

In 2022 the Reverend Doctor David McElrath, beloved pastor of Graham Memorial Presbyterian Church in Coronado, announced his intent to retire on the 1st of January 2023, after 30 years of service to this congregation and community. He led the congregation in prayers throughout the year for discernment of the new pastor to replace him; the one the congregation would call, and that God would provide. The process of calling a new pastor is a multi-staged process in the Presbyterian Church and involves the congregation prayerfully discerning what the mission of their church is now and where they believe God would have their mission go in the future. Potential pastors can then be matched to the congregation, examined by a Pastor Nominating Committee as representatives of the congregation, and then recommended to the members of the congregation to choose and call the pastor they believe God wants to lead them.

October 2022:

Since the search for a new pastor is a deliberative process that will take time for the discernment, often one to two years, provision is made for an Interim Pastor with specialized training for leading a congregation in these transitions. Calling an Interim Pastor is a simpler process and is a function of the Session of the church. An Interim Pastor search committee was voted on by the Session and included Donald Steuer as chair, Debbie Bell-Smith, Richard Dukes, Ward Wilson, and Doug Reavie. Prayerful work began with evaluating potential pastors, contacting references, listening to sermons, and interviewing the excellent candidates.

November 2022:

Work began on a Mission Study of Graham Memorial Presbyterian Church (GMPC) in anticipation of this transition. A Mission Study had been prepared with surveys of the congregation in 2019 and it was initially felt that this Study could be simply updated without surveying the congregation again. Pastor David McElrath was honored and thanked with a heartfelt retirement party in the Coronado Community Center, using a Scottish theme.

December 2022:

Final candidates for the Interim Pastor position were selected and scheduled for interviews in early January 2023, as the final selection process needed to occur after the departure of the out-gong pastor.

January 2023:

Pastor David McElrath gave his final sermon on January 1st. The Reverend David Rodriguez was offered and accepted the call to be the Interim Pastor at GMPC and would start after he completed his Navy Chaplain Reserve Duty at Arlington National Cemetery, in February.

Applications for participation on a Pastoral Nominating Committee were solicited from the congregation and the applications were held until the committee could be seated after a Mission Study was approved.

February 2023:

Pastor David Rodriguez arrived with his wife Cathy and prepared to begin ministry on the 1st of March.

March 2023:

The updated Mission Study was presented to Session, but it was felt that there were so many changes in the church staff, leadership, and programs since the last congregational survey in 2019, that it would be best to resurvey the congregation to discern what the current vision of ministry was for the congregation and where they felt God was leading them in the future.

April 2023:

Revisions and corrections to the Mission Study were proposed and incorporated into the document.

May 2023:

A new Mission Study Committee was advised by Session to develop the congregational survey and prepare the GMPC Mission Study to be used by the congregational Pastoral Nominating Committee when they are seated.

June 2023:

Research on congregation survey questions was begun and the outline of a survey was designed. It would be available to the congregation online on a Survey Monkey program as well as on paper with time given during Sunday services for the paper version. A next phase would focus on specific questions for the future of GMPC based on results from the initial survey.

July 2023:

The Session voted on the final composition of the Mission Study Committee and the committee consists of Pastor David Rodriguez, Doug Reavie chair, Mary Jane Wilfong, Martin Almquist, Nicole Baller, DeEtte Loeffler, and Diane Snyder.

August 2023:

Work began in earnest preparing the congregational survey. The survey was made active online and given to the congregation on Sunday August 27th, to be filled out during the last 10 minutes of the church service. Approximately 95 paper surveys were completed that day and surveys were also made available on paper in the church office and at the next Sunday service. The online survey version remained available for four more weeks.

September 2023:

The total number of completed surveys was 142 and the paper surveys were entered into the online Survey Monkey format so the data could be analyzed. A summary of the Likert Scale results and comments filled in on the open-ended questions were tabulated.

October 2023:

The congregational survey results were evaluated for areas of additional focus to determine what specific open-ended questions could be developed for understanding the direction the ministry of GMPC should go in the future. Congregational groups to survey were identified including the Staff, the choir, Men's study groups, Women's study groups, committees, etc., as well as an opportunity for the congregation to briefly stay after services on Sunday November 12th, to participate in this discernment.

November 2023:

Three open-ended questions were asked of each "focus group" to initiate conversation:

1. How is our Vision Statement, "To Know Christ and Make Christ Known", being lived-out today at GMPC and what do you think God is calling this congregation to be and do?
2. What church and community needs can GMPC address, both what we are doing and could be doing?
3. What skills, gifts, and training should our new Senior Pastor have to lead us in our ministry?

These questions were also asked of the entire congregation after each service on Sunday, November 12, and all responses and suggestions were tabulated, organized, and included in the developing Mission Study.

December 2023:

The results of the surveys were incorporated into the Mission Study and the Study was edited and re-written. It was approved by the Mission Study Committee and submitted to Session for review and approval. A few final revisions were made, and the finalized Study was forwarded to Session for an approval vote at the January 2024 meeting. It will then be forwarded to the San Diego Presbytery Committee on Ministry for approval at their January meeting.

January 2024

The Mission Study was again presented to the Session on January 17, 2024, and approved with the addition of the Apostle's Creed and the affirmation that all Scripture is inspired and true. The Session-approved Mission Study was forwarded to the Presbytery of San Diego Committee on Ministry and then also presented to the congregation of GMPC at the Annual Meeting on January 26th. The Presbytery Committee on Ministry approved the Study "without comment" and gave the go-ahead to form a Pastor Nominating Committee to begin the search for the Senior Pastor God has selected for us.