

Proposal to Facilitate Downtown United Presbyterian Church
Discovering and Living Their Just Cause (Why for Existence)

Current Steps and Retreat Outline

Rev. Carson Mouser

One Day Workshop (March 22, 2025)

The purpose of the one-day workshop is to create a one-sentence statement answering the question, “Why do We Exist?” I call this the Just Cause/Identity Statement.

1. Prior to the workshop the congregation will need to discern the biblical narrative that the congregation comprehends is their life story based upon their own Genesis story and how the congregation has evolved over its long history.
 - a. Education events discussing the congregation’s origin story and its history over time should be completed. These can be done by members of the congregation. This includes its ministry and not just the famous pastors as well as how the congregation’s history intersects with Rochester’s history. The reason for doing this is because congregational history and community history are often intertwined and reflect the evolution of both.
 - b. A biblical narrative should be chosen by the congregation that integrates the above and draws parallels between the two. This can be done as part of the education events.
2. The outcome of the workshop is the Just Cause/identity statement. This statement is then put in every media the congregation uses, so the congregation sees it and embraces it like the air it breathes.

Living the Just Cause/Identity Statement

The Just Cause/identity statement is used to evaluate everything the congregation does and supports, internally and externally. Those missions and ministries that do not make the congregation’s identity visible (the How and What) to the community within the congregation and the larger Rochester community should be either stopped or should be re-invented so that they clearly and concretely make the Just Cause/Identity statement visible to the world, inside and outside. This will mean asking the questions: “How will we do what we will do?” and “What will we do?”

Every new ministry and every communication should make visible the congregation’s Just Cause/Identity statement. Congregational leaders need to fully support and embrace the Just Cause/Identity as servant leaders who put away their interests, so the interests of the congregation are served. Trusted teams will need to be created or re-invented around how to do those ministries that reflect the Just Cause/Identity of the congregation. These teams should embrace people being able to admit they need training or help to learn how to develop new skills, implement innovative ideas, etc. This should extend to staff members as well.

The congregation will need to continually talk about themselves as both carrying and creating a legacy that stretches beyond themselves into the future.

One Day Retreat Outline

Arrange room into tables of 5-6.

8:30 Arrival. Coffee and pastries available.

9 a.m. Welcome and Opening Prayer

9:15 a.m. First Small Group Exercise (30 minutes)

Each member of the small group shares a short story about their life. After everyone has shared their story, answer the following question, “How do the stories of our lives tell others who we are?”

9:45 Large Group Exercise (35 minutes)

Play the video “Starting with Why?” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4ZoJKF_VuA

Discuss the video, then answer the following question in small groups “How does our “Why” connect to the stories we tell about ourselves, our families, and our congregation?”

Present the “Power of Narrative.”

Break (10 minutes)

10:30 Large Group Exercise (40 minutes)

Play the video “Finite vs Infinite Mindset.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tye525dkfi8>

Discuss the video and how it might change the way the congregation thinks about its future.

11:30 - 12:30 Lunch

12:30 Small and Large Group Exercise (40 minutes)

Small groups: Discuss how the biblical narrative and the congregation’s place in the biblical narrative intersects with the congregation’s history.

Discuss the narrative the essential tenets of the Presbyterian Church are telling, and how this is part of the congregation’s narrative.

Discuss how the above narratives are about an infinite mindset vs a finite mindset.

Large group: Each group reports to the large group what their answers are to the above questions.

1:30 p.m. Large Group Exercise (30 minutes)

Play the video “Why Leaders Eat Last.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4gUL76lV7gk>

Discuss how the video is about servant leadership and the way to create trusted teams. How does this reinforce an infinite mindset for the congregation?

2 p.m. Small Group Exercise (30 minutes)

Each group will create a one sentence “Just Cause/Why We Exist” statement that uses concrete, clear, active voice words. This is not a “what we do” statement or “how we do what we do” statement. It is more like “Apple’s statement” from the first video. It should draw on all the discussions from the morning, the congregation’s history intertwined with the biblical narrative and Rochester’s history and the previous nine question report.

2:30 Large Group Exercise (60 minutes)

A small group writes their statement on the newsprint easel for all to see. The rest of the groups contribute to it by adding, changing, and subtracting words to the first statement until a final statement emerges and is agreed upon by all who are present. This is the congregation’s “Just Cause/Why We Exist” statement.

The above statement is used in all media and reinforced through the next worship and in all subsequent sermons, so it is reinforced for the congregation and for the wider community. The Just Cause/Why We Exist” statement is utilized as an evaluative tool for all ministries of the congregation. Doing all the above will take intentionality and a commitment to this for the next 5-7 years because it will represent a shift in congregational culture and thinking.

It might make sense for the congregation to read James P. Carse’s book “Finite and Infinite Games: A vision of life as play and possibility” as a follow-up and deeper dive into the infinite mindset and legacy.

3:30 p.m. Closing Prayer