



EPIPHANY PROCESS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

National City Christian Church is unlike any other church in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). On the one hand, it is a vital, functioning, alive congregation in metropolitan Washington, D.C. that attracts people from just a block away as well as throughout the metro D.C. area. It is also the national presence of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in our nation's Capital. The congregation does what all congregations do – helps meet the spiritual needs of people in its community, and helps them live their lives faithfully as followers of Jesus Christ. But the congregation in partnership with the NCCC Foundation has a larger presence in the U.S. capital and beyond, with ministries and facilities that contribute to a much broader witness on behalf of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

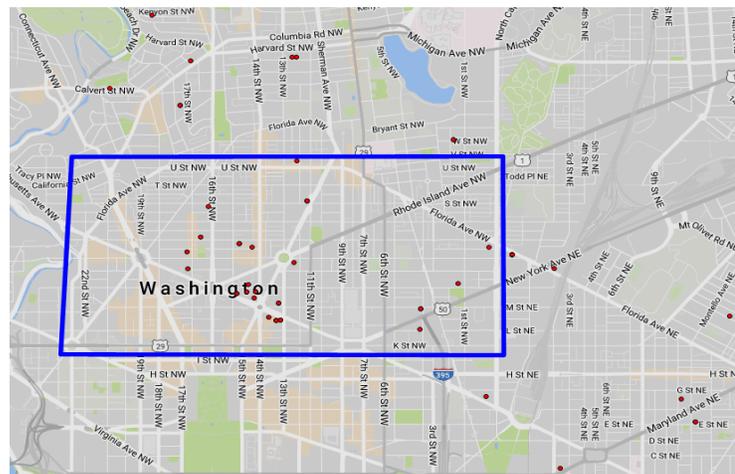
This Epiphany Process is primarily about the congregation seeking to define and carry out its mission to meet the spiritual needs of people in our community. While necessarily it involves the Foundation, which owns and maintains the buildings and property, the congregation of National City Christian Church has entered into this process to seek God's guidance in best fulfilling its mission as a spiritual home for people living in metropolitan Washington, D.C.

Previously, the congregation engaged in a planning process in 2010. That process identified a number of challenges and strengths of the congregation. It came on the heels of several challenging years for the congregation, and helped the congregation continue to move forward through a time of healing and regrouping. Leaders of the congregation felt like the time was right to enter again into an intentional process of reflection and planning in 2018. With the anticipated sale of one of the buildings, and the continuing gentrification of the neighborhoods around the building, the time to boldly step forward with a new vision seems to be at hand!

ASSESSMENT

National City Christian Church is at a great time in its ministry to make a significant shift. A once depressed neighborhood has gentrified with young urban professionals while the church has stabilized under the leadership of Dr. Stephen Gentle. This led the church to work with Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation to gain clarity about its future. The scope of work included a comprehensive assessment; a weekend orientation retreat for 33 key leaders in the congregation; and a follow-up gathering of six leaders who created the *Imagining A Future Story* (excerpt imbedded in this summary).

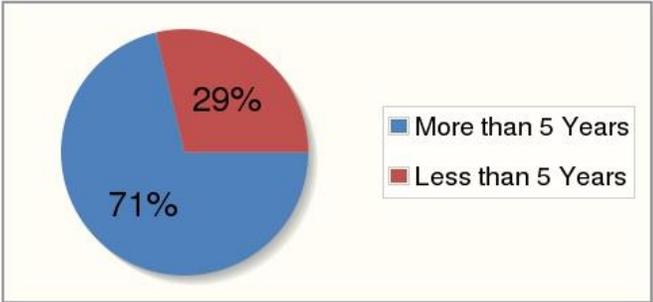
- ❖ **History and 10-year Indicators:** Washington, D.C. is a unique city, one of the most unusual in the United States, and maybe even in the world. It is the government and non-governmental organization capital of the U.S. The population of the city is over 800,000, and the metropolitan area, at over 6 million, is the sixth-largest metropolitan area in the United States. Population of the metro area grew by over 63,000 in just one year, from 2014 to 2015! The primary study area chosen for this report (in the rectangle below) comprises 80,000 residents – remarkably 10% of the total population of the District of Columbia. Most of our congregants come from outside of this area.



Note that vital congregations take seriously the area immediately around their location. Church leaders know that congregations are in the best position to serve and be a spiritual home to those who live, work and attend school nearby. Why does National City choose to remain in this location today? Does our church have a heart for those in this immediate community?

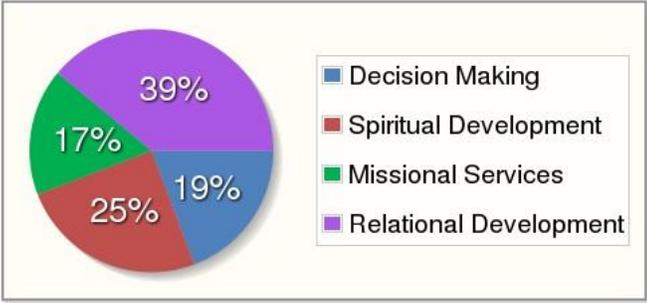
❖ **Participation and Engagement:** The National City congregation is a vibrant faith community that has faithfully fulfilled its charge from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to be a national presence in the capital. It has had its ups and downs, especially in the last fifteen years, which have been difficult for long-time members.

Participant Tenure



While membership has grown in the last ten years, average worship attendance and giving have declined. This has happened in a community that has seen considerable growth in the same period of time (25+ %). As true in most communities around the United States, interest in organized religion among the Millennial and Survivor generations has declined. Our congregation, like so many, has not been able to attract significant numbers from the explosive growth of these generations in our community. For the congregation to continue to thrive, this trend of decline must be reversed.

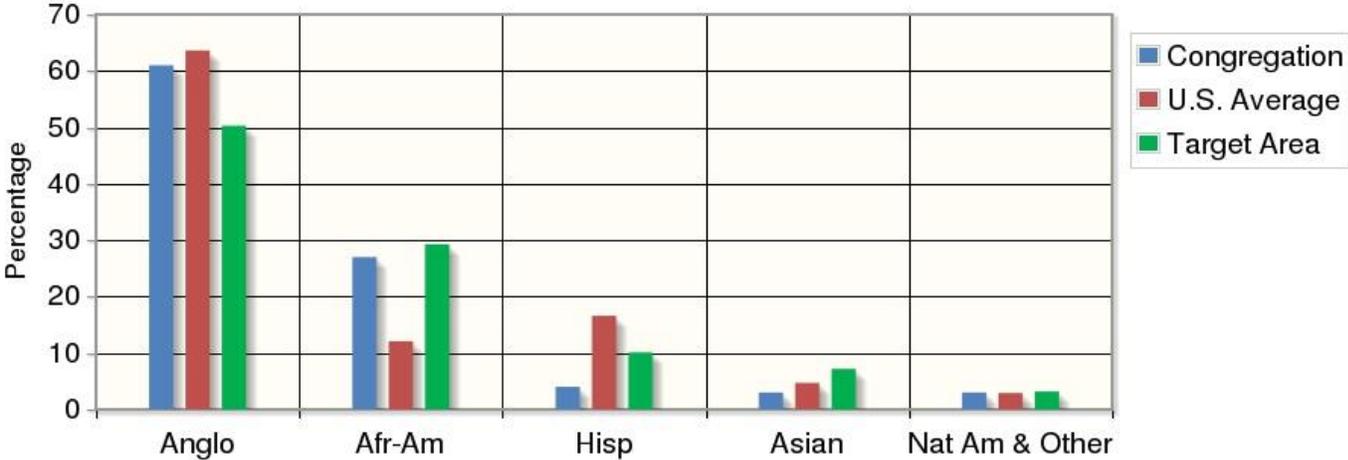
Participant Engagement



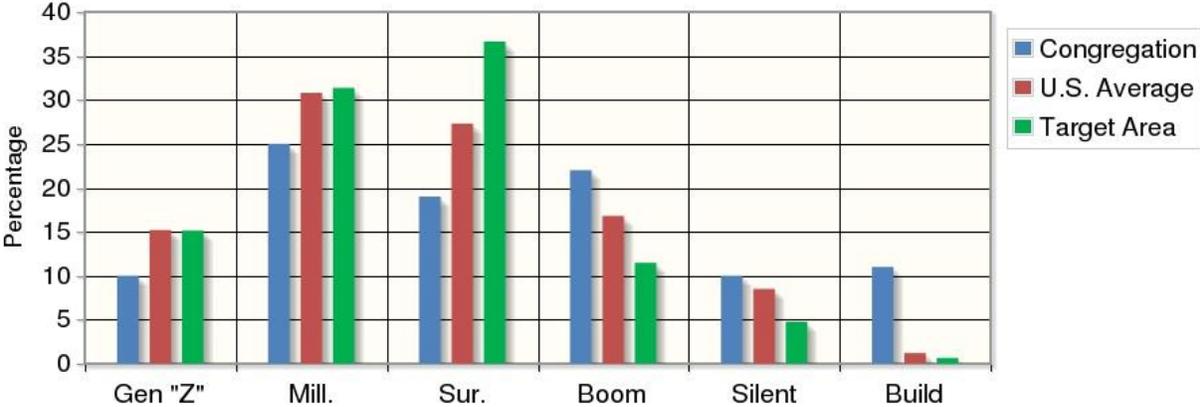
The congregation has a high level of relational programming; members enjoy one another! More engagement in direct, hands-on mission and spiritual development with young families, especially those with children, and less engagement in decision-making may be helpful in working to strengthen the life of the congregation.

❖ **Congregational Gaps:** The congregation has become younger and more racially diverse in recent years, but still is older and less diverse than the target community it serves. Similarly, the congregation draws more members from the entire D.C. metropolitan area than from the target area around the property.

Racial-Ethnic Populations



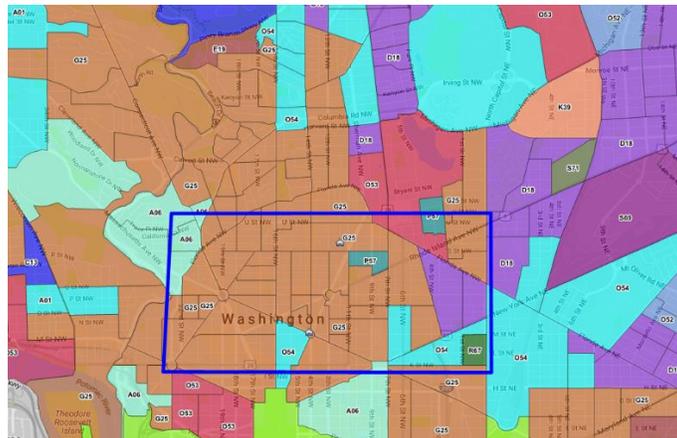
Generational Populations



Years born: (1996-2010) (1981-1995) (1965-1980) (1946-1964) (1928-1945) (1910-1927)

The graph above compares the ages of participants in the congregation with the ages of those who live in the community. The horizontal axis shows each of the six living generations. The youngest is Generation Z, followed by Millennials, Survivors, Boomers and Silents. The eldest is Builders on the far right of the chart. The blue bars show the percentage of participants in the congregation in each category. The red bar represents the entire U.S. population and the green bar indicates the community around the church. The data related to the red and green bars comes from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The demographic table below demonstrates some of the sociological dynamics taking place in the church's immediate context. It is remarkable to note that Young, City Solos (rust color) are over **66%** of the demographic make-up of the community, and Singles and Starters (light blue color), comprise another **9%** of the community. **Together they are 75.3% of the demographic.** The congregation needs to pay close attention to the needs and wants of these two demographic groups if it is going to connect with its nearby neighbors!

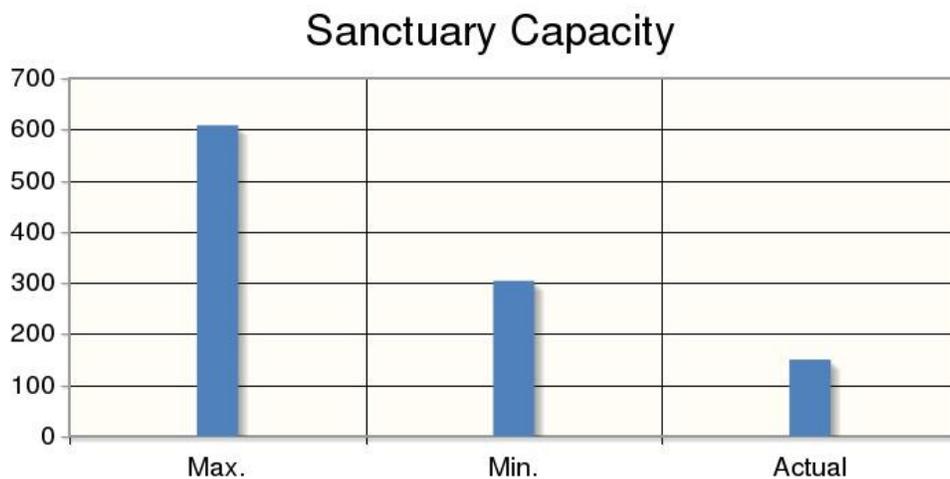


❖ **Facilities Evaluation:** The church's facilities are contained in one large building on the 1.28 acre site on Thomas Circle. It is estimated that the sanctuary wing, Howland Center and Beasley building total about 42,600 square feet. The sanctuary building was constructed in 1929 and the Howland Center and Beasley building were added in 1985. The insured value of the buildings and furnishings is \$60,700,000.

The National City facilities are a great blessing. The recent capital campaign has helped to provide much-needed updates while the sale of the Campbell building will help to bring the facilities more in line with needs of the congregation and its partner non-profits, as well as the needs of the community for gathering space.

The reimagining of remaining spaces in both the Sanctuary and Beasley Building will be extremely helpful to the congregation that inhabits them for current programming if that task is kept in line with the congregation's emerging mission priorities for the next decade, as well as the needs and wants of the largest demographic groups in the neighborhood.

The beautiful sanctuary – while very impressive – creates significant challenges for the worshipping congregation it houses. It is much too large to be an asset. It is likely more traditional and formal than is comfortable for the existing congregation and new worshippers from younger generations who will visit. These are major challenges as the congregation seeks to reach its target population. The chart below shows current average seating during worship services to maximum and minimum ideals for worshippers’ sustained comfort level.



How can the building and its physical assets be used not just to serve the larger community, but to attract new persons to the worshipping community of the congregation?

❖ **Financial Review:** The financial picture of the congregation and NCCC Foundation is complex. Both institutions have struggled in recent years and have taken steps to improve financial conditions. The sale of the Campbell building should improve the financial condition of both the congregation and Foundation, freeing more funds for ministry and mission. Congregations tend to have a lot of “restricted” funds, which can only be used for specific purposes, and which may or may not enhance the ministry of the congregation.

The financial picture of National City Christian Church is further complicated by the existence of the Foundation, which has its own operating budget, endowment, annual fund income, and pays many of the building expenses normally associated with a congregation

The combined income for both the congregation and the NCCC Foundation is an impressive \$1,464,315.00 in 2017. Neither institution can completely function on its own apart from the contributions of the other.

The chart below shows the **combined operating expenses** of both the congregation and Foundation, with comparisons to percentages based on Hope Partnership’s recommended benchmarks.

Current Operating Expenses

Current Operating Expenses		Percent of Expenses	Percent Recommended
Salary Support	\$801,006	58.99%	50%
Building/Admin	\$511,308	37.66%	25%
Program	\$19,203	1.41%	15%
Mission	\$26,351	1.94%	10%
Total Expense:	\$1,357,868		

“Program” expenses benefit the congregational life, while “mission” expenses benefit the wider community and denomination. Both of these indicate there is room for growth in these vital areas. Note that while the “mission” percentage is low compared to recommended benchmarks, some would consider the building of National City Christian Church itself to be a mission site of the whole Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.) Is this in line with how the congregation thinks of its mission?

IMAGINING OUR FUTURE

With the previous assessment revealing important indicators for sustainability and growth, there are several key implications for the “Future Story” of National City Christian Church:

- 1. The congregation will need to study carefully the demographic information for the single largest Mosaic group, “*Young City Solos: Urban Edge.*”** What are the spiritual, social, and programming needs of this single group that constitutes 66% of community surrounding National City Christian Church? What other programming needs might attract people to engage with the congregation on some level other than just Sunday worship? What are the worship preferences for this target population?
- 2. Much of the population of the United States is not aware that “Progressive” churches even exist.** Many people think that all churches are similarly exclusive, judgmental, science-denying, backward organizations. How can National City change those perceptions of church? If this place is different, how does the word get out? How can our uniqueness be communicated to the community? What about our public image needs adjusting to attract people in your target population?
- 3. The sanctuary/worship space must be addressed.** The sanctuary is the largest underutilized room in the facility. If the sanctuary space were flexible, could an area be created for social gatherings, especially for community building on Sundays after worship? Another idea: imagine an upscale coffee-house space in the rear of the large sanctuary space. Also, does the sanctuary need a technology upgrade in order to meet the communication needs and preferences of this target population? Though challenging, these are significant and important questions.
- 4. Hands-on mission is essential.** This congregation has a strong social justice focus among members and in the community. Yet the church is one among several strong progressive congregations in the neighborhood, some very well-known. Are there opportunities to use its facilities to enhance witness in speaking truth to power in the community? Dozens of people visit their congregations’ worship services just to be supportive of their justice efforts. Might our congregation have similar opportunities to provide more impactful hands-on ministry that could also speak truth to power? How does it enhance mission to singles and families with children living in the community?

AN EXCERPT FROM *IMAGINING A FUTURE STORY*

...As the Dog Blessing wrapped up just before the 10 a.m. service, Dr. Gentle greeted the first-time visitors and familiar faces from other church events. He recognized Sasha from the Lenten yoga series earlier in the year, Ken and his partner Michael from Thinking Thursdays, and the Medinas, a Guatemalan family who occasionally attended on Saturdays...

Dr. Goines made a point to get the names and numbers of the new faces she'd never seen before at church. She would text them the upcoming weekly schedule, which included Guy Talk on Tuesday night and the Woman to Woman happy hour on Friday night. She would also advertise on the church's website a talk on Thursday by Christian blogger and motivational speaker Glennon Doyle.

"Your dog is better behaved than some adults I know," Mr. Bowman told Caitlyn, as he spotted her at the coffee bar grabbing an espresso.

"Ha! Yes, Tuffy is such a good boy. I'm happy to see you, Mr. Bowman. Is this two days in a row for you at church?"

"Yes, can you believe it? Over the past two years, I've sat on my balcony across the street at Thomas House and seen more people come and go from this building than ever before. Married couples attending the Christian Love workshop. Muslim and Jewish families entering our house of worship to spend time in prayer. Families dropping off their kids for Vacation Bible School. I never thought I'd say this, but you young people have really brought new life into this church."

Caitlyn smiled. From what she'd heard, the changes at the church hadn't been easy. Or fast. Or cheap. As she looked around, she wondered what else they could be doing to share God's love in the community. She spotted Rev. Baines on the steps and asked, "So ... any interest in a flash mob?"

In just these few closing paragraphs of the Committee’s draft of a Future Story for National City Christian Church, one quickly **feels a shift from the “status quo” way of being church to a dynamic, missional focus of doing church with a community.** Three main elements are driven by this focus and presented in the narrative:

Main Elements of Future Story

Element One	National City will connect relationally with its immediate community and neighbors.
Element Two	National City will increase the flexibility of its worship space for expanded use.
Element Three	National City will inspire one another to be catalysts for peace as a family of faith.

CONCLUSION

National City Christian Church is fortunate to have been blessed with Christian forebears and visionaries in every decade who were not afraid to believe that all things are possible with God. The belief that all are welcome in God’s house and at God’s table is the church’s life force that sustains her in times of plenty and moments of pain. And still this church proclaims in all these things “nothing will separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Led by the power of the Holy Spirit, National City faces the future with vibrant possibilities of continued proclamation of God’s word and expanded service ministries in the neighborhood. The church faithfully maintains magnificent facilities and boasts passionate members who give sacrificially in time and talents. National City Christian Church faces unprecedented challenges to meet the ever-changing needs of its surrounding community and the nation’s capital. Yet undaunted in the “great cause we plead” words of Alexander Campbell, this glorious church perseveres into her next 175 years “being confident of this very thing, that the One who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ:”