

**Come Home...
to College Hill Presbyterian Church**

***College Hill Presbyterian Church
gathers in the name of Jesus Christ, who
creates community among us;
a home where all are welcome
to share life,
growing together in love
of God
and neighbor.***

The Invitation: Come Home

¹ *When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.*

² *Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
‘The LORD has done great things for them.’*

³ *The LORD has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.*

⁴ *Restore our fortunes, O LORD,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.*

⁵ *May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.*

⁶ *Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.*

-Psalm 126

What happens after exile?

Homecoming.

We return. We rebuild. By God’s grace, we do it together.

In recent decades, “exile” has come to serve as a widely-used metaphor for the situation of the so-called mainline Protestant churches. As religious practice continues to decline, and the number of “nones” (those claiming no religious affiliation) continues to rise, congregations like College Hill Presbyterian Church no longer enjoy the prestige, position and power to which they had long been accustomed.

This shift sets us adrift; we can feel like strangers in a strange land, increasingly isolated from our neighbors, deeply divided by politics, starved for connection and community. And our congregations suffer -grieving what was, yearning for what will not return, unsure of what comes next.

In exile, churches can feel stuck.

But we do not have to stay stuck. God offers life after exile.

God calls us to come home.

After the Babylonian Empire burned the holy city of Jerusalem and carried its people away—some 70 years *after* a hard and bitter exile—a remnant returned to rebuild.

But they did not find their home the way that they left it. Returning means rebuilding.

Psalm 126 reflects the profoundly mixed emotions of that homecoming moment. The psalmist makes time and space for weeping (the people sow in tears), while also speaking of joy (“our mouths were filled with laughter”) and praying for renewal (“restore our fortunes”).

Homecoming happens at the intersection of memory and hope. So the psalm looks back in grateful memory to God’s past deliverance (“the Lord has done great things for us”). And the psalm also looks forward in glad expectation of God’s deliverance to come (“those who go out weeping shall return with shouts of joy”).

Right now, in this inbetween time—in the pregnant pause between memory and hope—God has got work for us to do.

Once we come home we can start to rebuild.

Coming Home to College Hill Presbyterian Church

When you ask members and friends of College Hill Presbyterian Church what they value about the congregation, you will hear many variations on the theme of “home.” Some speak of their long decades of membership or even multi-generational connections to this place. Others will tell you that this church has become the home they need: a place where they experience welcome, a community that challenges them to grow, a context for receiving care and a village to help raise their children.

What does it mean for this church to partner with God, creating community that can serve as our home?

- **Welcome.** “*Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.*” So says Robert Frost. In a deeply divided and often hostile world, College Hill Presbyterian Church seeks to embody *radical hospitality* and welcome of all. “No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”
- **Memory and Hope.** Home helps us to learn the stories of our ancestors, the stories that tell us who we are and how we came to be. And home is the place where we order our life toward the future. We delay short-term gratification for the sake of generations to come, trusting that God will yet do the good God has promised.
- **Nurture and Care.** Home is the place where we receive what we need to grow into our own truest selves. College Hill Presbyterian Church equips its people for lifelong spiritual growth and organizes to provide care for its people in seasons of pain, isolation and grief.
- **Formation of Faith.** Home is the place where we devote our resources to nurturing the next generation. College Hill Presbyterian Church creates meaningful opportunities for the youngest among us to receive welcome, resources and support as they grow up among us.

- **Intergenerational community.** Home is where the generations share life together. Rather than retreat into age-segregated spaces, we seek to foster authentic connections between the old and the young.
- **Love of neighbor.** Home is where we learn to be better neighbors. At College Hill Presbyterian Church, we pay attention to the people around us. We identify needs and seek to meet them. We give of our time, talent and treasure to seek the welfare of our communities.

This Old House: Sharing the Work of Home Improvement

As anyone who has ever owned a house can tell you:

Home is a work in progress.

There is always another project to tackle, some needed repair, some necessary renovation.

As a people committed to God’s mission of creating this community—to do our part in building the home we all share—the Session of College Hill Presbyterian Church has identified and committed to a series of strategic priorities for the next season.

The Building

The church is *not* its building, but the church building is our most valuable asset and most critical tool for ministry. If we will flourish in the next season, our building will require wise and loving attention.

Phase #1: Session will support the work of the Board of Trustees in assessing current use of our space, identifying and prioritizing capital needs, then planning and conducting a capital campaign. The first phase of this work—a capital needs assessment—will launch by November 1, 2024.

Phase #2: The Session will convene a broad and inclusive visioning conversation for stakeholders, assessing building use needs and

developing a comprehensive vision for the next season. Plans for this conversation will be finalized by February 1, 2025.

Care and Connection

If we would create a community where all are cared for, we need to bring more intentionality and structure to our practices of caring for one another.

Under the guidance of Pastor Matt, and in collaboration with the Deacons of College Hill Presbyterian Church, the Session will develop a Care and Connection ministry. The new Care and Connection ministry will begin by Feb 14, 2025.

Hand-on Mission

As part of our commitment to doing right by our neighbor and seeking the common good, members of the church have expressed a yearning for more hands-on mission opportunities.

The Mission Committee of College Hill Presbyterian Church will act to identify additional opportunities for hands-on local mission, and then organize members and friends of the church to engage in it. Session will evaluate progress in this area and identify next steps by May, 2025.

Nursery School Integration

Over the course of its 75-year history, the College Hill Presbyterian Church Nursery School has cared for, nurtured and educated young children. As a church, we desire a deeper sense of connection to that work and ownership of that mission.

Collaborating with the Nursery School Committee and Director, the Session will work toward greater integration of the Nursery School with the church. A plan for increasing integration will be shared with the Session by October 1, 2024 and progress will be reviewed by June of 2025.

Prayer Group

As a church, we tend to be better at doing than being. As a consequence, we may miss out on a sense of God's presence with us. We would like to offer more opportunities for those who seek a connection to God.

In collaboration with the church prayer team, Pastor Matt will launch a weekly prayer opportunity for the season of Advent 2024. Session will evaluate and identify next steps in January of 2025..

Conclusion

Exile ends. A loving God invites us to come home. And here at the intersection of memory and hope, God graciously invites us into the work of rebuilding. In partnership with God's Spirit, we can create a community where all are welcome to share life, to grow in love, to serve our neighbor.

To those who see what we see and share our yearning for what God might make of us, the invitation is clear:

Come home...to College Hill Presbyterian Church.

