

## **From the Smithfield United Church of Christ Strategic Plan 2007-2012**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A strategic plan for any congregation is an act of faith. We at Smithfield United Church of Christ believe that God has blessed us as a congregation. We live in the heart of a great city, one that draws strength from its rivers. We live in a place where opportunities for service abound. It is the deep river of Smithfield's spiritual life that has given us the strength and courage to do God's work in this city since 1782. With God's help, we will continue that work in the 21st century by seizing the opportunities we face today.

As a community of faith, we know that God's call to us is to be a bold presence in the face of such opportunities. We will be bold in acting out our faith. We know that God will give us direction, courage, and perseverance. We ask God for help in developing and exercising these strengths.

Smithfield's historic building is beautiful. Its location for providing service is unsurpassed. The people of Smithfield Church are exceptional. Their desire to be of service is unparalleled. Smithfield is already feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, hosting nondenominational groups of many kinds, and opening our doors to new ministries. But we can do more, and this strategic plan for 2007-2012 describes how.

As the city of Pittsburgh continues to fulfill promises to develop its Downtown, we as a congregation make our own promise, rooted in our history and in our faith. This promise, Smithfield's Promise, is to demonstrate that God is still speaking in all of our lives. This strategic plan is the voice of Smithfield's Promise.

### **THE HISTORIC AND CONTINUING ROLE OF SMITHFIELD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE GREATER PITTSBURGH COMMUNITY**

Beginning with its founding in 1782 and the grant of its current property from William Penn's family in 1787, the Smithfield United Church of Christ congregation has played an indispensable role in the founding, development, maturation and ongoing growth of downtown Pittsburgh, the larger city, and the entire region. Its historic building and collection of artifacts illuminate city and regional history. Among the building's many assets is its longtime recognition as a gem of architectural excellence.

#### **Renewal**

Yet this facility, host to many services (outlined below) that benefit the community, faces a sizable challenge if it is to continue and to grow its ministries to serve both as the home of a particular congregation and as a nondenominational public gathering place. This challenge presents a golden

opportunity not only to restore a historic and architectural treasure but perhaps more important to preserve, rethink, and grow those ministries.

### **All are welcome**

Over the centuries, Smithfield Church – founded by German immigrants who settled in the small but fast-growing frontier town at the forks of the Ohio, Monongahela, and Allegheny Rivers and who came out of both the Evangelical and Reformed traditions of Protestantism – has welcomed newcomers. Membership across the decades has included people from countless Protestant backgrounds, Slovak and Methodist being prominent among them. From the church's beginning, differences of individual opinion have been respected as tools for growth in this community of faith, resulting in a unique affirmation of Christian unity in the midst of diversity.

Today, Smithfield United Church of Christ continues that tradition, its membership reflecting the full spectrum of Pittsburgh's ethnic, racial, and religious heritages and including congregants from across Greater Pittsburgh: Downtown residents, East-Enders, Northsiders and Southsiders, and folks commuting from suburbs near and far.

### **Service to those in need**

Smithfield Church's ongoing purpose is to bring the light of Christ to a world desperately in need of hope. Nowhere does this work occur more frequently and insistently than along Smithfield Street and the surrounding downtown Pittsburgh area.

#### *Within these walls*

- ❖ senior citizens encounter compassionate clergy and members of the church who provide companionship and comfort to them through home visits
- ❖ seniors, low-income adults, and young families receive groceries and household supplies from the church's food pantry – in 2006, 641 individuals were served through our program: 61% of them were 60+ years old and 38% were 35-59 years old; 68% were women; 61% had a disability; 90% lived alone; of the 610 "households" represented, 57% received food stamps and 30% were ineligible for food stamps [for current figures, updated monthly, see [Outreach](#)]
- ❖ people who are homeless shelter from the dangerously frigid winter nights in the church – during the prolonged cold spell in late January and through February of 2007, the shelter was open daily for more than a month with 120 people served
- ❖ high school students at the Northside Urban Pathways Charter School (housed nearby on Penn Avenue) take their physical education classes in the church's gymnasium and music classes and other extracurricular activities likewise meet here
- ❖ people facing the disease of addiction attend Alcoholics Anonymous and related meetings in this place

- ❖ members of the African Christian United African Fellowship worship at Smithfield Church on Sunday afternoons
- ❖ Bethlehem Haven provided shelter and services for women here from its beginning in 1981 through 2000 when it moved to its own building to accommodate much needed new services
- ❖ traumatized infants and children receive handmade quilts and blankets (over 60 to date) through the Women's Fellowship's participation in Project Linus
- ❖ children in families of limited means living in the Mon Valley receive personalized Christmas gifts through the congregation's participation in Touching Families' Giving Tree

### **A "Golden Triangle" asset**

In addition to making available a range of human services, Smithfield welcomes the diverse downtown community to join in a variety of events throughout the year and acts as a community-minded property owner.

#### *Beyond these walls*

- ❖ people working and shopping in the many towers and stores in the neighborhood enjoy a time of reflection and an opportunity for prayer during brief mid-day services each Wednesday
- ❖ the early summer Strawberry Festival and fall Apple Festival along Strawberry Way provide old-fashioned fellowship, camaraderie, and entertainment for all comers as music, crafts, meals, sweet treats, and all around good times make for an unexpected and welcomed break in the routine of a city at work
- ❖ little recognized but beneficial roles of Smithfield Church within the downtown community include that of (a) landholder of the property on Smithfield between Sixth Avenue and Strawberry Way on which sit the church, the Carnegie Library Downtown Branch, Brooks Brothers, and a number of professional concerns as well as that of (b) employer, with several full-time and many part-time staff members including custodians consistently keeping the sidewalks and alleys surrounding the building free of trash and snow.

### **A forum for critical issues; a venue for the arts**

Smithfield United Church of Christ serves the city and region in many other ways as well. The church hosts discussions with speakers on topics of the day, welcomes labor groups and justice organizations that use the church's rooms for meetings, participates in the Penn West Conference of United Church of Christ congregations, serves as an auditorium for groups such as the Pittsburgh Camerata and the First Night celebration, continues to play a role in the Fair Oaks nursing home (located in South Hills) that the congregation founded and oversaw for many years, helps to lead the Downtown Ministerium, and maintains its historic church building.

**A commitment to the future**

Smithfield's congregants pledge to sustain and broaden their commitment to serving Greater Pittsburgh in these and more ways, seeking expanded partnerships with and opportunities for outreach across the community writ large.