in our planning effort. From only 157 visitor families and individuals, we have gained an impressive 296 members since 2004. These new members are still active in our church. Obviously it is important that we continue to attract visitors in order to continue our growth. The chart below shows the level and trend in first-time visitors.



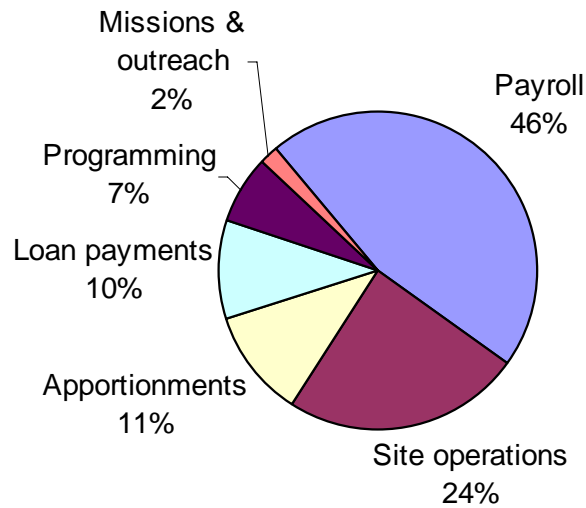
We experienced a large number of first time visitors immediately after our move to the new site in 2003. This was undoubtedly due to high community interest in the new church as well as to individuals seriously interested in finding a new church home. Since

that time we have seen a continuing decline in visitors. The reasons for this are not known. There does appear to be a leveling off of this trend beginning in 2007.

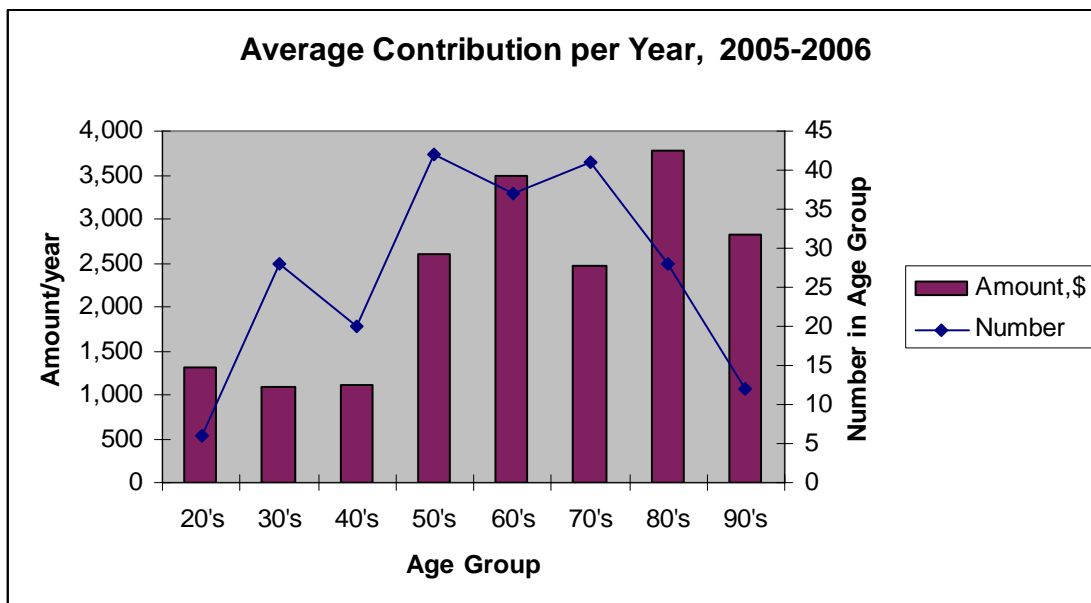
Financial

To aid in our planning effort we reviewed financial data for the last several years looking particularly at trends in expenditures and contributions and also at assets and liabilities.

Our general budget, including loan payments, has increased from 372 K\$ in 2000 to 685 K\$ for 2008, an increase of about 8% per year. In 2002 and 2003 capital expenditures for the new site and construction of our new church building were about 3.7 M\$. Debt on the facilities has been decreased from an initial 517K\$ to 353 K\$ at the end of 2007. For 2007, percentages of our total expenses by area are shown in the chart below.



The average contribution per year per household for the years 2005 and 2006 was about \$1,100 for those in their 20's, 30's, and 40's and \$2,000 to \$3,500 for those in their 50's and older.



New member giving for the years 2000 through 2006 averaged about \$1,200 per year. We have seen an average of 55 new professing members per year for the last three years. This resulted in an average of 25 new contributing households per year. Assuming that this same growth rate continues and that future new members contribute financially at the same rate as those of the recent past, we might expect contribution income to increase by over \$30,000 per year. Of course higher member growth rates, or higher contribution levels, would increase income proportionately.

Another measure examined was the per cent of total contributions that come from the top ten contributors and the second ten contributors. For the years 2002 to 2006 the top ten contributors accounted for 29% of all contributions and the second ten for 13.5% of contributions. These values are typical of most churches. This indicates that the church is supported financially by the entire congregation and is not unduly dependant on a few wealthy individuals. This is a healthy situation.

One of the Don Nations consultants pointed out that, because a number of years have passed since our major capital funds campaign, we are in a position to mount another campaign to finance a significant facilities expansion.

We conclude from the above information that our church is in a sound financial position. We are seeing healthy growth in income and expenditures and our debt is fairly low. New members are contributing significantly to the church and these contributions can be expected to grow with time. We also conclude that the congregation is capable of funding a facilities expansion in the near future.

Inputs from Our St. Mark's Family

Congregational Survey

In the spring and summer of 2007, the Long Range Planning Team sent out a church wide survey. There were 638 surveys sent out and 121 were returned. The survey was used to question the church about a wide variety of topics in order to identify key themes that were important to the members with respect to the long-range plan.

Survey results were tallied and reported in graphs and tables. It is important to note that each member of the Long Range Planning Team read every survey in its original form, to better understand the passion and feeling that went into each response.

The survey asked members to numerically rate several aspects of St. Mark's and to provide written comments on things members particularly like about the church and things they feel need improvement. In the rating section, members were overwhelmingly positive about the church as a place to worship, its physical facilities and its current programs. In rating a list of areas for possible improvement, 10% or more respondents rated the following most in need: Missions, Community Service, Evangelism, and Recreation.

In the subjective comments section, a friendly congregation, the staff and minister, children's programming, the facilities and the music topped the list of things that the

members liked about our church. For opportunities to improve, the youth program, community outreach, and worship style had the most comments in the survey.

For the question “What are the three greatest strengths of St. Mark’s?” the areas most often mentioned were:

	<u>% Who Mentioned</u>
Fellowship and caring	67%
Staff – Mike, and others	45%
Children’s programs	22%
Facilities	21%
Music	17%
Location	16%
Leaders, volunteers	12%
Worship services	12%

For the question “What are the three greatest weaknesses of St. Mark’s?” the areas most often mentioned were:

	<u>% Who Mentioned</u>
Youth program	26%
Outreach	24%
No contemporary service	16%
Adult programming	12%
More small groups	12%
Recreation	12%

The survey responses were very important in helping the team identify key issues which need to be addressed to help our church continue to grow in numbers and in discipleship. Firstly, the survey helped to form the questions that were asked in small group meetings with members. Secondly, the survey was also used by the church visitation team to help shape our discussions with the other churches. Lastly, the final report has addressed many of the responses made in the surveys.

Small Group Feedback Sessions

St. Mark’s members and repeat visitors were mailed personal invitations, followed by phone calls, inviting them to attend LRPT Small Group Feedback Sessions during October and November, 2007. The purpose of these meetings, led by LRPT members, was to provide information and to allow discussion, concerning feedback gathered from the St. Mark’s church-wide LRPT survey taken in May, 2007, as well as to allow the sharing of any new ideas since the survey was taken.

Approximately 110 people attended and participated in these sessions, representing a cross-section of all adult age groups and youth. Nine LRPT members led various sessions.

Areas of positive feedback expressed during the sessions included:

- Inviting, new facilities and grounds

- Strong minister and church staff
- Dynamic worship
- Excellent traditional music
- Friendly Christian fellowship
- Caring and supportive congregation
- Active Children's and Tweens' Programs
- Growing, active Youth Program
- Community –recognized Stepping Stones, a pre-school program
- Strong financial support

Areas of future opportunity for St. Mark's include:

- Expansion of facilities to accommodate current and future needs
- Utilization of undeveloped property, i.e. recreation facility, Scouts facility, Independent-living Retirement facility, etc.
- Implementation of various worship and study opportunities, i.e. styles, times, and locations
- Implementation of a Sponsor/Mentor Program for new members
- Implementation of a support network for member care and needs
- Increased staff for programs and ministry for growing membership needs
- Increased adult ministries
- Increased family-oriented activities, i.e. retreats, recreation, etc.
- Increased church-wide small group participation
- Increased focus on Bible study, prayer, and spirit-filled ministry
- Increased mission and community outreach involving both individuals and families

The Small Group Feedback Sessions mainly provided expanded thoughts on topics already expressed in the prior church-wide survey. A few new ideas were gleaned during these sessions, i.e. men-directed outdoor worship and witness preparation training. The most ardently expressed input included facilities and staff expansion, youth needs of space and equipment, technology updating, membership nurturing, casual worship, mission and community outreach, family activities, senior ministry, and singles ministry.

Information from Other Churches

In order to gain information on what other churches in our area were offering and to see what we could learn from them, we attended worship services at five churches – Baytown Second Baptist, Klein UMC, LaPorte UMC, Dickinson UMC and Faithbridge UMC. Discussions with the staff were held with three churches (Second Baptist, LaPorte, and Dickinson). All five churches have larger memberships than St. Mark's. Three of these

churches (Second Baptist, Klein, and Faithbridge) have higher worship attendance than we do; the other two are about the same as St. Mark's. We used a set of questions to guide the discussions and developed a detailed list of comments we received. Below is a list of things we learned.

- Alternative worship services are offered at all five of the churches visited.
 - These services were developed to reach the un-churched.
 - Some churches run their alternative service simultaneously with a traditional service.
 - Alternative services tend to be held in a multipurpose building with good acoustics.
 - The music director or praise leader is in charge of alternative services.
 - Sound system, a/v capability, music quality, praise leader, praise team and clergy participation are critical elements to the success of these services.
 - Music includes praise leader, 3-5 praise singers, guitars, keyboard, and drums.
 - Pastor or associate delivers the message which is shorter than traditional service.
- Traditional services are similar to the service at St. Mark's.
 - Most have an early and a later service on Sunday morning.
 - Churches strive to equalize quality in each service (e.g., message, music, and children's activities).
 - Only one other church had greeters in parking lot (Faithbridge); Second Baptist used a golf cart to assist visitors/members from the parking lot.
 - Name tags were rarely used for current members or for visitors.
 - Visitors were identified using a registration form similar to ours.
- Our campus compares favorably with those visited, except for acoustical quality in activities center.
 - All churches visited had excellent acoustical treatment where alternative services were held.
 - Some churches use computer check in/out procedures in the nursery and also provide beepers to notify parents.
 - All used a welcome desk and some provided a desk for small group signup.
 - Most churches visited are planning new facility additions or have recently completed major expansions.
- Several churches put major emphasis on small groups.
 - In some cases, joining a small group is a requirement for membership.
 - Coordination of small groups by staff/laity enhances success.

- Childcare is provided by some churches when small groups and other meetings are held on campus.
- Sunday and Wednesday nights are gathering times for children/youth bible study and other activities, such as praise bands.
- All churches visited have more clergy on staff than St. Mark's; all had at least one associate minister.

Overall we found these visits to be very informative, and we made contacts which should be quite helpful to us as we move forward with new facilities, programs, and, especially, a non-traditional worship service. We anticipate sharing LRPT results with the three churches who shared in discussions with us.

Information from Consultants

Comments below reflect the feedback given by consultants from Dr. Don Nation's DNA Coaching, a Texas Annual Conference sponsored consulting firm. These comments were developed from three different consultant visits to our church, and additional feedback is expected as the result of the information we are providing them regarding Congregation, Leadership and Staff survey results, as well as our preliminary LRPT report. This feedback will be considered when it is received from the consultants.

- Church facilities and landscape are very attractive and inviting to visitors; the sanctuary with stained glass windows and the organ music are outstanding.
- St. Mark's is a church that can appeal to young people; families trust our church as evidenced by confidence in a growing Stepping Stones program.
- Attendance at the second service will soon exceed 80% capacity requiring a third service or other steps to avoid overcrowded seating; suggestions included:
 - That church leaders be requested to sit towards the middle of the pews and to park in more remote parking locations.
 - That the minister request people to move towards the middle of the pews to provide room for others.
- A third service is needed, preferably a more casual service in the Activities Center, for young families; attendance will increase by 75-100 by adding this service. Suggestions included:
 - Holding this service on a week night, if desired by target group.
 - Providing a strong music program, dinner and activities for children and youth, and a life application message for adults.
 - Having a worship leader who is on fire to lead this service.
 - Appealing to men in order to involve the entire family.
 - Offering Children/Tweens programs at the same time as the new worship service.

- Creating DVD’s with life application messages for young families and their friends.
- Such a service should be non-threatening to current worshipers and will not impact the traditional services.
- An opportunity exists to create a video venue in the Activities Center for 10:45 service.
- A welcome center in the Narthex is needed.
- Signage should be improved. Signage issues cited included:
 - North Main sign is not visible from the south.
 - Restroom and nursery direction signs are needed.
 - Better visitor parking signage is desired.
 - Use *Power of the Carpenter* banners and signage, as appropriate.
 - Visible signage pointing the way to the sanctuary and church office is needed.
- It is not too early to consider a capital campaign to pay off debt and to provide a reserve for facilities additions.
- We should target Stepping Stones families and staff for worship, scouts, and other church related activities.
- Our church relocation was very successful; it is now time to relocate spiritually.

Vision and Goals

St. Mark’s Vision

“Building faith, disciples, and community through the love and power of Jesus Christ.”

According to Christ’s Great Commission, we are asked to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” Because of the ever-changing demographics of our community and the world at large, our evangelistic action must be flexible, sensitive, and adaptable in order to reach a wide range of believers and non-believers.

Defining Success – The Kind of Church We Want to Be

Our definition of success in achieving St. Mark’s Vision is that St. Mark’s should strive:

- To be a church that nurtures and develops the faith of its members and neighbors, with the goal of bringing people into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.
- To be an inclusive congregation, welcoming all persons and expressing Christ’s love and caring for all its members and for all others with whom we come into contact.

- To be a church that takes the love of God out to others through missions, bringing faith, hope, and salvation to the un-churched, both at home and abroad.
- To be a church that offers worship experiences that change people's lives.
- To be a church that has a strong prayer life and asks for God to come into the lives of His church and our community.
- To be a church that loves music and offers excellent opportunities for members of all ages to regularly participate in various kinds of musical events.
- To be a church that teaches its members about scripture and takes education seriously.
- To be a church that emphasizes helping families to bring their children to God and to raise them in the church.
- To be a church that brings faith into our daily lives in relevant ways, that serves the surrounding community through outreach, and that makes Baytown a better place to live.
- To be a church that demonstrates good stewardship of the resources and talents that God provides for our use.
- To be a church that has a strong sense of community, with an intimate feeling within the congregation, where people know one another on a personal level and enjoy fellowship together.

Specific Goals and Actions to Achieve the Vision

A. Worship

Worship is a key to the life of the church. Worship services should be inspirational, educational, and social. Worship style preferences vary from one member to the next, so the church should offer a range of worship services with differing styles to serve the needs of the congregation.

Goals

- Worship experiences are inspirational and life-changing.
- Various worship styles are offered.
- Weekday or evening services are offered.

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

- Feedback from numerous members, as well as consultants, says that we need to start a contemporary/alternative style worship service. This would serve to attract people to St. Mark's who are uncomfortable with traditional worship services and prefer informal worship settings.
- We need to seek opportunities to reach people who are non-believers or un-churched believers.

- Our regular attendance at worship for our active membership is about 50%. For our newest members regular attendance is 40-50%.
- The 10:45 service attendance is nearing its comfortable seating capacity.

Recommended Actions

1. Balance the 8:30 and 10:45 services to make them more 'equal'. This should alleviate the overcrowding problem at 10:45 for a few years (see Facilities section below). Specific modifications to the early service that should be considered:
 - Offer children's message.
 - Offer Kidtricity and Little Lambs programs, or something similar for children to enjoy during worship service.
 - Provide special music (e.g., children/youth choir, contemporary songs, solos, instrumental music, etc.) of the same, high quality we have at 10:45.
2. Offer a worship service with a style different from that of the current 10:45 service and which includes contemporary Christian music.
 - Form a special team to plan and manage the establishment of the new, alternative worship service.
 - Establish a team to work, in conjunction with the new service, to reach the unchurched near St. Mark's and in the Baytown area.
3. Offer a weekday or evening service.
4. Offer an additional setting for the 10:45 Sunday worship service (10:45 service broadcast to a suitable room with a casual setting within the building).

B. Music/Performing Arts

God often speaks to people through music, and many feel His presence during the performance and enjoyment of music, especially music that is offered in His name. St. Mark's has a tradition of excellent music, and it is one of the strengths of the church today. Music programs should be a key part of our ministry, seeking to involve as many people as possible, as a means to bring them closer to God.

Goals

- Offer high quality, year-round music programs, available for all ages.
- Provide varied music styles, including contemporary Christian music.
- Offer vocal music or 'special' music in all services.

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

The current music offered at St. Mark's is of very high quality, and, in fact, is one of the most common items people mentioned as a 'positive' in the church survey. Expanded music opportunities include:

- Some members have requested that we have more diversified music styles offered at the worship services.

- Both children and youth have expressed interest in being part of the church’s music on a regular basis. Today children only perform in a children’s choir on special occasions, and youth are rarely involved in the music program.
- In many churches, music groups are a form of “small groups” and meetings and rehearsals include times for prayer, fellowship, and Bible study. Current music groups at St. Mark’s do not do these things regularly.

Recommended Actions

1. Start a youth music program.
2. Start a contemporary Christian music group.

C. Prayer and Other Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual discipline is critical to the life of all believers. St. Mark’s should be a place where God is present in the lives of our members. We should strive to help our members experience the various disciplines more fervently and to develop strong spiritual lives.

Goals

- Members strive for healthy spiritual lives through active participation of disciplines such as prayer, meditation, fasting, confession, etc.
- A prayer ministry that actively supports the church and its members
- Prayer is a part of all church meetings.

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

- Some members have expressed a desire to have more time for contemplation and individual prayer during worship services.
- Opportunity exists to expand the number of prayer teams.
- Many church members may not be aware of other spiritual disciplines beyond prayer.

Recommended Actions

1. Increase visibility of the prayer ministry, e.g., by specific prayer lists for members to use and by prayer teams focusing on specific needs.
2. Church meetings and small groups should be encouraged to spend time in prayer.
3. Encourage the practice of other spiritual disciplines, implementing programs to develop spiritual discipline awareness.
4. Create a Prayer Team for supporting the Long Range Plan activities.

D. Fellowship/Community

St. Mark’s is a very friendly and welcoming congregation. This point was the strongest single message that we heard in the church survey. It is crucial to the success of our church that we retain this aspect of who we are, and build on it to achieve our vision.

Goals

- Strong sense of community among members where people share with each other, support each other, and love each other.
- Vibrant children and youth programs, which are educational and fun.
- Vibrant small groups where members participate regularly.
- Vibrant and well-publicized programs of social, recreational, and fellowship activities for adults.

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

Survey responses indicate that people perceive St. Mark's to be a place of close fellowship between members. We have many events, activities, and traditions that encourage us to gather and to have fellowship together. There are events for all ages, some specific to individual groups and others church-wide, such as:

- Children's, Tweens, and Youth program activities.
- Prime Timers and Sunday School class activities.
- Various events on Sundays after church (lunches, bake sales, etc.).
- Seasonal major events, such as Turkey Dinner, Fish Fry, etc.
- Various small groups in place.

According to a number of responses, opportunity to minister in some areas still remains.

- Some new members have struggled to find a sense of "belonging," stressing the need for small group involvement.
- There is a need for an organized process for follow-up with people who have drifted away, or who have been absent for a few weeks.
- There is a need for an organized process for helping new members to fully assimilate and to find their "home" at St. Mark's.
- There are requests for organized sports and recreational activities for all age groups.
- Survey feedback indicates a need for improved internal communications.

Recommended Actions

1. Encourage and facilitate the startup of more small groups.
2. Create and maintain an up-to-date master calendar of events and increase the visibility/communication of it to church members.
3. Continue to support LAMP's ministry in welcoming visitors and new members and in their assimilation into the church family.
4. Form a Recreational Ministry Team for all ages.
5. Develop new ministries for both men and women.

E. Education

John Wesley believed that at the core of the Christian faith is scripture, tradition, personal experience, and reason. A solid Christian education is necessary to develop an understanding of the Bible, to know and to appreciate the contributions of the founders and the saints of the Church, and to develop a thoughtful, personal faith. St. Mark's will provide opportunities for all to achieve a well-rounded, Bible-based Christian education.

Goals

- Growth of all St. Mark's people in knowledge of the Bible, church doctrine, and ways in which we can grow in Christian discipleship
- Vibrant educational children and youth programs, Christian based and fun, which draw families to our church and involve them in worship and ministry.
- High quality Christian education options for adults.
- A variety of small group Christian educational opportunities is available and effectively communicated. All members are encouraged to participate in small group study.
- All visitors and new members receive help to find Christian educational opportunities and to become involved in small groups.

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

Recently established small groups, thriving children's Sunday school classes, and several very strong adult Sunday school classes are a magnet for growth. Key challenges:

- Sunday school classes struggle at times to find teachers and suitable, quality curriculum.
- Visitors and new members often struggle to 'fit in' to existing Sunday school classes, and many have not joined these groups.
- A younger adult class is needed.

A key opportunity:

- A church-wide gathering on a weeknight when small groups can meet to provide learning opportunities and fellowship.

Recommended Actions

1. On Sunday mornings, immediately prior to church school, establish a "Gathering" in a prominent location (e.g., Activity Center), providing coffee and breakfast snacks, music, prayer, and options for people to attend their choice of Christian education classes.
2. Launch a periodic "Weeknight Gathering" similar to the Sunday morning version including dinner, music, child care, and small group/educational options.

3. Establish a more intensive, ongoing program of teacher recruitment and training and provide additional support in matters of curriculum, structure, new class startup, etc.

F. Missions/Caring

St. Mark's has a long tradition of service to the community. The church should follow the example of Jesus and the disciples by not only focusing on internal needs of the congregation, but also by serving those in our community who have needs and by promoting peace and justice in the world.

Goals

- Clear definitions and goals for missions and caring
- Focused support on selected missionary programs
- Involvement by a broad spectrum of the congregation in outreach and missions
- Programs that share the Word, not just the 'Love'
- Inward as well as external focus; congregational care ministry, including strong support for elderly and homebound members within the church
- Support for Christian peace and justice actions that affirm the value of all persons

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

- Stepping Stones is at 100% capacity with a long waiting list for next year. Since this is one of our most important and successful programs of outreach and evangelism to the children and families of our community we need to expand its ministry.
- We need to increase our service to the community.
- We should do a better job of caring for the needs of our own members, particularly those who are elderly or homebound.
- We have 231 members in the Baytown area who do not attend worship.
- We should more actively address peace and justice issues, both at home and abroad.

Recommended Actions

1. Increase the local focus of our Missions effort by identifying specific opportunities where our members can be of service to those in need in the Baytown area and organize and coordinate the delivery of help. This will require adding resources to our existing Missions Team.
2. Enable Stepping Stones to expand.
3. Continue support of LAMP's ministry.
4. Form a membership care team to maintain contact with established members and provide needed care.

5. Establish a worship outreach team to work, in conjunction with the new alternative service, to reach the un-churched near St. Mark's and in the Baytown area.

G. Stewardship

Good stewardship is more than giving money for the sake of preserving the church. It is much broader, personally enriching those who would be genuine followers of God and who seek to fulfill the mission of the church. Good stewardship with our time, talents and money is important for the spiritual and physical health of the church, as well as for each of us. We should prayerfully consider how we use the gifts that God has given us.

Goals

- A strong awareness in our church of our trust in God and of God's ownership of all things, which is exhibited by
 - generosity with our personal resources
 - concern about the conservation of the earth and its resources
- Timely and effective teaching about biblical principles of stewardship
- Broad participation by church members in meeting the financial needs of the church
- Members who take seriously the importance of being good stewards of their time and talents
- Solid financial position for the church; debt managed carefully

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

St. Mark's is in a strong financial position, and the congregation has historically been very generous in support of the church's programs and of the direction the church wants to take. Also, St. Mark's people have a long history of generosity with their time and talents, with a strong group of volunteers to carry out the programs and missions of the church. Some challenges we have:

- Achieving our vision for new facilities and staff will require significant financial resources.
- According to our Don Nations consultant, enough time has elapsed since our move that a capital fund raising campaign would be feasible, if needed.
- If the church takes on too much debt, it could limit our ability to grow in the future and to adapt as needs change.
- In order to get strong commitment of the needed resources from the congregation, we must work to communicate the vision and plans, and make sure people are supportive.
- There is an opportunity to teach and talk about the biblical principles of stewardship through small group studies. There are several good programs

available in this area, which, in other churches, have made a significant impact on church finances.

Recommended Actions

1. Make the connection between St. Mark's vision and the actions recommended by the LRPT and explain what will be needed from congregation – time, talents, and money
2. Analyze projected giving and budget growth and estimate potential revenue from a capital fund campaign. With prayerful consideration, and using good stewardship, set a limit on the amount of debt that the church should take on, and have the discipline to stick to it.
3. Develop a comprehensive funding plan and strategy for all elements of the vision.
4. Launch a church-wide stewardship education program, with a goal of all members participating in a stewardship course.
5. Broaden stewardship activities to develop ways for incorporating stewardship into the total life of the church and to regularly encourage members to commit a portion of their time and talent to the work of the church.

H. Staffing

The church staff members are critical to St. Mark's successful delivery of its mission and achieving the vision. Staffing should be sufficient to allow focus on achieving specific elements of vision. They should have overall responsibility for success in their area, but should look to facilitate and coordinate the work of many volunteers to get the work done wherever possible. One of our goals should be to involve as many church members in the ministry of the church as possible. The current model of part time workers fulfilling key positions is successful and should continue where feasible. Volunteer positions are effective and appropriate for temporary roles, or for activities that are less than 50% of full time.

Goals

- Sufficient ministerial staff to support additional worship service and growing educational/ministry/other needs
- Sufficient professional staff to coordinate all programming activities – adult, youth, and children
- Accomplished praise worship/music leader and band for casual service

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

The existing church staff is doing a great job. Key opportunity areas exist where there is a need to grow or expand the scope of programs and services we provide.

- Church staff organization should be designed to enable and support all key areas of church ministries including: Worship and Music; Caring and Outreach; Evangelism, Welcoming and Assimilation; Discipleship of Children, Tweens,

Youth, and Adults; Stewardship and Business Management; and Stepping Stones Day School.

- Additional staff will be required to support a new Praise/Contemporary worship service (e.g., Music/Praise leader).
- We will need to launch a high quality praise and worship music group. Input from other churches who have done this would be helpful to work out a plan for this.
- The work of existing LAMP team is currently going well, but may in the future require that a staff position coordinate evangelism activities outside the church walls, in addition to welcoming and assimilating visitors and new members.
- On the current staff, we have 4 part-time (50%) positions to support the programs for our children, TWEENS, youth, and adults. As these programs grow, there will be a need to revise this for evolving needs.
- Studies of similar churches show that most have an associate pastor. This would help with load balancing on our pastor and provide for easier transition planning during pastoral changes.
- Lack of a daytime janitor results in an additional burden on our staff – setting up rooms, moving tables and chairs, etc.

Recommended Actions

1. Initiate plans to bring on an associate pastor, who is comfortable with an alternative/contemporary style worship service.
2. Recruit a part time praise music and worship leader for a new service.
3. Create a praise band / music group to provide music at the new service.
4. Establish a Communications Team to oversee various communication issues.
5. Consider the feasibility of a daytime janitor.

I. Facilities

The church facilities enable St. Mark's to carry out its mission to build faith, disciples, and community effectively. It is important that these facilities be attractive, well designed for the purposes intended and well equipped to enable our staff and members to use them effectively.

Goals

Sanctuary

- Seating is comfortable and does not feel crowded for normal Sunday services.
- Is a place of reverence and beauty, and exudes a sense of quality, enhances the worship experience, and is appealing to visitors

Activity Center

- Doubles as a space to hold casual worship services and semi-formal events and can accommodate alternative styles of worship services

- Can accommodate overflow on busy Sundays and holidays
- Acoustics are sufficient for large groups to hear clearly.
- Has high quality, projection and sound facilities
- Is suitable to hold large church-wide events and other recreation activities
- Has nearby shower and changing facilities for visiting groups or temporary disaster relief

Church Offices

- Church staff has sufficient meeting and office space with an individual desk and PC for each staff member.
- Offices are arranged so that natural work groups can sit near each other.

Storage Space

- Sufficient activity center and non-activity center space to support expanding needs.

Education Building/Classrooms

- Provide adequate space for Stepping Stones which enables growth goals for the school while continuing to share rooms on Sunday morning for children's Sunday school.
- Provide comfortable spaces for small groups to meet on Sunday morning (e.g., Sunday school), as well as during the week (daytime and evenings).

Youth Area

- Youth have adequate space, sized to accommodate future growth.
- A space designated for use by the youth group only, containing furniture, equipment, and decorations aimed at making St. Mark's a "cool" place for youth.

Infant Nursery

- Is adequately sized to accommodate peak load needs for Sunday mornings and special occasions.
- No parent would feel the need to leave or miss an event due to lack of space in the nursery.
- System in place to track infants, contact parents. No parent should feel concern about the safety of their child.

Parking / Signage / Safety

- Parking is adequate to support needs for all events.
- Visitors and persons with disabilities have designated parking spaces and do not feel frustrated or uncomfortable due to inadequate parking space.
- Pedestrian and traffic safety is emphasized and planned accordingly.

Scout Facility

- Scout troop has a place of their own to meet and store their equipment.

Kitchen

- Adequately sized and equipped for hot meal preparation and cleanup.

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

Our current facilities are in good condition, and people perceive them to be of high quality. However, in several areas the church has grown to the point where the facilities are now stretched to meet current demands. Specific challenge areas include:

Sanctuary

- The current sanctuary is crowded on many Sundays at 10:45, and it is often overcrowded on special occasions.
- Total attendance, counting both morning services, is now routinely over 300. This includes choir, nursery, ushers and other workers who do not occupy seats in the pews and side chairs.
- The current seating capacity for the pews and side chairs is 286. St. Mark's 2007 average attendance at the 10:45 service was approx. 200, which is 70% occupied.
- Consultants advise that 80% is too crowded, and that many worshipers will feel uncomfortable in a sanctuary where more than 4 out of 5 seats are occupied.
- At currently projected growth rates, we will soon routinely exceed the 80% capacity on "normal" Sundays (within 1-2 years).

Activity Center

- The current activity center has significant acoustical issues that preclude using the space for new styles of worship in a casual setting or for other "speaking" occasions.
- Issues to be addressed include acoustics, and the lack of a raised platform/stage.
- The current half-gym is too small now for some recreational activities (e.g., basketball leagues) and will be marginal for an expanded Stepping Stones. Feedback from Stepping Stones, youth, and children is that the gym is highly valued and gets a lot of use throughout the week.

Church Offices

- All offices, except Mike's, are currently shared, although several are too small for such an arrangement.
- The current facilities are not sufficient to meet growing needs of church staff, e.g., Associate Pastor. Existing rooms which might be used as offices are not near the main office area.

Education Building / Classrooms

- Stepping Stones is unable to grow in current facilities. Infant/toddler rooms are too small.
- We have limited space, especially nursery facilities, for weekday outreach or other programs, e.g. MOPS, or other small groups.
- Several Sunday School rooms are frequently overcrowded - Open Door, Friendship, and Seekers (on some Sundays). Four rooms are not in use during the Sunday School hour but are not suitable for large classes.
- Youth Area - At projected growth rates, the youth rooms will be severely crowded within 1-2 years. Youth have expressed the desire to have an area of their own. They would use this as a place for Sunday school, for Sunday evening MYF activities, and for mid-week activities in summer, etc.
- Infant Nursery - Some have expressed desire for even better security.

Parking / Signage / Safety

- Parking is at or over capacity now on busy Sundays and on special occasions.
- Traffic safety upon entering and leaving the site at busy times during weekdays is a concern. This will become worse when the Presbyterian Church is built.

Scout Facility

- The Scout Troop has no official "Scout House" in which to meet during the week.
- The scouts are currently using the church building, which is not ideal given some of their activities.

Kitchen

- Current kitchen equipment and arrangement makes preparing meals for large groups, including serving and cleanup, unnecessarily difficult. Slow cook top heating, small and hard-to-use sinks, and a cumbersome and space consuming dishwasher are cause for many complaints by many kitchen workers.

Recommended Actions

1. Make changes to optimize use of the present sanctuary, balancing the 8:30 and 10:45 services. Add additional services when needed. Re-evaluate sanctuary needs as membership and worship attendance grow.
2. Use the activity center as a more casual place for attending worship via telecommunications link where people can sit in a more relaxed and informal setting but still worship with the main service. Any interim modification to the activity center should be compatible with the next building phase.
 - Design should accommodate families with young children, so parents will not be concerned that their kids will disrupt the main service
 - Can serve as an overflow area on very busy Sundays

- Can welcome visitors and/or late-comers who may be uncomfortable entering the sanctuary after service starts
 - Have decorations and ambience to maintain worshipful environment, even if less formal
 - Would have usher(s) and a worship facilitator to oversee and handle elements of the service that need to be done in person (e.g., for communion)
3. Complete video and acoustical upgrade of activity center to support concerts, contemporary worship, and other semi-formal gatherings. Target to be as good as other churches who have successfully worked this problem.
 4. Establish a Facilities Management Team to address detailed needs and develop an architectural and other plans for the following:
 - Additional rooms to enable the growth of Stepping Stones and to accommodate significant growth in church school activities and small groups (Priority 1)
 - Improve the utility and the security features for the infant nursery (Priority 1)
 - Larger youth room and recreation area to support youth group of 50+ members; consider including meeting area for Sunday School & MYF plus recreation area with kitchen (Priority 1)
 - Appropriate office space for relieving current crowding and meeting growing staff needs, including the addition of an associate pastor and staffing required by worship service additions. (Priority 1)
 - Expansion of the activity center to a full size gym to accommodate an alternative worship service and fellowship needs (Priority 1)
 - Kitchen upgrade of equipment in existing space or a move to a new location in expanded building based on architectural recommendations. (Priority 1)
 - Changing/shower facility to accommodate UM Army visitors, disaster relief, etc. (Priority 2)
 - Parking area expansion based on building additions/church growth, according to the architect’s master plan, emphasizing pedestrian and traffic safety. (Priority 1)
 - Scout Hut, separate from main church building; scouts contribute input on design and some of the construction labor where possible. (Priority 2)
 5. Coordinate new construction with Land Use Team.
 6. Consider ways to make weekday traffic exiting and entering the site safer.

J. Land Use

The current church property is not being fully utilized, with a significant portion of the lot still undeveloped. This long range plan aims to suggest appropriate uses of the land, as well as to consider other possible options with respect to adjacent or nearby land.

Goals

- Utilization of the entire property to support and expand the ministries of the church, in alignment with the St. Mark's vision statement and goals.

Highlights of Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities

A portion of the property will be required to support the building expansion and accompanying parking area. Several suggestions have been made for the use of the remainder, about six acres. These include:

- Develop recreation facilities, such as sports fields, walking trails, a fitness course, or an outdoor gathering area. These would not only serve the church's needs, but could also double as a community recreation area for local residents.
- Develop the land as a retirement community / independent living facility, although the existing lot is likely too small for this
- Consider purchase of the adjacent lot located south of the church property and behind Jack in the Box. This additional land would provide enough space for a retirement facility. Some of that land fronts on Rollingbrook and could possibly be subdivided and re-sold to partially offset the cost of this development

Recommended Actions

1. Contact the Conference office and determine if there is interest in the Methodist Church, not St. Mark's, purchasing the vacant adjacent property and developing it for a retirement community.
2. Form an action team to determine the best short and longer term use of our excess land. Include consideration of the following possibilities:
 - Create a sports area, including a softball/soccer field.
 - Construct a covered pavilion with picnic tables to use for outdoor group gatherings, adjacent to the sports field. If possible, design to double as an outdoor, covered basketball court.
 - Reserve a small portion of the land for a Scout house.

Implementation

Overview

St. Mark's has much to celebrate. Just in the last few years, the church has

- moved to a new location on North Main
- expanded membership, grew the budget, and increased attendance, all by ~50%
- established a mission statement to carry us to the next stage of our journey
- established thriving children's and Tweens programs
- revitalized the Youth program
- launched 6 new small groups

- dramatically expanded the day school (Stepping Stones)
- launched a very successful outreach program for mothers of young children (MOPS)
- etc.

We have established a good foundation on which to grow, and we have begun to establish our mission and develop a focus for the future of our ministry. The next steps have been the focus of this Long Range Planning Team.

Engagement with Church leaders and members

It is crucial that church leadership “owns” the plan, and that church membership feels engaged and included in both the long-range vision as well as the nearer term tactical steps we will be taking. Several important goals and tactics are important to achieve this:

1. *Communicate the Long Range Plan elements and implications* – We recommend hosting a series of engagement sessions, perhaps over lunch on Sundays after church, to explain the rationale and substance of the LRPT recommendations.
2. *Seek input and advice* – We recommend that we continue to seek input from our members in areas such as the facilities master plan and the design for the unused church property. By doing this we will increase the buy-in of our members, and often identify people with a passion for particular topics and who can help drive implementation.
3. *Track progress and provide updates on progress* – We recommend that we track progress and use a graphical representation of the overall journey for St. Mark’s in regular church communications such as the Messenger, Sunday morning bulletins and announcements, web site, etc. This graphic should be a feature of all communications related to the program. Also we should cover any changes to the plan in these progress updates.
4. *Seek out ways to celebrate the successes* – We recommend that we regularly highlight the ways that God is working through our church and giving validation to the overall plans we have been working on.

Prayer/Spiritual Support & Guidance

God is clearly directing our work here. It is important that we retain our focus on His guidance, and seek His support as we proceed with the implementation phases of this work. We recommend establishing an ongoing prayer support system, so that the members of St. Mark’s are not only supporting the program with their gifts and their service, but also with their prayers. This prayer system should be actively managed and the goal should be to have all members of the St. Mark’s family praying for God to help us achieve our goals, and then to use our gifts to do His work.

Financial Support

Of course much of this program relies on money in order to be achievable. The funding of the LRPT recommendations should take two forms:

1. For items that can be implemented as part of existing ministry areas, these should be funded through existing budgets and managed as part of day-to-day operations.
2. For major capital items that don't fit in existing operational budgets, the church will need to raise funds to support them. We recommend that the fund-raising for these elements of the plan should be carried out with a separate stewardship campaign, seeking pledge support from members for a 3-5 year commitment. Ideally the elements of this Long Range Plan should be fully paid for by the end of the pledge period, so that no long-term debt is required to pay for the expansion.

Operational Project Management

The Long Range Plan contains many recommendations. Many can be implemented by staff and existing church leadership teams. Others involve the creation of new action teams of different sizes and complexities to carry out the recommendations.

In order to successfully proceed with all the plan recommendations which are approved by the Administrative Board and to help ensure that the efforts are well organized and executed, we recommend the creation of a Plan Implementation Team (PIT) to provide oversight and coordination for the entire activity. This team would report to the Ad Board and be responsible for:

- Developing a time table for the implementation of the LRPT recommendations and preparing an implementation plan for Admin Board approval.
- Assisting with the establishment of the needed new action teams and recommending to whom each team will report
- Recommending who should be responsible for each plan recommendation.
- Working with the Facilities Team and the Finance Committee to arrive at needed estimates of cost and funding ability and to develop recommendations needed to move ahead for Admin Board review and approval.
- Supporting the Prayer Team and its actions to involve the Church in prayer for God's guidance in our work
- Assuring clear communication of the plan recommendations to the new action teams and to the existing staff, ministry teams and other church committees who will implement recommendations
- Tracking progress of the implementation of all recommendations, providing assistance with needed changes or difficulties as they arise
- Regularly reporting progress in implementing the plan to the Ad Board and to the congregation
- Seeking appropriate ways to recognize and celebrate successes as they occur

The new teams which this report recommends be established are listed below, followed by the recommendations for which these teams should be responsible.

Specific LRPT Recommendations Suggested for New Teams

- **Plan Implementation Team:** *responsible for start-up, oversight and coordination of the plan implementation* (Priority 1, 3Q 08)
- **Facilities Management Team:** *responsible for new facilities construction and coordination with Land Use Team and Trustees.*
 - Support changes needed to balance Sunday worship services. (Priority 1, 4Q08)
 - Implement video and acoustical upgrade of activity center. (Priority 1, 1Q09)
 - Have a completed architectural plan for facilities additions/modifications. (Priority 1, 4Q09)
(See page 29 for priorities of individual items.)
 - Consider ways to make weekday traffic exiting and entering the site safer. (Priority 1, 4Q08)
- **Land Use Team:** *responsible for developing plan for using church property not required by Facilities Team and for coordinating with Facilities Team and Trustees*
 - Develop recommendations for plans to use our excess land (Priority 1, TBD)
 - Investigate purchase of adjacent property for a retirement community (Priority 2, 4Q08)
 - Reserve a small portion of land for a Scout House (Priority 2, TBD)
- **Alternative Worship Team:** *responsible for developing an alternate worship service and coordinating with Worship Ministry Team and SPRC*
 - Offer a worship service with a style different from that of our current 10:45 service and which includes contemporary Christian music (Priority 1, start 3Q09)
 - Start a contemporary Christian music group (Priority 1, 3Q09)
- **Worship Outreach Team:** *specifically responsible for attracting the un-churched to our new alternative worship service; may be a sub-team of the Alternative Worship Team instead of standalone*
 - Work in conjunction with the new alternative service to reach the un-churched near St. Mark's and in the Baytown area (Priority 1, 3Q09)
- **Communications Team:** *responsible for communicating progress of LRPT implementation and for other aspects of church operations including church calendars, advertising, Messenger, and other church communications*
 - Oversee various communications including LRPT implementation (Priority 1, start 4Q08)
- **Prayer Team:** *responsible for working with our pastor to develop congregational prayer support during the transition period of our Long Range plan*
- **Recreational Ministry Team:** *responsible for developing recreational opportunities for all ages*
 - Increase recreational opportunities across all age groups (Priority 1, start 1Q09)

- **Membership Care Team:** *responsible for maintaining contact with established members and providing needed care*
 - Maintain contact with established members, identify those needing special help, and organize and coordinate delivery of that help (Priority 1, TBD)

LRPT Recommendations for Existing Teams

- **Worship Ministry Team**
 - Balance the 8:30 and 10:45 services. Consider children’s message, Lil Lambs, Kid Tricity, special music (Priority 1, 4Q08)
 - Offer an additional setting for the 10:45 Sunday worship service (broadcast to the activity center or other room) (Priority 1, 4Q08)
 - Offer a weekday or evening service (Priority 2, Evaluate 1Q09)
- **Missions Ministry Team**
 - Identify specific opportunities where our members can be of service to those in need in the Baytown area and organize and coordinate the delivery of help (Priority 1, TBD)
- **Adult Council/Adult Coordinator**
 - Encourage and facilitate the startup of more small groups (Priority 1, ongoing)
 - Continue support of LAMP’s ministry including new member assimilation efforts (Priority 1, ongoing)
 - Establish a more intensive, ongoing program of teacher recruitment and training (Priority 1, 1Q09)
 - On Sunday mornings, immediately prior to church school, establish a “Gathering” in a prominent location (e.g., Activity Center), with church school classes to follow (Priority 1, 3Q09)
 - Launch a periodic “Weeknight Gathering” similar to the Sunday morning version including dinner, music, child care, and small group/educational studies (Priority 2, 4Q09)
 - Increase new ministries for both men and women (small groups started) (Priority 1, 4Q08)
- **Youth Council**
 - Start a youth music program (Priority 1, 4Q08)
- **Stewardship/Finance**
 - Broaden Stewardship activities to develop ways for incorporating stewardship into the total life of the church and to regularly encourage members to commit a portion of their time and talent to the work of the church (Priority 1, 3Q08)
 - Make the connection between St. Mark’s vision and the actions being recommended by the LRPT and explain what will be needed from the congregation-time, talents, and money (Priority 1, 4Q08)

- Analyze projected giving and budget growth and estimate potential revenue from a capital campaign; with prayerful consideration, and using good stewardship, set a limit on the amount of debt that the church should take on, and have the discipline to stick to it (Priority 1, 4Q08)
- Develop a comprehensive funding plan and strategy for all elements of the vision (Priority 1,3Q09)
- Launch a church-wide stewardship education program, with a goal of all members participating in a stewardship course (Priority 1, 2Q09)
- **Trustees**
 - Consider the feasibility of a daytime janitor (Priority 2, 3Q08)
- **Staff**
 - Create and maintain a central master calendar of events and increase the visibility/communication of it to church members (Priority 1, 4Q08)
 - Increase visibility of the prayer ministry (Priority 1, ongoing 2008)
 - Encourage prayer times in church meetings and small group meetings (Priority 1, ongoing)
 - Encourage the practice of other spiritual disciplines; implement programs to develop spiritual discipline awareness (Priority 1, 4Q08)
- **SPRC**
 - Initiate plans to bring on an associate pastor (Priority 1, 4Q08)
 - Work with AWS to recruit a part time praise music & worship leader for a new service (Priority 1, 1Q09)
 - Work with AWS to create a praise band/music group to provide music at the new service (Priority 1, 2Q09)

Maintaining & Updating the Plan

Renew every 5 years – This Long Range Plan should be formally refreshed every 5 years, both to review progress against the previous plan, and to establish the priorities and focus areas for the coming 5 years.

Quarterly Updates – We recommend that quarterly reviews be held by the Implementation Team to check progress versus the plan and determine the need for any necessary changes in implementation.

Annual Updates – In addition, there should be annual status meetings of the church leadership to confirm progress against the Long Range Plan, revise the plan to include new elements that may arise along the way, and confirm next steps for the coming period. A broad church communication should accompany each annual update.

Immediate Next Steps

Some of the recommendations from the LRPT have already been implemented. Examples include the beginning of work to balance services, the creation of a new mission statement, etc.

Key next steps to kick off the remaining activities should include:

What	Who	By When
Board presentation and approval	LRPT	June '08
All-church presentation and engagement sessions	LRPT & Admin Board	Aug '08
Create a Plan Implementation Team and name the team leader	Admin Board	Aug '08
Create an Alternative Worship Team	Admin Board, Worship Team	Aug '08
Establish a Communications Team & director	Mike/Lay Leadership Committee	Aug '08
Establish a Spiritual Support Team & coordinator	Mike/Lay Leadership Committee	Oct '08
Create a Facilities Team	Admin Board	4Q 08
Create a Land Use Team	Admin Board	4Q 08