

A Church Plant in Southern Delaware

- *The Need:* Heritage Presbytery is looking for a church planter with the following qualifications:
 - At least seven years of pastoral experience
 - Proven track record in evangelism and discipleship formation
 - Entrepreneurial and willing to lead a scratch church plant
- *The Start Time:* As soon as possible
- *The Resource Available:* \$150,000 to jumpstart the fundraising process

The Quality-of-Life

As is true for nearly all of Delaware, Milford is a great place to live and to raise a family. “Best Places to Live” gives the area a 7.4/10 on its “Comfort Index.” The average July temperature is 86 degrees; the average January one, 27. While there is a total of 45 inches of rain in a typical year, there are less than 12 inches of snow. The median-priced house is \$256,800 and property taxes are extremely low. The taxes for the median-priced house are about \$700 per year. Delaware has no sales tax.

Milford is conveniently located in the middle of the Middle Atlantic States. It is 2 hours from Philadelphia and its airport with flights to everywhere in the US and much of the world; 2 hours from Baltimore, and 2 hours from Washington DC. Every conceivable historical, cultural, educational, sporting, and recreational diversion is within an easy drive. Milford is rural, but it is not remote.

Forty-five percent of Sussex County is dedicated to agriculture. It is the #1 county in the US in the production of broiler chicken. As a result, much of what one sees in summer as he/she travels its byways, is miles of corn and soybeans. Farm fresh fruits and vegetables are readily available. The most significant industry in the county comes from having some of the finest beaches on the east coast. These beaches are within a 50-minute drive of Milford and bring \$2 billion in tourism spending to Sussex. Tourism provides 15,000 jobs. The beaches, wildlife sanctuaries, marshes, rivers, and parks near Milford provide for great exploring and recreational opportunities.

The People and Growth

The county is to a large degree rural but it is developing rapidly. From 2010 to 2020 the population grew from 197,000 to 234,000, a 22.6 % increase. While many areas in the US are declining in population and deserve Christ-centered, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches, most church planters agree that establishing churches is generally easier in growing areas. Sussex County is drawing significant numbers of Latinos from South and Central America. It is also drawing many younger retirees from the major population centers of the east coast who are seeking a slower pace of life, reasonably priced housing, low taxes, and proximity to coastal amenities.

Sussex County is 75.4% Caucasian, 12.2% African American, 9.3% Latino, and 4.1% other. 88% have a high school diploma or more. 28% have a bachelor’s degree or more. The median household income is about \$64,000. With regard to age: 5% of the population is under 5 years of age, 18.5% under 19; 47.8 % between 19 and 64; and 28.7% over 65.

The town of Milford, Delaware, is a hub for much of the county's growth. It is, in many ways, a typical small town. It has a quaint central core for the population of 12,000, but most of the recent growth for the hub is located along the highways radiating from the core. In these corridors are found typical suburban developments, stores, banks, service-type businesses, professional offices, and fast-food chains. Milford has its Walmart Super Store. What Milford does not have is a Christ-centered, outreach-oriented, Reformed and Presbyterian Church. The closest one is 20 miles and 30 minutes away.

The Elephant in the Room

If nothing had changed in recent years, the Milford area would warrant the planting of a PCA Church. However, in 2019 cataclysmic change came to the town and its environs when Bayhealth opened its all-new 242 bed, \$300,000,000 regional medical campus just outside of town and began the renovation of its old in-town hospital for use as a nursing home. The new hospital is a regional teaching hospital that provides every imaginable form of health care. It has a Level III Emergency Trauma Center. This monumental investment in what was once a sleepy, out-of-the-way place, has brought and will continue to bring to the area for decades, every kind of health care professional and medical support staff. It will also draw non-medical businesses of every type and the workers to staff them.

These people, uprooted for the most part from communities far away, will need places where they can be nurtured in faith and worship according to the dictates of their consciences. The unbelievers among the transplants deserve a strong outwardly focused gospel witness in their midst. Heritage Presbytery and Faith Presbyterian, Wilmington, Delaware, are committed to seeing a PCA church planted that will meet these needs.

The Resources Available

At this juncture, there are no known persons who could provide a nucleus for a new church. This is not to say there are none. It could be that some people are driving extended distances to Presbyterian churches in Dover, Lewis, or Pot Nets, who would participate in the church plant. It could also be that there are people who are Reformed and Presbyterian who have made church attendance compromises that don't suit them since they have no PCA option. While we don't have an identified core group, what we do have is money. Approximately \$150,000 has been reserved for Milford area church planting.

We expect that during the early years of the work, the church planter would raise about 35% of his support from individuals; Faith and Heritage Presbytery would provide 35%, and that 30% would come from foundations and other presbyteries. We are also well equipped to provide nurture, advice, and counsel to the church planter from our network of past and current church planters and godly ruling elders who are passionate about and committed to seeing this new church planted.

Investigating the Possibility

If you are ordained or ordainable in the PCA, an entrepreneurial type, have seven or more years of experience in pastoral ministry, a proven track record with evangelism and discipleship formation, are comfortable meeting and interacting with medical professionals, and white-collar retirees, we invite you to research Milford and Sussex County online and contact Rev. Jim Brown at jim@faithwilmington.com or Rev. Will Stern at pastorwill@explorehopechurch.org.