

PROVIDENCE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (OPC) PROFILE

Providence Presbyterian Church, located in the heart of Madison, Wisconsin has experienced God's grace and provision through many "toils and snares." One manifestation of that grace has been our continuing presence since 1993 in Wisconsin's state capitol.

OUR HOME

Madison, located in Dane County in south central Wisconsin, is a city of beauty and variety. Built around four lakes and located at the edge of a glacial plain, it provides access to over a hundred parks and numerous biking trails and beaches. A United Soccer League team and a minor league baseball team call Madison home. The University of Wisconsin attracts students from around the world and the University Hospital is nationally ranked. Museums, art galleries, performing arts, live music and festivals abound.

Listed as one of the 'rising star' cities in the Wall Street Journal (Justin Baer, May 9, 2021) for its low unemployment rate and ability to draw in new workers, Madison has been building a vibrant economy since well before 2020, sustained it during Covid, and has even accelerated during the 2021 economic rebound.

Madison is a city of great opportunity. Although church buildings are in abundance, orthodox Christianity, especially in the reformed tradition, is in short supply. Madison, and all of Dane County, tend toward political, societal, cultural, and theological liberalism.

A study several years ago identified Madison as "average or slightly above in measures of places of worship and donations, about in the middle on consuming books on religion, but below average in total number of religious organizations, including businesses associated with religion, and in our level of religion-connected volunteerism." (Paul Fanlund, *The Capital Times*, Dec 1, 2010; Updated May 22, 2012)

We are the birthplace of the Freedom From Religion foundation, and while evangelical churches are a presence, the city is home to a greater than average number of Unitarian Universalist adherents. Three PCA congregations join Providence in proclaiming the gospel according to the reformed faith but are relatively new and lack their own buildings. Our desire is to continue edifying and encouraging the family at Providence while using our God-given resources to evangelize our neighborhoods, cities and county.

PROVIDENCE HISTORY

Providence's history began in 1993, but during that first decade members faced many struggles and disruptions. Unfortunate and unlooked-for situations, various disagreements, and numerous moves from one temporary worship facility to another took their toll. In 2004 local leadership made a decision to dissolve the church.

At this weakest point, Providence would begin to comprehend not only the truth of its name, but the beauty of the presbyterian form of church government. Our regional home missionary Jim Bosgraf and Pastor Matt Cotta of Grace OPC (Hanover Park, IL—our overseeing

congregation at the time) stepped in and declared Providence open and active. They ensured that each week a godly minister of the gospel encouraged the tiny remnant and recommended recent seminary graduate Mark Jenkins to serve as pulpit supply.

On one of Mark's first weeks preaching at Providence, two members were overheard to suggest locking the doors of the church and not letting this contagiously reformed preacher escape. Within a few years Providence was particularized, and Mark installed as Pastor.

In 2010, as our temporary meeting place began renovations, Providence again found itself in need of a new home. Pastor Jenkins already had a relationship with a few members of the independent Madison Chinese Christian Church (MCCC) who were interested in learning more about the reformed faith. When the leaders of the Chinese congregation learned that Providence would be looking for a new location to worship, they invited us to move in and share their building.

The arrangement has worked well, with our congregation worshipping in the sanctuary at 9:30 a.m. while the Chinese congregation used the lower level for Adult Sunday School. At 11 a.m., the congregations swapped spaces. Providence enjoys full use of the building the remainder of Sunday and throughout the week. The fellowship with our Chinese brothers and sisters has included joint worship services at Easter and Christmas Eve, sharing an intern, and the occasional exchange of our pastors, who preach through a translator.

In Spring 2021, another major decision was reached between these two bodies. The MCCC family, recently functioning as a PCA Mission Work, dissolved that relationship. With the affirming vote of the Providence family, the Chinese work is becoming part of Providence. Approximately 15 MCCC members have been welcomed into membership at Providence, with more expected in early 2022. The MCCC pastor continues to head up the shepherding of this flock, under the direction of the Providence session. He is assisted by the church's newly appointed Director of Chinese Ministries, Joseph Wu. This native Chinese man is forty years old and completed his degree studies at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi in May 2021. His real-life experiences serving churches in his native China, earning numerous advanced degrees, as well as his maturity, have commended him to the local work. The Session is assisting Joseph as he in the process of being examined by Presbytery for ordination as an evangelist, scheduled for completion by mid-2022, at which time he will join the Providence session.

The vision for this Chinese ministry is outreach to a significant Chinese-speaking population at the UW Campus. Potentially, this group of the Providence body may be established as a separate mission work if God so blesses.

TODAY

Providence was a mission work for many years, but in 2011 was particularized, called the Reverend Jenkins as its pastor, and installed our first elder and deacon. Today the church has has approximately 50 English-speaking communicants and 22 non-communicant members from 24 households, plus approximately 15 Chinese-speaking communicants. We are blessed with 2 elders and 3 deacons. Our members and regular attenders are divided almost equally between those living in the city of Madison, and those in surrounding communities. Providentially, the location of the building is central to these attenders.

Average attendance on a Sunday morning is approximately seventy for the English-language service, and 30 for the Chinese service. Our website was recently redone, and we maintain an active Facebook page to increase awareness of our presence in Dane County. We use this medium to share a weekly invitation to join worship, a Monday summary of the Sunday sermon, and a mid-week variety of posts of encouragement, education and outreach.

About twenty children ages 10 and under attend Sunday School while adults and older children have adult Sunday School. While several members are over the age of 50, the preponderance of the congregation is in the 25-50 age range.

Historically Sundays at Providence included our 5 O'clock Gospel gathering, an informal teaching time and prayer followed by a meal, but this has not been restarted since Covid and the departure of our pastor. We do enjoy monthly Fellowship Meals after Sunday School the second Sunday of each month.

During the summer months we enjoy afternoon/evening fellowship at congregants' homes or local parks. Through-out the year, Community Groups meet at various locations in and around Madison, and intermittent Men's breakfasts, Ladies' outings, a book discussion group, wedding and baby showers enhance and encourage our fellowship. Once a week, the women of the church meet via Zoom to pray specifically for the needs of Providence.

Providence has been blessed with an abundance of opportunities. We enjoy a permanent location in a church building suited to most of our needs. With half our congregation living outside of Madison, we have an extended territory to evangelize. The hospital and university attract those from the medical community and students from around the world. As the seat of state government, Madison draws visitors and temporary residents who may be looking for a reformed church at which to worship. It is a medium-sized town, growing every year, with big-city vibes.

As we search for our new Pastor, we look forward to our future. We are eager to renew our commitment to "go into Jerusalem, Judea and all the world" by becoming a visible presence and light in Dane County and by supporting missions home and abroad. We look forward to discovering how the man of God's own choosing will lead us to carry out the Great Commission.

To learn more, please contact our Pastoral Search Committee at:
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