

# STATE OF THE CHURCH ADDRESS

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Before we conclude our meeting, I would like briefly to address the state of the congregation. In my travels I am occasionally asked how things are going in our church. My answer does not directly speak of increased numbers of members or of an expanding budget, but rather on the excellent spiritual vitality we are enjoying and of God's blessing on the ministry of his Word. My concern as your pastor is not for numbers or statistics, which are all only byproducts, but of the spiritual health and life of our congregation. I want to give praise to God for a loving, joyful, unified, and fervent congregation and to thank you all for your commitment to God's work here. I believe that our church health and vitality are the result of a long legacy of commitment to biblical teaching and worship, of sound and godly church leadership, and of the sovereign blessing of Christ through the Holy Spirit. I would urge each member to continue to prize the peace and health of our church, and I continue to pledge myself as a guardian and servant of the same. If I am asked for an area where our church has a need of growth and improvement, I would say that we should challenge ourselves to be more zealous in personal evangelism and more fervently committed to corporate and personal prayer.

One issue that I would bring to your attention is the heavy burden of pastoral interventions and church discipline cases that our session has been handling during this year. We have had an unusually high number of challenging pastoral cases in recent months: more, in fact, than I have ever encountered in all my years in ministry. The congregation will often be completely unaware of these situations due to our need to exercise discretion, but I can state that our elders have been stretched and in some cases fairly exhausted by the demands of ministry. In numerous cases the pastoral staff and ruling elders have devoted scores of hours to ministry situations; it is our pleasure to serve the flock of Christ in this way but it is difficult and demanding. I tell you this, first, so that you will know that your elders are cheerfully expending themselves in ministry of which you may not be aware. Second, I ask you to pray for our elders, that God would grant us wisdom, energy, compassion, and strength in dealing with painful and difficult pastoral situations. Third, I would ask you all to make a special effort to submit to the Bible's teaching in the year to come so that this burden may be decreased in 2011.

I am sometimes asked what is my vision for Second Presbyterian Church. I usually answer that ours is a church devoted to the biblical worship of God, the bold and clear teaching of his Word, the spiritual growth of believers in loving

Christian community, and our zealous participation in the worldwide mission of Christ's gospel. Those things should be true of any church, of course. I also believe that God has placed our church – with its downtown location in an important regional city, and its historic role in the region and denomination – to serve as a beacon for Reformed Christianity in the surrounding area. Ours should be a church that encourages others by example to remain true to faithful preaching and biblical worship, that serves as a resource center for the surrounding area, and that exists as a rallying point for like-minded believers. This vision I expressed through conference events held here and also by our radio ministry outreach. In addition to our weekly program here in Greenville, our sermons are now being broadcast daily in a number of cities mainly in the Southeast. I have also been approached by a nationwide radio network about the possibility of expanding the program, God's Living Word, into major media markets like Atlanta. This radio expansion will rely on listener support and outside giving, but it reflects the expanding influence of the ministry of our church.

Let me address as well a few topics about which questions are sometimes raised. The first is our commitment to missions. You may have noticed that our missions budget did not increase this year, despite my expressed desire for annual increases to missions. The reason for this was the withdrawal of our support from the Presbyterian Mission in Haiti because of moral breaches. In 2011, our missions committee will be charged with developing a new missions partnership that will take this place in our budget and provide opportunities for new short-term missions trips. Meanwhile, I praise God that he is honoring us by sending our own people to the missions field, including the Bruecks in Kenya, Heather Waugh to Spain, and in the coming year Elizabeth Johnson to Peru.

A second topic concerns the long-range planning committee. It seems evident that continued growth will require sanctuary expansion, as part of long-term site planning. This committee is continuing its work and will likely give recommendations to our officers early in 2011. There are a number of options being developed and considered, along with the necessary financial planning. I can say that there are no plans to erect a new building or to move our location. I foresee Second Presbyterian Church continuing indefinitely to meet for worship at its historic location at the corner of River and Rhett Streets in the West End of downtown Greenville. We will need to maximize our seating capacity in the coming years, and this is virtually certain to require renovations and some additions or changes to our current configuration. It is possible that such expansion will permit a return to a single morning worship service, but continued growth may make that less likely. Some have suggested that we might consider church planting as an alternative to sanctuary expansion. Church planting is not a remedy for an expanding congregation, however, and is a subject we may consider in years to come independent of our space needs.

Let me conclude by saying what a blessing it has been to me and my family to serve as your senior minister in 2010. It is a special blessing to preach God's Word to such an eager congregation, and I am grateful for the peace, unity, love, and commitment of this church. It distresses me to be frequently asked if I expect to be called away from this pulpit and my answer is that I do not expect this. I want you to know that I do not accept any approaches from other churches and that I would have to be persuaded by God before I would be willing to do so in the future. While I do not know God's will, my desire is to remain as pastor of this church for the duration of my ministry and I am praying for God to give me good health and spiritual blessing to enable this for many years. While my service to Christ involves a fairly wide-ranging ministry, I desire to continue giving you my best labors and I am deeply committed to the work of the gospel in this place.

Let me conclude by giving all praise and glory to God for his blessings on our church. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him alone be glory. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).