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## PROSPECTUS

A NEW CHURCH COMMUNITY IN  
GLOUCESTER COUNTY NEAR  
MANTUA CREEK AND ROWAN  
UNIVERSITY THAT PRIORITIZES  
**REACHING DECONVERTING AND  
DECONSTRUCTING GEN XERS AND  
MILLENNIALS, AND THEIR CHILDREN.**

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# THE MISSION

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Overwhelmed by the gift of friendship with God, we are building a church community to **ENJOY** the journey together, **RECONNECT** those who've been hurt or disillusioned by the church, and **SHARE** the Good News with others.



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# STATEMENT OF FAITH

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Mantua Creek is a church plant of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). Our faith commitments are captured well by: our Book of Order, The Westminster Standards, and what the EPC calls "The Essentials of our Faith" which are as follows:

All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks. On this sure foundation we affirm these Essentials:

- We believe in one God, the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To Him be all honor, glory and praise forever!
- Jesus Christ, the living Word, became flesh through His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit and His virgin birth. He who is true God became true man united in one Person forever. He died on the cross a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. On the third day He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where, at the right hand of the Majesty on High, He now is our High Priest and Mediator.
- The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ and to apply the saving work of Christ to our hearts. He convicts us of sin and draws us to the Savior. Indwelling our hearts, He gives new life to us, empowers and imparts gifts to us for service. He instructs and guides us into all truth, and seals us for the day of redemption.

- Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God’s free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them in His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life.
- The true Church is composed of all persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit are united together in the body of Christ. The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced, and where loving fellowship is maintained. For her perfecting, she awaits the return of her Lord.
- Jesus Christ will come again to the earth—personally, visibly, and bodily—to judge the living and the dead, and to consummate history and the eternal plan of God. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).
- The Lord Jesus Christ commands all believers to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world and to make disciples of all nations. Obedience to the Great Commission requires total commitment to “Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.” He calls us to a life of self-denying love and service. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

These Essentials are set forth in greater detail in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

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# OUR CORE VALUES

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## LOVE

We resonate with these simple observations about how Jesus drew crowds: He loved them, met their needs, and taught them in practical and interesting ways.<sup>1</sup> Elevating and starting with love does not mean that teaching truth is not in the mix. Tim Keller’s insight informs how we “speak the truth in love:” “Paul does not simply dismiss a culture’s aspirations; rather, he both affirms and confronts, revealing the inner contradictions in people’s understanding. This is why it is so important to enter a culture before challenging it. Our criticism of culture will have no power to persuade unless it is based on something that we can affirm in the beliefs and values of that culture.”<sup>2</sup>

## MERCY

“Lord, have mercy on me a sinner” is the prayer that’s at the heart of genuine Christianity. Martin Luther prayed “May a merciful God preserve me from a Christian Church in which everyone is ‘good.’ I want to be in a church of the fainthearted, the failed, the feeble, and the ailing... who believe in the forgiveness of sins.” As Jesus was called a friend of sinners (Luke 7:34), so we want to be known as that too.

## CONNECTION

In welcoming others into our church, we want to connect them with the “beautiful orthodoxy” associated with historic Christianity. Further, we find it significant that in the book of Revelations, Jesus stands in the midst of his lampstands (churches)—errors and all (Rev. 1:13). In sync with this, we see ourselves as part of the three-branch unity of the Church: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.<sup>3</sup> Finally, we value the kind of connectional ministry that’s associated with the accountability of healthy Presbyterianism: churches led by a plurality of elders (Heb.13:17; 1 Tim. 5:17) that are connected to area presbyteries (Titus 1:5) and a national (or international) general assembly (Acts 15).



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# OUR CORE VALUES

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## SIMPLICITY

The pace of our culture can be soul-killing and the church can feed into that busyness with its programs and non-essential infrastructure. Additionally, addictive consumerism and crippling debt are at the root of much of our busyness, stealing precious margin God desires us to use for love and hospitality (Rom. 13:8). Understanding this, we will provide help in these areas and keep church programs and events to a minimum. Prioritizing “simple church,” we will stay laser-focused on these three S’s: 1) Sunday Worship (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20; Heb. 10:24-25); 2) Small Groups (Rom. 16:3-5; Col. 4:15; Acts 2:42-47). 3) Serving Out of Giftedness (John 15:8,16; Eph. 2:10; Eccl. 9:10a) and reminding people of their specialness (Psalm 139: 1-18).

## GODSPEED

This refers to the pace of being known. It’s also a reminder that ministry flows at the speed of trust and only God can make things grow (John 15:5; Acts: 2:47b, 16:14b). Again, we want “three easy steps” to “fix” others or ourselves, but it’s only He who can bring change from the inside out (Phil. 2:13). In waiting on Him for change or even guidance, we often want the *ecstasy* of the “wings as eagles” or the *energy* to “run and not grow weary” (Isa. 40:31). More often than not, however, He only gives *endurance* to “walk and not faint.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, His normal MO in our lives is to use suffering to produce perseverance that brings about proven character and in the end hope (Rom. 5:1-5).



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<sup>1</sup>Rick Warren makes these observations in *The Purpose-Driven Church*. And one of the top needs in our day is addressing our mental health crises.

<sup>2</sup>Center Church, 124.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.carpentertheologian.com/three-branch-unity-reflecting-the-heart-of-god/>

<sup>4</sup>The preacher John Claypool is credited with this three-e alliteration.



# WHY MANTUA CREEK IS NEEDED

Matthew Henry once said that good people are blessing to the places they live. Gloucester County, where we live, is one of southern NJ's growing counties, where there is no EPC church and over 50% of the 305K population identify as irreligious. Further, we are in close proximity to Rowan University, the nation's 4th fastest-growing research university among public doctoral institutions.

According to a 2022 Pew Research Center study, only 63 percent of people in the United States self-identify as Christians, down from 75 percent ten years ago. It's trends like this—what some are now calling “stealth secularization”—that have been the primary catalyst to plant a church in Gloucester County NJ.

Using largely a tent-making model that prioritizes mental and spiritual health, our specialization is reaching millennials and those that been hurt or disillusioned by the church.

*“Setting out is always a leap of faith, a risk in the deepest sense of the term, and yet an adventure too. The familiar and the habitual are so falsely reassuring, and most of us make our homes there permanently. The new is always by definition unfamiliar and untested, so God, life, destiny, suffering have to give us a push—usually a big one—or we will not go.”*

-Richard Rohr

*Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*





“Thank you for being there for the most trying time in our **LIVES...**”

“I believe you have helped me understand how to finally **FORGIVE...** thank you!”



“Thank you for your Godly **LEADERSHIP** and **SUPPORT...**”

# OUR TIMELINE



# AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

## GLOUCESTER COUNTY

Many families and young professionals live in Gloucester County and it is considered one of the best places to live in New Jersey. Most residents own their homes and the public schools are highly rated. It's a county with lots of restaurants, coffee shops, parks, and individuals who tend toward moderate political views.



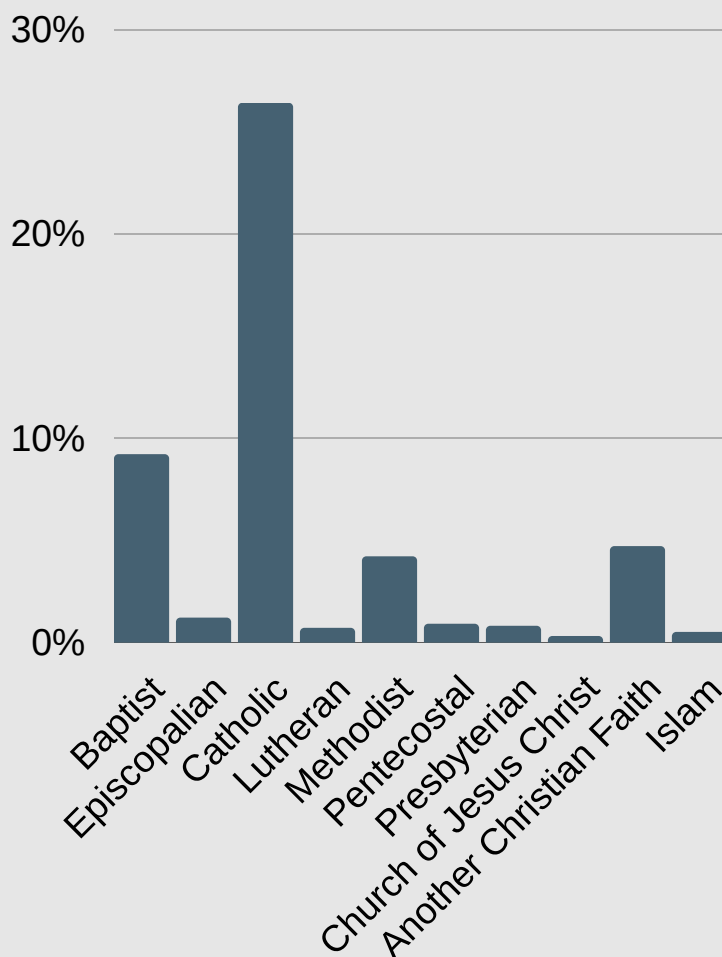
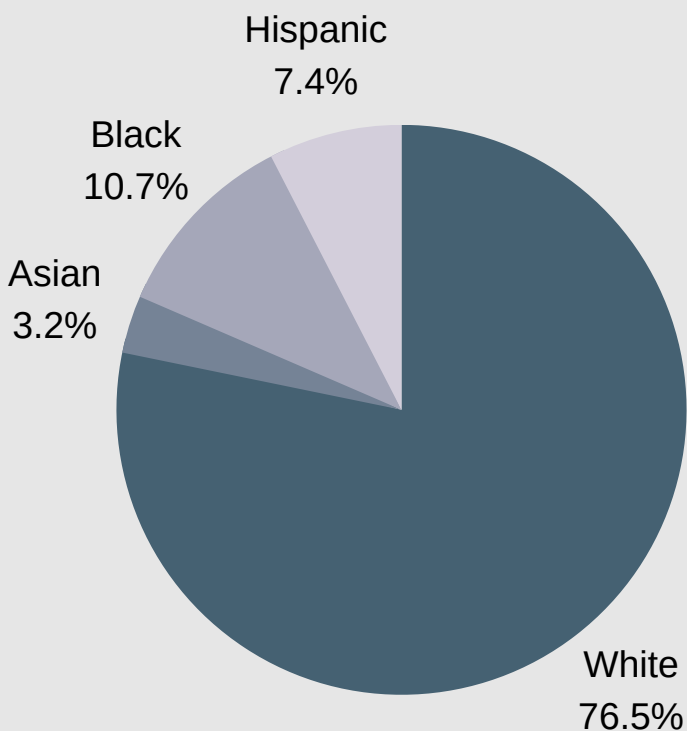
**305,000**  
Population



**\$102,650**  
Average Family Income



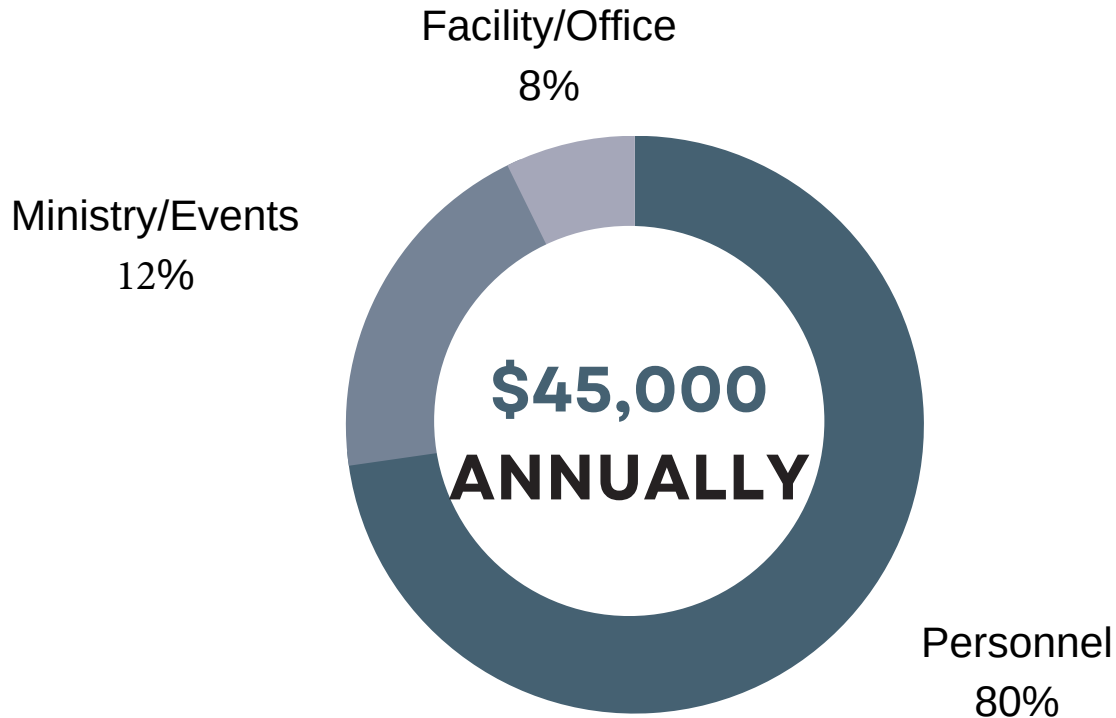
**Millennials**  
Target Group



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# OUR BUDGET

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Mantua Creek will need to raise \$45,000 for 2024, with a majority budgeted to support one part-time pastor. The remaining is allotted towards ministry, Sunday worship, outreach events, pastoral intern assistance, and other operational costs. We are asking both churches and individuals to partner with us in raising funds for a revised six-year plan. We are at the end of year three of that plan.

# THE CHURCH PLANTER

— THE AUSTENS —



Dr. Greg and his wife, Pam, grew up in southern New Jersey and now live in Gloucester County, gratefully, not far from their three children and seven grandchildren.

Greg, the church planter, is a licensed teaching elder in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church who has a passion for the gospel, families, and the unity and loving witness of Christ's Church.

Greg also has a special heart for those who've been hurt by the church or are on a path toward deconversion or deconstruction. The author of *How I Became a Christian Despite the Church* and *Irreplaceable: Recovering God's Heart for Dads*, Greg also writes a weekly blog at [carpentertheologian.com](http://carpentertheologian.com) where he provides "constructive thoughts on faith and life."

An excellent finish carpenter who ran his own LLC in the past, Greg now uses these skills part-time as a tent-making base to move the Mantua Creek church plant forward. Prior to this, Greg served as Care Net's Executive Director of Church Outreach & Engagement for six and a half years, and before this, for National Fatherhood Initiative for eleven years. A seasoned pastor, communicator, and community strategist, Greg's background is a mix of vocational work in the non-profit, community, faith-based, and business worlds. Having worked in a variety of denominational contexts, Greg holds a D.Min. from Westminster Theological Seminary, an M.Div. from Southern Seminary, and a B.S. from Cairn University.

for more information  
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our church plant?

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