

**TO: The Session of First Presbyterian Church**

**FROM: Church Planting Committee**

**DATE: September 21, 2009**

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At its meeting on May 18, 2009, the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Columbia established a special committee on church planting, consisting of the following members:

Elders:	Ken Wingate (Chairman)	At Large:	Paula Hill
	Marion Davis		Kristy Rollins
	Pat Dorn		Bonnie Spacek
	Lanny Lambert		Adam Neely
	Gordon Query	Pastors:	Sinclair Ferguson
Deacons:	Jonathan King		Neal Mathias
	Thornton Kirby		

The committee was charged in terms of Motion 2009-024 of the Session, March 16, 2009, in which it was passed that “a committee be established to consider the possibility of First Presbyterian Church establishing another ARP congregation in the greater Columbia area, the committee’s responsibilities to include

- (i) making a recommendation on the principle itself,
- (ii) the examination of potential areas for planting,
- (iii) suggesting a possible strategy for church planting best suited to the needs identified and the area in view, and
- (iv) the initial relationship of the new church to First Presbyterian Church.”

The full committee met on six occasions, with additional subcommittee meetings. Its members are unanimously thankful for the trust placed in them by the Session and deeply grateful for the privilege of serving the eldership and congregation as a whole in this way.

After several months of prayerful and deliberative discussion and analysis, the committee herewith submits its report to the Session. The report is in three sections:

Part I describes the thinking process of the committee.

Part II provides demographic considerations which have contributed to the committee’s findings.

Part III summarizes the committee’s conclusions and recommendation, which is as follows:

The Church Planting Committee recommends to Session that FPC establish another ARP congregation in the greater Columbia area in accordance with the findings of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth B. Wingate

# REPORT OF THE CHURCH PLANTING COMMITTEE

## PART I: THE COMMITTEE'S THINKING PROCESS

### A. Theological Background: The Case for Church Planting

It is always wise for us when facing decisions, meeting fresh challenges, or seeking wisdom about the direction and shape of our church life for the future, to go back to the first principles given to us in Scripture. In this context, we want to be guided by New Testament principles related to the growth, expansion, and reproduction of the church.

The New Testament foundations for church planting lie in three statements of the Lord Jesus which trace out his own foundational vision.

1. **Matthew 16:18.** Here Jesus promises to build his church, and calls Peter and the other apostles into service in that plan.
2. **Matthew 28:18-20.** Here Jesus commissions the apostles to build the church in the power of his presence with them. While “church” as such is not specifically mentioned (there are in fact only two texts in the Gospels that do mention it), clearly Jesus here envisages the church planting activity in which the apostles will be engaged. They are to teach (the word) and baptize (administer the sacraments) the disciples who are gathered by the preaching of the gospel. In this new, baptized community, the pattern of life is to be “everything that I have commanded you.” Moreover, the Lord Jesus sees this as an international activity shared by all believers (they are to go to “all nations [= people groups]” and they are to do so “until the end of the age”). There is, therefore, neither geographical nor temporal limitation to this command.
3. **Acts 1:8.** Here, just before his ascension, Jesus further delineates the “stages” in the fulfillment of his great church planting vision:  
But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

The geographical advance of the church is here set within the framework of God’s purposes in the history of redemption. The gospel comes first to the Jews (Jerusalem and Judea); it then breaks through into the “half-breed” religious territory of Samaria where a truncated form of Old Testament faith was preserved, but a region with which—notoriously—the Jews avoided dealings (John 4:9; cf. the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37). But then the gospel is to break out into the Gentile world and thus churches will be planted all over the world.

There is a certain uniqueness about this pattern—in the sense that the movement from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the earth is inaugurated once for all. But there also seems to be a pattern here that provides wisdom for the church’s ongoing mission. First—despite persecution and internal struggle—the church is built up “at home” (Acts 2:1-7:60). It then reaches out to its surrounding area (Acts 8:1). Then, stretching beyond its own cultural and comfort boundaries it touches another culture (Acts 8: 4, 14). Finally it reaches to all places and cultures in the Gentile world (Acts 10:1ff).



There is always a danger of “running ahead” of God (if such a thing is possible!) without having a sense of burden that will keep us going and sustain us through the ups and downs of a church-planting existence.

Many church planting efforts in our locality and State have failed to bear lasting fruit. It is essential that the drive that leads a church to plant is sufficiently weighty to enable it to persevere.

3. ***Is there a sense that God has provided, is presently providing, and will continue to provide, the resources that will be needed to plant a church?*** Acts 6:4, Acts 13:1–4, Ephesians 4: 1-16 provide classic statements of how the Lord Jesus Christ builds up the church by providing prayer saturated, word-centered, leadership, which in turn serves to equip members of the fellowship for the work of the ministry and the upbuilding of the body. The church in Ephesus is itself an instance of this pattern. Built up under the ministry of Paul, it became a center for church-planting in the area. Thus Epaphras, who seems to have become a Christian through the work of grace in Ephesus, went to his home city (Colossians 4:12: “Epaphras, *who is one of you . . .*”). The same was true of the Thessalonian church. Planted by Paul (Acts 17:1ff), by the time Paul writes to them the word of the Lord has “sounded forth” from them and their “faith in God has gone everywhere” (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

4. ***Is there a willingness to place ourselves at the Lord’s disposal?*** Herein lies the specific challenge. The need may be clear, there may be a corresponding burden, and a supply of resources. But for a variety of reasons there may be an unwillingness to act in fresh commitment.

This needs to be distinguished in our minds from:

5. ***Is this the Divine Time?*** It should not necessarily be assumed that positive answers to questions 1-4 drive us absolutely to the conclusion that church planting must be pursued according to our timetable and geography. God has his own placing and timing, and it appears providentially under his sovereign hand.

Acts 16:6ff describes such a situation. The apostolic band led by Paul seem to have planned to church plant in Asia, but they were forbidden. They came to Mysia and actually attempted to go into Bithynia to church plant. Instead they were restrained by the Spirit. Only when Paul heard “the Macedonian call” in his dream and the apostolic band related this providence (dreams are experienced in the providence of God!) when placed side by side with the restraining providences recently experienced, do we find them “concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them [i.e. the Macedonians].”

Several features of this experience are interesting. But one that should not be overlooked is that the church planting mission into Macedonia did not begin simply on the basis of one man’s dream, but was driven by the thoughtful and considered agreement of the little apostolic fellowship, that this was God’s leading for them.

When churches are built up and reduplicate themselves according to this pattern, Christ himself continues to build his church and the gates of Hades will not be able to withstand his church planting purposes.

## **B. Positive Reasons Supporting a Church Plant**

There is no one compelling reason that singularly determines that First Presbyterian Church should support a church planting project. Rather, several considerations woven together collectively have led the committee to a conclusion that both an opportunity and a responsibility to become actively engaged in church planting present themselves to us as a fellowship at this time.

These considerations include the following (ranked in order of general importance):

1. There are specific areas in the greater Columbia area in need of the kind of local witness to Christ that would be created by an expansion of our city-based ministry into one or more of these areas by means of a church plant from FPC in response to Christ's commission to go and make disciples.

2. Church planting is a specific, concrete way for the kingdom of Christ to grow in a context in which our entire congregation can be helped to develop and become energized in mission. It will help FPC focus on an outward mission of discipleship and safeguard us from any unhealthy contentment with what we have.

3. FPC is blessed with people with varied spiritual gifts, some of whom may answer a call to participate in church planting. Members within our congregation may already have an interest in becoming involved in such an initiative. We are rich in numbers of elders and deacons as well as regular members who could use and develop their talents for further service. A church plant would also challenge our members to use their gifts and give more of themselves instead of waiting on others to do the work.

4. FPC is blessed with financial resources—and we are conscious that from those to whom much is given much is required.

5. The committee senses that, while FPC rejoices in numerical growth, and hopes for such growth to continue, it does not aim simply to be a “mega-church” for its own sake. A potentially fruitful growth strategy is to plant daughter churches with an ability to grow to a certain size (*e.g.*, a congregation of 400 may be an optimal number). In a church plant, seeking an optimal size provides an effective means of providing worship and pastoral care; pastors are able to become meaningfully engaged in the lives of church members and, thus, better able to meet all congregational needs.

6. Catawba Presbytery has encouraged FPC to plant a church, and we believe it would be an encouragement to our entire denomination for FPC to do so.

7. The present time seems a propitious one for action. Other major initiatives and projects of this church over the past decade have now been completed.

### C. Addressing Possible Concerns

In considering a church plant, the committee recognizes a number of possible concerns may arise in an undertaking of this kind. In counting the costs of such a significant new work, we felt it important to address these concerns forthrightly.

In any large undertaking by a church, there may be a general fear of change. Because FPC has not planted a church in several decades, it may take people out of their comfort zone.

*It is important to emphasize, however, that no members will be pressed into service who do not want to be directly involved in the church plant.*

There may be an underlying concern that a church plant will diminish the fellowship we currently enjoy, even within family circles.

*The purpose of this church plant is not to move members from FPC, but to begin a new congregation in a different part of the city, yet within relatively easy access for a majority of our members, to facilitate nurturing the new congregation and sustaining fellowship with its members. There is no question that planting a church will require congregational education so that our motives as well as our methodology are widely understood and warmly embraced.*

It might seem that a new church plant would inevitably deplete our own talent pool and resources.

*Our congregation has a super-abundance of officers. Many may not realize that we have over two hundred members who have been ordained as elders or deacons. Of these, only one hundred actively serve at any given moment. We have in fact more elders and deacons who are ordained but not currently serving than many ARP congregations have members! Likewise, we have an extensive number of Sunday school teachers, musicians, and other volunteers whose gifts and abilities are not substantially utilized at this time. We recognize that from those to whom much is given much is required.*

*With respect to finances it is anticipated that after a period of gestation and infancy, the church plant would become self-sustaining, covering the costs of salaries, facilities, etc. A workable financial budget and timetable for decreasing support from FPC would be built into the initial proposal. It is not uncommon in the ARP denomination for a church plant to receive 100% funding the first year, followed by a declining balance over the next three to five years, until it is expected to be self-sufficient within five years.*

It may be thought that we should be “propping up” other ARP churches within our geographical area, rather than starting new ones.

*Our Presbytery, however, requires any existing congregations in need to seek financial or other assistance in the first instance from the denomination itself. Thus while FPC might well give due consideration to any such request for assistance, it is also required to recognize the autonomy of other congregations and not interfere in any way with their church vision.*

**PART II: DEMOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR A POTENTIAL CHURCH PLANT SITE**

Our committee followed the direction of the Session in examining potential communities for a new church. Specifically, we considered the following factors in our analysis:

1. Absence of an ARP or PCA congregation in the area;
2. Population and number of households in the area;
3. Projected growth of population and households; and
4. Distance from First Presbyterian Church of Columbia (reasonable distance for existing FPC members to attend/participate in, or be well informed about, the planting effort).

Within the greater Columbia area, we first examined where most current members of FPC reside. Nearly 60% of our families live within the 29204, 29205, 29206 and 29209 zip codes. We are, surprisingly, more of a community church than we realized. Reasonable proximity to a majority of our members and access to the facilities of the mother church will facilitate fellowship and joint participation in activities between the congregations.

Consistent with criteria 1-4 above, and within a 15 minute drive of a majority of our existing members, we found three communities in which no ARP or PCA congregation currently exists: Blythewood, Elgin, and Pontiac.

We analyzed each community on 1-mile, 3-mile, and 5-mile radius statistics.

We concluded a 3-mile radius presents the most balanced view of the respective areas.

Pontiac is the largest of these communities, Elgin ranks second in size, and Blythewood is the smallest. The new growth in Pontiac is substantially greater than the new growth in Elgin. Here are the relevant statistics for the three communities.

<u>Community</u>	<u>2008 Population/Households</u>	<u>2013 Population/Households</u>	<u>Distance from FPC</u>
Pontiac	37,435/13,288	45,991/16,598	18 miles
Elgin	9,686/3,592	10,879/4,084	23 miles
Blythewood	4,122/1,586	4,670/1,829	18 miles

Attached are maps of the three communities showing one, three, and five mile radius overlays. The committee believes that the larger population, easy access to downtown, and other demographic factors strongly favor Pontiac as the logical location for a church plant.

**PART III: CONCLUSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO SESSION**

The Committee’s charge included: “making a recommendation on the principle itself” but also “suggesting a possible strategy for church planting best suited to the needs identified and the area in view, and the initial relationship of the new church to First Presbyterian Church.” We have concluded that FPC is in a position to establish a new ARP congregation in the greater Columbia area, serving as the mother church to the daughter congregation until it is self-sustaining, and unanimously wish to encourage the Session to pursue this new ministry.

The committee's vision and the methodology to achieve it can be summarized as follows:

**Goal:** to start a new, ARP congregation serving a specific community in the greater Columbia area, to become self-sustaining and self-governing within five years.

**Location:** to target a community in the greater Columbia area which currently has no ARP or PCA congregation, and which is within easy access of a majority of our members to enable FPC members to nurture the new congregation. In particular the committee recommends the Pontiac area as best meeting the basic considerations that have guided its thinking.

**Procedure:** to have an initial "gestation" period of a minimum of six months, followed by a launch of the new congregation in the target area and an "infancy" period of several years for the congregation to become self-sustaining. During the gestation period, a mission developer would hold Bible studies and community outreach in the target community, with the help of a core group of FPC volunteers. During the "gestation" period the core group could hold worship services in Smith Chapel. After the launch, the mission developer and the core group would hold worship services in a facility within the target community.

**Mission Developer:** FPC would in the first instance call the mission developer with a view to serving in this ministry.

**Core Group:** FPC would seek perhaps ten to twenty families and individuals with a range of gifts and abilities who would be willing to commit themselves to pray for and participate in the work.

**Provisional Session:** FPC would seek several of our elders and perhaps one or more elders from Catawba Presbytery's Church Extension Committee to serve as the provisional session pursuant to our Book of Order.

**Budget:** As an example, the following levels of budgetary support by FPC could be established:

2010: formative (provide funds for a partial year's salary for mission developer)  
2011: 100%  
2012: 80%  
2013: 60%  
2014: 40%  
2015: 20%

**Potential Timetable:** The following dates are, at best, approximations, but the unfolding of events might be as follows were Session to concur with the conclusions of the Committee:

<b>Sept. 2009</b>	Church Planting Committee Report presented to Session.
<b>Oct. 2009</b>	Session discussion and decision.
<b>Nov. 2009</b>	If approved, church plant included in 2010 budget discussions.
<b>Jan. 2010</b>	Congregational “education” begins; search for mission developer begins; specific prayer encouraged.
<b>May – Aug. 2010</b>	Mission developer called.
<b>Sept. 2010 – May 2011</b>	Mission developer and core group begin new Sunday School class.
<b>June 2011 – Sept. 2011</b>	Begin worship in a facility in the target community.

#### **Conclusion and recommendation**

The Church Planting Committee unanimously and enthusiastically believes that both the need and the opportunity exist for “this people, in this time, in this place” to begin a bold new work.

The Church Planting Committee recommends to Session that FPC establish another ARP congregation in the greater Columbia area in accordance with the findings of this report.