

# The Southern Rhode Island Project

Presbyterian Church in America

Bringing "Hope in Christ" to the Community & University

## Reaching Southern RI with the Gospel to Reach the Northeast for Christ

*Southern RI: An Important Gateway to Long-Term Gospel Advancement in the Northeast*

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"Isn't Rhode Island off the coast of New York?" More than a few have said similar words. How can a PCA church plant in the southern part of "Little Rhody" be a significant influence for anything, let alone "long-term gospel advancement in the Northeast"? We will outline the reasons for you in this proposal letter.



The state motto for Rhode Island is "Hope." Originally, the full motto was "Hope in Christ," and the flag pointed RI'ers to Jesus as the "sure and steadfast anchor" of the soul (Hebrews 6:19). Our vision is to bring Gospel hope to RI's southern community and state university through a Gospel-centered church planting movement.

Trinity Presbyterian's Southern RI Church Plant exists to glorify God and extend the fame of His Son's saving name by continuing a church planting movement that is faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission

## The Community and the Need

South Kingstown is the anchor town for the Southern Rhode Island church plant, from where we desire to bring the gospel to the surrounding region. The town of South Kingstown, in the New England tradition, is made up of several "villages" – including Kingston, Wakefield, West Kingston, and Peace Dale. Kingston village is the university section of the town, hosting the University of Rhode Island. Wakefield includes the business district, which has a number of small shops and family-run restaurants along with a classic Main Street. West Kingston is a more rural village where a number of developments for up-and-coming young families have sprung up in recent years. And Peace Dale is an old mill village, hosting the town's bustling recreation center which draws a multitude of young families from the larger community.

### Why Southern Rhode Island?

#### **1) Southern Rhode Island is a substantially growing region**

Our area of focus, known to locals as "South County," has over 90,000 residents, which represents a 36 % increase since 1980. A headline from the March 30, 2001 edition of *The Providence Journal* notes the "South County Boom" as a Rhode Island highlight from the 2000 Census. An April 1, 2001 feature article titled, "Instant Neighborhood," examines a newer South Kingstown development called Watson Farm as typical of area growth. Young families there indicate why they choose this neighborhood: they enjoy a sense of community, a less congested setting, and view it as a

safe area for their kids. *Money* magazine's April 2001 issue listed South County as among the 12 best vacation spots in North America. *The Providence Journal* picked up on that and ran an April 11, 2001 front page article titled, "The Hot Spot: South County." *We believe Southern Rhode Island is strategic for a Gospel-centered church plant simply because it is where people want to be, and thus is a "cross-roads of influence" in New England.*

## **2) Southern Rhode Island is a strategically located region.**

The region has considerable "life-style diversity." Percept, a company that analyzes demographic trends, categorizes some 50 distinct U.S. lifestyles. 33 of these are represented in South County, including those described as "established country families," "prosperous new country families," "educated mid-life families," "reliable young starters," etc. The area, reflecting the presence of the University, is highly educated. College graduates in the area are 47.3% above the national average. Post graduate degrees are 86% above the national average. There is also a mixture of affluence and classic middle America – both categories substantially above the national average. There is remarkable family stability in the area – "married with children" families are 9% above the national average while "divorced or widowed" are 22% below the national average.

Additionally, the University of Rhode Island is located in South Kingstown. Here are some facts about URI:

- over 11,000 undergraduate students
- over 3,200 graduate students
- of all URI students who are U.S. citizens, 68 % are Rhode Islanders
  - when you add MA and CT, Southern New Englanders comprise 82 % of the U.S. student body
  - when you add New York, New Jersey, and Northern New England, Northeasterners comprise 98 % of the U.S. student body

*We believe that Southern Rhode Island is strategic for a church plant because of the presence of the University. A Gospel-driven URI campus ministry (i.e.,*

*the PCA's Reformed University Fellowship), anchored in a stable family-based church, can significantly impact the future of Rhode Island, New England, and the Northeast for the kingdom of God, as students have a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ, and their lives are re-oriented to His service in every area of life. And so we are convinced that the establishment of RUF ministries among State Universities in the Northeast may well be the means God uses for long term Gospel-advancement in this area of the country.*

More vital facts about URI:

- among the 375 international students, 59 countries are represented
  - 24 % of these from China
  - 16 % from India
  - 11 % from Germany

*And so we also believe that Southern Rhode Island is strategic for a church plant because of the all-nations opportunity for the Gospel at URI.*

## **3) Southern Rhode Island needs the Gospel!**

Like New England at large, Southern Rhode Island is substantially *under represented* by Gospel-preaching churches. *Especially* sparse is the witness to the Gospel of God's sovereign grace (i.e., via reformed churches).

Where are South County households in terms of religious involvement?

- **40 %** are ***not involved with their faith***
- **32 %** would describe themselves as ***somewhat involved with their faith***
- **25 %** would likely have a ***decreased involvement with their faith in the last 10 years***
- **38 %** would indicate their religious preference as ***Roman Catholic***

Where are South County residents in terms of their primary concerns compared to the rest of the nation?

- **hopes and dreams** – defined as "longer term quality of life issues," related to finances, career, and relationships: **11 %** above the national average. Specifically,

- **31 %** of South County households have the challenge of ***finding time for recreation / leisure***
- **22 %** are concerned with ***finding retirement opportunities***
- **16 %** with ***developing parenting skills***
- **personal and spiritual** – defined as personal concerns of a “searching” group where people are dealing with change, loneliness, stress and finding direction: **7 % below** the national average.
  - However, one category, ***finding life direction*** describes **16 %** of South County households, much higher than the national average.

## THE RESPONSE OF THE GOSPEL

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism's* famous first question and answer declares: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” We believe that as human beings, we are designed to “live for” and to “delight in” our Creator. However, since the Fall and the brokenness introduced by sin, we “live for” and “delight in” other things. And so we desire to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of Southern Rhode Island, that through Him they would find forgiveness of sins and restoration to their original purpose – to live for and delight in the living God in every area of life.

- We desire to see the people of South County transformed from living for and delighting in material affluence to living for and delighting in the Triune God of grace – who offers incomparable spiritual riches in Christ and the living waters of His Spirit to quench their thirsting souls.
- We desire to see the people of South County transformed from living for and delighting in vocational and academic status to living for and delighting in Jesus Christ and the freedom He brings – through Whom their reputations and status are forever secured before their Maker, and to Whose glory they might pursue their important callings in this world.
- We desire to see the people of South County transformed from living for and delighting in family comforts and accomplishments to living for and delighting in the God of the covenant – Whose design for the family is restored in Christ, and reflected in the community of the church.

## OUR CORE VALUES FROM EPHESIANS

“And [the Father] put all things under [Christ’s] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. . . to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Eph 1:22-23 / 3:21

### The Gospel Privileges of the Church

We delight in our privileges to

***Joyfully worship God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*** for all the benefits of the Gospel — to the praise of His glorious grace (1:3-14 / 3:20-21)

***Faithfully declare the gospel*** of God’s initiating grace that renews, saves, reconciles, and enriches us in Christ ***to ourselves and to our community*** (2:1-22 / 3:1-13)

***Continually grow in our knowledge and love*** in response to the matchless grace of the Gospel (1:15-23 / 3:14-19)

### The Gospel Duties of the Church

We delight in our duties to

***Diligently pursue the unity, peace, and maturity of the church*** in our doctrine, relationships, and service of Christ and one another in the power of the Holy Spirit (4:1-16)

***Authentically demonstrate the transforming power of the Gospel to our community*** in Spirit-filled lives of increasing love, gratitude, purity and honesty – as individuals, families, and in our callings – through our words and our deeds (4:17-6:9)

***Strategically advance the Gospel*** through the spiritual weapons of proclamation, prayer, and perseverance so that God’s kingdom of grace is extended into our lives, the lives of our neighbors, and the lives of those in the surrounding region (6:10-24)

## CHURCH PLANTER PROFILE

Tony and Donna Phelps have been a part of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Providence, RI since 1997. When they joined, Trinity was a mission church – a new center-city church plant led by Pastor Mel Sensenig. From the start, Mel cast a vision for a church planting movement in RI and Southern New England. Tony and Donna caught this vision. Both are graduates from the University of Rhode Island, and painfully aware of the lack of Gospel witness in that region. And so Tony and Donna have a uniquely personal and deep passion for the advance of the Gospel in Southern Rhode Island – and to continue to extend this church planting movement in New England and the Northeast.

To pursue this passion, Tony left a career in the insurance industry and completed seminary studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He completed a church-planting internship at Trinity, which included outreach, small group ministries, and the cultivation of a launch team for the church plant. He was ordained as an Associate Pastor of Church Planting at Trinity in March of 2003.

Tony and Donna have two children: Emily and Benjamin.

## YOUR OPPORTUNITY FOR INVOLVEMENT

### *Prayer*

Church planting is an impossible task – apart from the Spirit of the exalted Christ who promises to build His Church. Would you join us in asking the Lord of the harvest to use us as His laborers in this important harvest field? We will provide regular prayer updates via email or regular mail.

### *The Financial Need*

New England is an expensive place to raise a family and to plant a church! Housing expenses are significant as are the costs associated with starting a church. Our desire, as the church grows, is to be a future funding source for other church plants in New England, the larger Northeastern region, and to the ends of the earth. ■

### Psalm 67

<sup>1</sup> May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah*

<sup>2</sup> that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.

<sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

<sup>4</sup> Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah*

<sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!

<sup>6</sup> The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us.

<sup>7</sup> God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him!

### PARTNERSHIP FUNDS TO COMPLETE THIS PROJECT

\$ 49,000 -- Year One

\$ 31,000 -- Year Two

\$ 26,000 -- Year Three

\$ 106,000 – Total

This is the total of all giving needed for the Southern Rhode Island church plant, in addition to giving by the new congregation, and the support of Trinity Presbyterian and our presbytery. Please prayerfully consider whether you can join as a partner with us in this challenging privilege of gospel advancement in the Northeast.

For those who are able, a gift of \$25,000 would help to underwrite worship space for three years. Four gifts of \$10,000 each would underwrite the cost of office / study center space for three years.

Response information:

Please make checks payable to *Mission to North America*. Indicate in memo section "Southern RI Project (Phelps)."  
Please mail to:

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