

Holy Temple Mennonite Church

Holy Temple church was founded by pastors, Rich and Karen, ten years ago. Rich and Karen are a couple with an evangelical background who became enamored with Anabaptist theology while attending seminary. Though they have had long-term exposure to life in a Mennonite community, Rich and Karen feel that they have found their true spiritual home. They have a deep desire to share the reconciling love of Jesus with the world. They moved to Silver Creek a growing community with stunning mountain views to start a new church. While they are clear in their identity as Mennonites, they also believe that trying to replicate the traditional Mennonite Churches they've visited would not attract the unchurched in Silver Creek. From the beginning, Rich and Karen worked hard during the week to build relationships with strangers, assisting people in the neighborhood with their material and spiritual needs. People responded to their ministry and many have adopted them as family. In the first years of the church's life, it seemed like the worship services of the small group "pulsed" with vitality as new people joined the community of faith.

After the first five years the church numbered about 35 people. At about that time Silver Creek experienced an economic surge with new industry which created lots of manufacturing and management jobs. The school system grew drawing teachers and educated professionals to town. As the city's economy blossomed, a cadre of friends who recently graduated from a Mennonite college decided together to seek their fortune in Silver Creek, they were delighted to find this vibrant Mennonite community. Because those from Mennonite background articulated their faith quite clearly, they were quickly appointed to positions of leadership. They often volunteered to represent the church at the conference annual meeting and as delegates to the national convention. In the last couple of years the attendance at worship has leveled off at about 60 people. One of the recurring questions that is raised when the members of Holy Temple Mennonite dream about their future is, "How do we 'open' our congregation so that new people feel comfortable but stay true to the Mennonite convictions that are at the heart of our witness?"

While the Christ-centered sermons at Holy Temple often reference the way of peace and the nature of God's kingdom, at times those from Mennonite background puzzle over what they deem to be "thin" content in the pastor's sermons. They sometimes complain that the worship music is shallow. Since the church began, the neighborhood has undergone a number of dramatic demographic changes. The neighborhood that was originally dominated by young white professional families is now increasingly populated with Hispanic working class people. None of the households of the church have remained living in the neighborhood.

The church has not had good success in reaching out to the Hispanic population and has made the decision to relocate. They have purchased four acres of land at a bargain price in a fast growing suburban area where two member families live. The land is paid for and they have a little money committed for building a new facility but they anticipate the cost of building to be approximately 1.2 million dollars. They think the land is a good investment. They are currently considering whether they should sell it to finance a building on cheaper land or develop part of it to sell as business lots as a way of paying for the new building.

1. Whose space is determining the character of Holy Temple Mennonite Church?
2. In what ways are the members seeking a church that reinforces the life members have chosen? In what ways is the church calling members to new forms of discipleship and witness?
3. What unspoken hopes for the future of this congregation are operating among the members?
4. What do you imagine this group will need to do to develop common commitments regarding the mission of their congregation that all will own?