

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
IN  
WAMEGO**

**MISSION STUDY**

**PREPARED BY THE FULL SESSION  
AS  
MISSION STUDY TEAM**

**APPROVED BY THE SESSION ON APRIL 6, 2016**

*I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'*

Psalm 122

The First Presbyterian Church in Wamego is a worship-centered church. We seek excellence in every aspect of worship and aim to create worship experiences that kindle faith, flow with joy, and engage heart, mind and spirit. We seek to educate and guide members through corporate worship and through instruction that helps all find their own personal worship voice and practices in daily life. We hope worship is safe, unifying, protected, accepting, welcoming, challenging, engaging, relationship-building, multigenerational, and applicable to our lives and the lives of those who have not yet found their way into our sanctuary. We hope it is a time for learning and teaching the Bible and Reformed theology, for exploring and expanding our relationship with God as well as our questions about that relationship.

We look to worship as our guiding principle. Worship calls people to service and discipleship. It leads them to good stewardship through mission.

We offer this Mission Study as the scaffolding on which we will build the Church Information Form that will call a new pastor to our church. As a Session, we have journeyed through a period of discussion and uncertainty, and we have used that uncertainty to help us explore and understand who we are. We have discussed our church's strengths and weaknesses — sometimes with great passion — along with the path that lies before our church and how best to guide it, but we have strived to keep our knowledge of Christ's love and God's grace in our minds even in the most difficult moments.

## History

*He makes me lie down in green pastures...*

Psalms 23:2

**Wamego.** Wamego, in the heart of the Kaw, or Kansas, River watershed, is a beautiful place. Our rolling hills have been gently transformed by agriculture and industry, but enough of the old tallgrass prairie has been preserved to treat the eye to sights millennia old. There is a pervasive sense that God, in the Creation, lingered a little longer here than, perhaps, some other places.

"Wamego" is an Indian proper noun, although one will hear different stories about whose name it was. Today, about half of the town pronounces it "Wa-me-go" and half pronounces it "Wa-meg-o." Nobody seems to mind either way.

Wamego, which is celebrating its sesquicentennial this year, lies near the center of two great American dramas. The first drama was Westward expansion. A main route of the Oregon Trail passed through our hills. Wagon ruts and pioneer graves can still be seen. The second drama was the war before the Civil War, the conflict known as Bleeding Kansas.

The earliest settlers in our region were families recruited by the Emigrant Aid Company, organized in Massachusetts for the express purpose of populating "Kansas" with religious men and women opposed to the extension of slavery after the infamous Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. That Act provided that a majority vote of settlers would determine whether Kansas could join the Union slave or free, so the race was on to see what sort of people would be here when the election came. Those settlers traveled here not only to tame the land, but were prepared to fight the pro-slavery border ruffians sent here from the Southern states to pack the vote the other way. Indeed, the earliest church in our region became known as the Beecher Bible and Rifle Church (a wonderful if un-peaceful name) because no less a person than Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, the great abolitionist, smuggled rifles hidden in crates of Bibles to the free-state colonists.

A pamphlet written in 1854 by the Emigrant Aid Society described the area that would become Wamego and its environs as beautiful and called the soil "kind, warm and quick." These statements must be credited as some of the more honest ones in the history of real estate advertising. Yet, even in so self-conscious an effort to settle a land in the name of righteousness, we acknowledge the presence of racism and sin. The same pamphlet designed to bring free-state settlers to this beautiful land said that the "red skins," who had lived on the land from time immemorial, must give way to "manifest destiny." We honor the Holy Spirit's work through our founders in the fight against slavery, and thank Jesus for His forgiveness of believers' sins.

Wamego proper came with the railroad. The tale is a familiar one. When the Kansas Pacific Railroad came through, quick-sighted entrepreneurs staked out a township along its tracks. Wamego grew and prospered when it became the site for a major railroad repair facility. One roundhouse worker and his wife had a son in Wamego in 1875 and named him Walter P. Chrysler. He went on to found the famous automobile company. The Walter Chrysler birth home is being renovated to serve as a visitors' center for our region. While the railroad facility was ultimately closed, part of it remains today in the form of our beautiful City Park, reclaimed from the land where the facility formerly stood.

From the beginning, the residents of Wamego thought big. It takes a certain amount of moxie for a small Kansas town to build two opera houses, but build they did. One of them, the Columbian Theater, founded by J.C. Rogers over 100 years ago, remains an absolute gem. Rogers, one of our early boosters, decorated his theater with art he purchased from the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. The Columbian Theater was fully restored in 1994 by a new generation of can-do citizens and is in constant use today for live stage performances. Our City Park also boasts bronze statues, cast in France, brought back by Rogers from the Chicago Exposition.

If a Kansas town has French statues, it might as well have a Dutch windmill, and we do. A Dutch immigrant, John Schonhoff, built one on his farm outside Wamego in the 1870s. In 1924, our park board decided that it would make a fine addition to City Park, and it was moved here stone by stone. It stands today as the anchor for both our Wamego Historical Society Museum complex (consisting of a museum building originally built for the railroad

in 1862, plus a restored school house, post office, city hall, jail and settler cabin), and our annual Tulip Festival in April.

***Our church.*** A marvelous history of our church has been compiled by Dr. B.J. Kerr. This section cannot hope to capture the detail and kindly humor in that document, so all are encouraged to read it. What we can do here, however, is summarize the themes that leap out of that history, and the two biggest themes are obvious to each reader. The first theme is the tenacity of faith shown by good people over this church's 136-year history. The second theme is the joy that has come to us, again and again, as our unflagging devotion to God has been bountifully rewarded. Tenacity, devotion and joy — three words that sum us up pretty squarely.

We Presbyterians were the first to raise a church in this frontier railroad town. The original 1870 structure on Lincoln Avenue is now gone, but the songs of the faithful who gathered in that small building (shared with other denominations at first) still echo. Our church records show that the founding elders took their duties under 1 Timothy 5:20 very seriously, as shaming backsliders before the congregation was frequently practiced as a way to suppress some of the wild and wooliness of those days.

A new church building was raised in 1921 and forms the core of the church today. Reviewing the minutes and other records from the last eighty-six years reveals just how sweetly familiar the small triumphs and tragedies of our congregation have been over time. We have had discussions and motions over paint colors and pastor salaries, youth programs and new members, cooling systems and preferred creeds. We have baptism records and membership certificates for babies and youths who are now the respected gray hair of our congregation. We can read the touching story of the church's adoption of a refugee family after the Soviets crushed the Hungarian Rebellion in 1956. The same records from 1957 reveal Session's round disapproval of youth *dancing* in the church hall (a prohibition ratified again in 1972, although perhaps more as a good taste reaction to Disco). But if, perhaps, some of the broader trends in American society have passed by us lightly (the biggest debate in the Summer of 1968 was over whether new pews being purchased for the Sanctuary should be straight or curved) who is to say that that was all bad? Where God's work truly needed to be done, such as including women on the Session or establishing missions in our community and abroad, our church has never been a laggard.

Our church took a major step forward in 1995, with the formation of a Long Range Planning Committee. Internal discussions and meetings with members led to various projects, the most significant of which was the formation of a Building Needs Committee in early 1996. Our church was faced with the happy problem of not having enough space for our growing membership, and a spirited debate ensued about whether we should build an entirely new church on undeveloped property or add to the existing structure. By August of 1996, the Committee resolved to expand our beloved 1921 structure. That decision was ratified by the membership in September 1997 by over a 2 to 1 margin.

Of course, deciding to build something and figuring out how to pay for it are two entirely separate processes. Like good Presbyterians, we prayed for the Holy Spirit to guide the brains God gave us. Professional consultants were interviewed. Building Needs Committee members met with other churches that had expanded, to learn from their experiences, good and bad. Negotiations with the city began in earnest, because the Lord's house cannot be expanded until Caesar is happy with the number of available parking spaces (generous local businesses donated parking lots to us!). Finally, a Building Committee was constituted in January 1998 to draw up plans. Fundraising began in earnest in 1999.

The idea was to throw into the design everything anyone could want, price it, and work backwards from there. As predicted, the architects came back with unacceptably high estimates. Through months of intelligent give-and-take, pared back plans emerged that we could afford. Anyone looking at our wonderful new space will puzzle over what, if anything, was left out, but the main thing was a planned expansion of the sanctuary, which can be implemented in the future. Presbytery approval was gained in late 2001, a loan was arranged through the Church Development Corporation, construction bids were obtained, and ground was broken in 2002. Fittingly, an ancient oak tree uprooted in the process was turned by one of our wonderfully skilled members into a conference table for the new Session room, a crowning touch to the efforts of so many capable people, working hard through their joy in the Lord.

## **Wamego and First Presbyterian Church Today**

The 2000 census found a population of 4,246, with many more in the surrounding townships. In 2009, the population of Wamego was estimated to be 4,680. That number has gone up considerably with the overall growth of northeastern Kansas, the growth of Ft. Riley, and an increasing influx of people from the coasts coming to middle America in search of a better way of life. The racial mix is approximately 96% European ancestry, 2% Hispanic or Native American, 1% African-American and 1% Asian ancestry. Median family income is approximately \$46,000, with about 8% of the population below the federal poverty line. Median home value is \$79,600. The town is supported by a healthy mix of agriculture, manufacturing, retail, public employment, and residents who commute to nearby Manhattan, the site of Kansas State University.

Raw numbers, however, tell virtually nothing about the heart, the soul and livability of a town. Clichéd as it may sound, Wamego could be described as a small town out of Hollywood Central Casting, if Hollywood ever again decided to make a movie that spoke well of decent, hardworking Americans. We are blessed with high quality public schools, excellent public parks and amenities, clean streets and, most of all, friendly people. Civic traditions such as Fourth of July parades (with the best fireworks for hundreds of miles), Christmas parades, and local festivals (including the historic Tulip Festival and more recent "Oztoberfest") still thrive in Wamego. A walk down our main street (officially it's "Lincoln Avenue," but many people call it Main Street) also reveals a strange connection between Wamego and the movie [The Wizard of Oz](#). We have an Oz Museum, and a restaurant called

Toto's Taco, and it seems like new Oz-themed ideas, such as renaming Hwy 99 from I-70 to town "The Road to Oz," crop up constantly.

Our 2016 Annual Report showed active membership of 159 persons (89 women and 70 men). The total active and inactive roll is 225. To-date in 2016, we have 11 confirmands.

Once again, raw numbers do not convey the heart of our community of faith. To learn about our heart, you need only to walk in the door. If you were to do that on a Sunday, you would find a friendly congregation that welcomes families and young professionals, empty-nesters, and retirement-age people alike. If you stuck around for a while, you would notice the diversity of occupations and backgrounds among our adult members. Our members include some of the best farmers and ranchers in Kansas, professors and administrators from Kansas State University, homemakers, social workers, bankers, skilled craftspersons, and professionals of every stripe. There are no town or country cliques, and we enjoy each other's company. At the start of services, it is frequently a challenge to restore order after the passing of the peace, because so many people leave their seats and dart all over the church to shake hands.

***Session and Deacons.*** The Session consists of ten elders elected for three-year terms in more or less equal staggered classes. The gender and occupational diversity of the congregation is well reflected on the Session. Our Session has a history of strong leadership and more than a touch of independence. Our Session also has a history of maintaining our church within the vital life of the Presbytery of Northern Kansas. One of our elders is currently vice moderator of the Presbytery of Northern Kansas.

The Board of Deacons also serves the congregation. Each deacon needs a heart for service and a love for all members, especially the elderly, the infirm and the needy. In focusing on our mission of caring for one another, deacons pray for joys and concerns of individual members at every monthly meeting in preparation for serving. They visit members of our church family who are homebound or living in care facilities, provide transportation to church when requested, and serve communion to shut-ins once a month.

Deacons also serve by providing food for those in need due to illness or death in the family; securing greeters for Sunday worship and volunteers to provide coffee and treats for fellowship after worship; preparing communion; preparing and serving meals for special events such as the Easter breakfast, a meal after Christmas caroling in the community, and other special events. A deacon representative serves on the Emergency Fund committee that makes funds available to members in time of immediate need. Our church is also an active participant in the Community Council of Churches, and that organization tasks our deacons with finding volunteers to deliver Meals on Wheels for one month during the year.

Deacons also work to maintain contact with the congregation by sending cards and making phone calls so all in our church family feel loved and cared for.

***Church staff.*** The First Presbyterian Church in Wamego is blessed with a caring, dedicated staff. First and foremost is our Church Administrative Assistant. She is a native of Georgia

and brings a good dose of Southern hospitality and comfort to those entering the church. She is a dedicated, hard-working employee and member of the church, integrated into all the areas of our administrative and spiritual life. Last but not least, she is a wonderful cook, as evidenced by our monthly Fellowship Dinners, and she also serves as a Deacon.

Our custodians spend many hours, day and night, making sure the church is clean and ready for the next service, meeting, or event. They again show the dedication and devotion to the church as a whole, not just workers doing a job, that makes us so richly blessed. They have also served as an Elder and Deacon. We employ a childcare attendant who makes sure our babies and toddlers are well cared for during service and special events.

***Our Property.*** The main structure was built in 1921 and is in good physical condition. The building was substantially enlarged to provide additional classroom, fellowship, kitchen and meeting space in 2002–2003. The sanctuary contains seating for approximately 162 persons, with additional seating for 60 in the balcony and 48 in overflow folding chairs in the rear of the sanctuary, for a total of approximately 270 worshippers. Overall seating is strained to capacity at Easter and Christmas Eve services, and close to capacity in the Sanctuary on Communion Sundays. A contingency plan exists to increase the number of pews by modifying the configuration of the area in the front of the sanctuary. Thanks to the recent renovation, the church as a whole is compliant with modern standards for handicapped accessibility.

Our church does not possess a manse. The original manse stood next to the church and nobly sacrificed its life and land when the church addition was built. In the church's experience, the lack of a manse has not proven a liability, since ample affordable housing exists in the area, and pastors are able to determine whether their own spiritual needs are more satisfied by an in-town or rural home setting.

The church also owns a property across the street, formerly the home of Community Health Ministry, a free medical and dental clinic that is a vital part of the church's mission. The original house that housed Community Health Ministry was demolished in 2014, and the lot was planted with grass to provide a green space for church activities. The Vacation Bible School day camp made good use of it this past summer as a nice area for outdoor water activities.

## **Worship**

We are a worship-centered church. Sunday morning is our chance to gather outside the demands of everyday life, to lay aside our to-do lists and electronic devices and take time to dedicate ourselves to God, pray, sing, hear the word, and better understand what God wants us to know.

Our worship service is fairly traditional but not rigid. Sunday service begins at 10:15 a.m. We start with an upbeat greeting and announcements, singing of a favorite hymn, and passing the peace. This time is a favorite of our congregation because we are genuinely

happy to see and greet one another in fellowship. Prayer follows, then a few moments of contemplation during the prelude. With the ringing of the church bell, the service continues.

We involve many people as liturgists. Our worship is family-oriented and unfailingly God-centered. People offer prayer concerns on cards delivered to the pastor by greeters. Communion is a regular part of our services and is most frequently conducted with the congregation seated. Most of all, our congregation appreciates a well-written and thoughtful sermon that feeds our minds as well as our souls. We know our faith journeys are not meant to be simple. We want to ask and answer difficult questions. Sometimes we want to be reassured, but we always want to be challenged to see our relationship with God in new ways.

We are blessed with a strong organist, and our services contain beautiful music. We have a choir that offers special music. This year the choir gathered during Advent and surprised the congregation with “flash” Christmas carols at different times before, during, and after services and also added anthems to worship in December. The choir also gathered during Lent to offer joyful anthems on Palm Sunday and Easter.

After the service, we gather for fellowship time. Children enjoy the snacks, and adults enjoy time to connect and talk. (Ok, maybe the adults enjoy the snacks, too!) Many would find their Sunday time incomplete without the chance to visit with friends after the service.

## **Discipleship**

The aim of our Christian Education program is to better equip people of all ages to experience worship and see how Jesus’ teachings apply to their daily lives. We want to help children build a strong foundation, help youth deal with the trials of growing up, and help adults understand the breadth and implications of God’s grace.

Our Christian Education program has waxed and waned through the years, but we have never shied away from trying new things. For pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade Sunday School, at times we have used a rotation model, and at other times we have established classroom teachers who remain with students throughout the school year. We also changed from Sunday School to Wonder Wednesday (a Wednesday evening meal and class) for one year. In 2015-16, we switched back to offering mixed-age Sunday School for pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, a separate class for middle school youth, and an adult education class that welcomes high school youth. A small high school youth group has met regularly on Sunday evenings this year and has participated in activities with other youth groups in the region several times. (One of our youth, a senior in high school, served as head of the Presbytery of Northern Kansas Youth Council this year!) A small group of dedicated volunteers and teachers keeps Christian Education for children and youth alive, and their efforts are much appreciated.

We had 11 students in a spring 2016 communicants class. We look forward to welcoming those young adults into the church this spring. The class was led by our interim pastor. We appreciated his ability to build relationships with the young people in our church.

A constant strength for many years has been an adult Bible study that meets at 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings. The class strives to learn what the Bible really says, and has studied the gospels one verse at a time — sometimes one word at a time — to learn the skill of exegesis and to help all think about and understand God's word.

We hope to continue to provide enriching educational opportunities for all ages. In addition, we are a congregation that enjoys socializing together. Members volunteer to bring drinks and snacks and host weekly fellowship, which occurs immediately following worship in fellowship hall. We gather for fellowship dinners on the last Wednesday of the month, when members and the community at large enjoy a home-cooked meal in fellowship hall. In summer, a church-wide pool party and ice cream social is held at the city pool. An annual all-church fall picnic is another event we all anticipate; for the last few years, it has been graciously hosted by a family with ample room for young and old alike to play outdoor games, enjoy good food, and explore.

We are blessed with a robust communications group that keeps us abreast of upcoming events through a monthly newsletter and an excellent website and blog. Recent efforts include a Facebook page and converting our print newsletter to an online newsletter. We are thankful for the talents of these dedicated volunteers.

## **Stewardship**

First Presbyterian Church in Wamego is a giving church — its people give of their financial resources, their spiritual gifts, the sweat of their brows, their heartfelt words of encouragement, and their worship. Stewardship, particularly direct appeals to financial stewardship, is not verboten in our church, although it can be said that has not always been the case. For many years, our church relied heavily on one wealthy family for any purchases needed or if the coffers were a bit short for the month. True, the bills were always paid and the building was always kept up, but the spiritual growth that is attained through sacrificial giving waned. Not coincidentally, our church through these years did little mission giving as a whole, either in the local community or the through the greater Presbyterian Church. Also not coincidentally, membership stagnated, especially among those with school-aged children.

The trend began to change in the mid 1990s, as the leadership in the church began to sense that our town of Wamego was on the verge of faster than normal growth. As detailed above, a long-range planning committee was formed to assess the needs of our building and also the ability of our church to pay for an expanded facility. The aforementioned wealthy family was aging and it was unclear how big a gift for construction was available. There had been no building fund over the years for members to give to for such an occasion. After many meetings with church members and hours of prayer for discernment, it was

becoming clear this church would need to “grow up” if it was to expand in scope, mission, and members. Sacrificial giving would be preached from the pulpit. Lay persons would also speak of giving as they felt led and able. A building fund was established. The church elders also saw the need for the Session to set an example and started budgeting mission giving of 10% of annual expenditures. Not coincidentally, the budget began growing at a rapid pace. The church did not meet its budget every year through this time, but did more times than not. Enough funds were prayerfully given to begin a building project. New local mission projects sprang up that are still active today. Our financial situation is stable.

## **Mission**

Worship drives mission work in our church, both in terms of giving and actions. We hope to spur new energy in this area to spur continued outreach and to spread God’s love in our community, state, region, and world.

Our church has a strong recent history of mission work. In 1997, our church invited the other churches in the community to come together and brainstorm specifically about missions. They responded, and the Reach Out group was born. God moved through Reach Out directly into the formation of Community Health Ministry – churches from all denominations working together to meet our community's health needs. Additionally, as stated in the section on Stewardship, our church set an internal goal of ten percent for mission giving (over \$20,000 is budgeted). Instead of eating into our other budgets, our mission giving energized our congregation and giving increased across the board. God multiplies every gift when one trusts Him.

Missions supported by this church include:

- Project Rescue of Amazon Youth (P.R.A.Y.). This foreign mission was started by a Wamego woman visiting Brazil and moved by God to start a home there for neglected and abandoned children. She is now a Roman Catholic nun and lives in Brazil permanently. P.R.A.Y. has succeeded beyond all expectations and is supported by churches statewide. Several members of our congregation have served on P.R.A.Y.'s board of directors. Recent changes in government regulations in Brazil have complicated this mission, and we are in the process of deciding how to handle the difficulties.
- Community Health Ministry (C.H.M.). Our church formerly provided the physical home for and was instrumental in starting this vital part of the Wamego community. C.H.M. operates a medical and dental clinic staffed by local doctors, dentists and nurses, all volunteering their time in this Godly work. A registered nurse is on-site at all times. C.H.M. also operates a food bank and distributes infant clothing, formula, diapers, bedding, medical equipment and household furnishings. C.H.M. operates a Mobile Mission, providing volunteer taxi service to local residents for medical appointments region-wide. Members of our congregation have served on the C.H.M. board and volunteered to help with its work. C.H.M. has developed a strong fundraising network through support from the Salvation Army, Red Cross, and Council of Churches, including the Council's annual Walk for Warmth to buy coats

and other winter supplies. We are privileged to be part of this ministry and are proud of how far it has come.

- Our Presbytery Pledge.
- Support for the Council of Churches.
- A dedicated budget line item for Presbyterian Youth Ministries, since evangelism and education for youth are of primary importance to us.

Our Mission Committee directs special offerings and projects throughout the year, including Souper Bowl Sunday, the One Great Hour of Sharing offering on Easter Sunday, an annual special offering to collect school supplies for needy children, gifts to needy children worldwide through Operation Christmas Child, fifth Sunday offerings for the Presbyterian Theological Education Fund and other causes, and "adoption" of local families with children through the community Christmas Bureau.

Our church seeks to support those who help others. We strive to reach out to our neighbors in the community and throughout the world, helping them materially and showing and telling of God's love for them through our Lord and Savior.

## **Prayers for the Future**

*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*

Luke 11:9

As the central part of this Mission Study process, Session thought long and hard about where we want this church to go. We prayed over it individually and collectively. We listened for God's answers in noisy rooms and in the stillness of midnight hours.

We hope to find a pastor who will help us make Sunday mornings special as we set aside the complexities of contemporary life and gather to be refreshed. We are looking for someone with the energy to help us carry the lessons from worship into the world and, as we said at the beginning of this document, to use worship to call us to service and discipleship and lead us to good stewardship through mission. We do not seek a pastor who is looking to meet or address his or her individual needs or weaknesses, but someone who can reinforce our congregation's efforts with leadership and strength by helping us cut through the noise, establish priorities, and do God's work in the world.

We want a pastor who will grow and think with us, one who will not shy away from asking difficult questions about the meaning of God's word. We are seeking a pastor with a package of talents that come together in a manner that inspires trust. We are looking for person who cares for people, and who genuinely wants to be involved in this church and larger community. That a particular individual may be stronger in the pulpit than in pastoral care, or stronger in administration than in youth ministry, or the reverse in either or both, or in any of a dozen other qualities that mix into a pastoral vocation, is less important to us than in finding someone who hears God's call to Wamego and who grasps

the possibilities of this congregation and community. Obviously we will favor someone who knows how to run a meeting and mind the church's relatively healthy finances, but only because their efficient conduct gets us out sooner and make us stronger to do the even more important things God calls us to do. A final quality we seek in a pastor is a sense of humor. Our congregation loves a sense of humor. Come and laugh with us.