

# Report of the Mission Study Team

*Spring 2007*

*“Transforming our individual journeys into a pilgrimage of high joy and deep purpose”*

**Mission Statement—First Presbyterian Church, Mendham, New Jersey:**

*The purpose of the First Presbyterian Church is to acknowledge and proclaim the presence and power of God and to continue the work of Jesus Christ by loving God, God's world, each other and ourselves. We are committed to the growth of faith, the spreading of the good news, and the mission of caring for those near and far. We fulfill these commitments through prayers, study, sharing, teaching and serving.*

# Contents

	<u>Pages</u>
Report Summary	3 - 6
<b><u>Updated Report</u></b>	
Assignment Overview	7
Committee Structure	7
Process	7 - 10
Key Findings	10
Core Strengths	11
Overview of the Challenges	11
The Common Theme	12
Challenge Area and Action Steps	16 - 24
Conclusion	25
Summary of Desired Characteristics of the New Pastor	28
Proposed Action Steps to Address the Challenges for Hilltop Church Identified by the Mission Study Report	33
Community Context	36

## *Report Overview*

### **Process:**

Guided by the objectives set forth by the Mission Study Organizing Committee, The Mission Study Team oversaw a year-long series of investigative programs to help determine the needs and wants of our congregation, coupled with our insights on what God's needs and wants for our congregation might be.

Programs and workshops included the quantitative US Congregations Survey as well as a number of group exercises lead by Rev. Patricia Hayes of Alban Institute, contracted by Session in March 2004.

The Mission Study Team met in 10 sessions to review and analyze all material, as well as study relevant Scripture and join in prayer.

Subsequent to the retirement of Pastor Harris in July of 2006, this Mission Study was reviewed in detail, with a new focus on the desired characteristics of the new pastor. A series of 7 small group meetings were held to obtain input from members of the congregation regarding the desired traits, background training and experience to be successful at our church. The Long-Range Planning Committee prepared an outline of specific work steps that could be undertaken regarding each of the challenges identified in this report, and the section Community Context was prepared. The Mission Study Report was updated Spring of 2007.

### **Key Observations**

- As a congregation – we care about that which is most important - our belief in God and our desire to serve Him, to praise Him and pursue spiritual growth together.
- There are consistencies around issues we need to address, yet the issues are not considered highly divisive nor do they pose risk.
- The profile of our Church and our community has remained fairly consistent in recent years – we are considered a mid-size community church, deep in programs. We are at the high end on affluence, educational levels, etc.
- Mirroring our community and our times, we find it difficult to attract and serve young adult members, in the 25 to 34-year age bracket. We see that younger families are also stretched by youth sports and other organized activities.
- Mirroring the community, we serve three major constituencies – youth, families and mature/senior members. *The struggle to serve young families and the pressures of competing activities that pull young families away from the church may have increased.*
- We seek to retain the “traditional” aspects of the “church experience”, yet there are those who are looking for even more contemporary influence.
- Some members of the congregation think that our church should work to become more effective to greet, and subsequently engage, visitors or newcomers.
- We are very strong in areas such as youth programs, music, mission and our generosity inside and outside the Church.

### **The core strengths:**

- We place great importance on nurturing the Christian development of our youth
- We have an extremely vibrant music program at all levels.
- Our facilities are excellent - Our Church on the hill is a physical beacon for God's love in the community.

- We place great emphasis on our range and depth of programs – including Christian Education.
- We are seekers - continually looking to nurture our spiritual growth.

## **Key Challenges**

Based on findings of all the research we conducted, there are six primary areas identified as “Key Challenges” for this congregation. While the focus of the Committee was to identify the challenges, we have included specific recommendations for short and long term actions we can take, based in many cases on input from the Congregation.

### **Challenge #1 – Growth in Spirituality**

What can we do to address our congregation's desire and God’s desire for us to deepen our spiritual lives and become His disciples?

- Continue to offer a range of Christian Ed programs, making them even more accessible to church constituencies on a time and content basis.
- Use fellowship to create more awareness of spiritual opportunities and an aura of togetherness within those activities.
- Continue to nurture the strength of our music programs as way to celebrate our faith.

#### **Sample Tactical Approaches**

- Conduct more ad hoc worship services based on timely/topical Spiritual needs.
- Restore “Year of the Bible” to provide study focus and spiritual fellowship.
- Learn about nurturing spirituality by worshiping and interacting with other congregations.
- Add Entry-level “Christian Ed 101” programs.

### **Challenge #2 Fellowship**

How do we answer the Congregation’s desire for a stronger sense of belonging? Can we use fellowship as a means tighten the bonds?

- Restore Fellowship as a high priority for the Church.
- Consider building even more fellowship activities that attract participation based on the common interests of major constituencies - youth, couples with young children, etc.
- Increase the "fun level" by staging events such as "Auction Night", circus trips and other onsite and offsite activities.

#### **Sample Tactical Approaches**

- Form and fund the Fellowship Committee.
- Major quarterly, church-wide social.
- Involve the community in our fellowship events.
- Consider off-site family events such as trips to circus, museums, sporting events.
- Large-scale Mission trip taking youth and adults together.
- Plan a church-wide retreat for 2006.

### **Challenge #3: Welcoming and Assimilation of Members**

How to do a better job of welcoming and assimilation of new members? How do we re-engage with inactive members? How do we “tend our flock”?

- Use of “low-pressure/hard-to-say-no-to" Fellowship events.

- Over-communicate with new members and best prospects for re-assimilation. Personal and led with fellowship or worship opportunities.

### **Sample Tactical Approaches**

- Reinvigorate the Welcoming Committee for newcomers.
- Develop system to identify and preempt loss of “at-risk” members. Pastors should look for ways to offer recognition of newcomers in worship or other venues.
- Call and write the newcomers after first visit.
- Identify new Sunday School participants and develop similar welcoming approaches.
- Extending this period and deepening the devotional experience as a prelude to membership.

### **Challenge #4: Leadership**

How do we expand our leadership ranks? How do we prevent “burnout”? How to improve leadership?

- Improve how we identify the potential within the congregation by leveraging fellowship and shared spiritual experiences.
- Identify more "doers" and assign tasks to them - tapping this reservoir of talent will allow our leaders more of a chance to lead and direct - an explicit need pointed out in Mission Study exercises.

### **Sample Tactical Approaches**

- Establish a Recruitment Committee at Session Level to match skills to tasks.
- Develop a clear plan of succession for current leadership.
- Develop a clear plan of succession – committee work – to apprenticing to leadership.
- Increase familiarity of the role of each leadership body in the church. Many people called for Leadership positions are unfamiliar with what the various groups do.
- Use our full array of resources, including the power of prayer to create more awareness for the “Theology of Service.”
- Build much stronger training programs for new Elders and Deacons.

### **Challenge #5: Worship**

How do we continue to grow by offering worship and praise experiences that account for the varying preferences within the congregation?

- Continue to look at refinements in our approaches, rather than major shifts.
- Respect our desire for tradition, yet have the confidence to experiment with new approaches.
- Offer solutions for those looking for a "dynamic" and "higher energy" worship experience.

### **Sample Tactical Approaches**

- Exchange Sunday worship visits with a “sister congregation” to learn more about what makes for a rich worship experience.
- Consider techniques for more “dynamic” preaching with tangible examples.
- Engage our children/youth more in the 20 minutes they’re in Church.

- Explore more music variety.
- Experiment with alternative days for contemporary worship to accommodate weekend conflicts
- Experiment with moving the contemporary service to the sanctuary.

### **Challenge #6 – Financial/Stewardship**

How can we financially support all the programs we desire, including Mission in the face of less than required Stewardship yield?

#### **Sample Tactical Approaches**

- Develop a life stage approach to stewardship appeals - make the pitch more relevant.
- Continue to nurture processes to encourage “special gifts” such as endowments, gifts of stock, real estate, etc. We need to make people more aware of this.
- Continue to explore the motivations for pledge levels. Develop ways to test the hypothesis that if we successfully address our key challenges, including long term planning - that financial commitments will increase.

#### **Fellowship as a pivot point**

A key point made throughout this report is that enhancements in fellowship have the potential to drive improvements in all areas. Developing a greater sense of belonging, understanding, compassion, openness and love for one another through fellowship will help us to easily cross the generational and lifestyle gaps within the church, or strengthen the bonds among like groups. *In 2007, there is evidence that Fellowship has strengthened, (measured by the number of events and participants). This is encouraging, because Fellowship was identified as a main objective in 2005; however, there is continued interest in providing a time for Fellowship between services on Sunday morning.* Ultimately, becoming a stronger Church family will allow God’s energy to flow strong through all that we do and allow us to fulfill the Mission Statement as a pilgrimage.

#### **Is this a report? A plan? Next Steps**

This is a **report** profiling our congregation, our community and current lifestyle trends impacting our Church. The report identifies issues of importance to them. The findings will be communicated to the congregation in a very clear, concise way. We also recommend going back to the congregation to track changes in attitudes along the key challenge areas uncovered.

While the report does include implications and approaches we might take to address the challenges - it is not a **plan** per se. As the charter pointed out - it is a critical tool in the planning process, another touchstone to help us fulfill our mission statement. A next step is the development of a more formal plan informed by the realities of our financial resources, understanding of our programs and through this report - an understanding of our congregation's needs.

To that end, the final recommendation of this task force is that Session develops a Long Range Planning team to author a plan and communicate that plan to the congregation. It’s also highly recommended that the plan be very visible, inclusive and approachable. We'll celebrate together as one under God as each milestone is met.

## **Final Report of the Mission Study Team**

### **The Assignment:**

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Elders Dave Pollock, Leslie Erickson and Jack Crouch, representing The Session Mission Study Organizing Committee met with the newly formed Mission Study Team to review expectations for the Mission Study chartered by Session.

Expectations for Mission Study Team included:

- Evaluate all that we do together – an evaluation process serving as rationale for making recommendations about what we should do in the future
- Use any and all tools available to collect and analyze congregational and leadership opinions.
- Focus on worship, mission, education and fellowship. The Mission Study team later agreed to add “outreach and evangelism” to its areas of focus.
- Develop a report capable of guiding staffing, committee structure/size, facility needs, program prioritization, budget priorities.
- Develop a report with theological focus to inform recommendations on our spiritual direction, building discipleship, and overall organization.
- Build the findings as a tool to bring us together to fulfill our Mission Statement, rather than redoing the Mission Statement.
- Identify and celebrate strengths, as well as identify weaknesses.
- Help us in: “Transforming the individual journeys into a pilgrimage of high joy and deep purpose”.

### **Committee Structure and Process**

#### **The Mission Study Committee**

Members recruited by the Mission Study Organizing Committee included Kathie Schumacher; Joe Remshifski; Harriet Muir; Liz Eberhart; Rhonda Buzbee, Brad Gano; Bill Emmitt, Rev. Bo Harris, Brian Haumersen (Chair)

#### **Hiring of Alban Institute**

With the prior approval of Session, The Committee, in its first regular meeting determined that the use of an outside consultant to facilitate the investigative portion of the study was advisable. After interviewing several consulting firms, it was decided that Alban Institute would be hired. Rev. Patricia Hayes of Alban Institute became our primary consultant. Estimated fees: \$5K

## **Process**

After reviewing processes other Mission Study Teams have followed to profile and evaluate congregational attitudes and needs, it was determined that the Committee would use the following information-gathering tactics in sequence:

### *1) US Congregational Life Survey*

On June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2004 the Mission Study Team administered a standardized, quantitative survey to the congregations participating in both the 9:30 traditional service as well as the 11:00 contemporary service. Participants = 109 (Versus our average Sunday attendance of 160). This is the same survey taken by hundreds of congregations across many denominations in the US and provided a comparative view of our congregation's attitudes on key metrics - demonstrating our strengths and revealing our thoughts on spiritual connections.

### *2) Leadership Workshop for Vision Process*

In a full day session on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2004, led by Rev. Hayes, members of Session and Deacons discussed wide-ranging issues impacting Hilltop Church, focusing on our gifts, our values and our identity. An important component of this workshop was a standardized survey known as Congressional Health Inventory.

### *3) History of Hilltop Workshop*

A three-hour, Saturday-morning session was held on September 26th open to all members of the congregation. This workshop, led by Rev. Hayes of Alban encouraged participants to recall the full 270-year history of Hilltop Church and apply history's lessons to the Church today. Approximately 40 members participated.

### *4) "Defining the Norms" at Hilltop - Workshop*

A Saturday morning session held on October 16th was open to all members of the congregation. The workshop was based on identifying the "norms and unwritten rules" at our church. The exercise, led by Rev. Patricia Hayes was intended to identify not only the perceived negative patterns we tend to see, but also the positive elements and actions we, as an entire Church might take to address issues. Approximately 35 people attended.

To allow participation by those who could not attend the Saturday session, a second session duplicating the initial workshop was held at Hilltop House the following Thursday evening, led by the Mission Study Team.

### *5) Small Group Interviews- Fall 2004;*

Using the existing series of "Parish Group" meetings, the Mission Study Team included germane discussion topics for all the groups. Each group, led by the usual Parish Group probed three questions:

- If our congregation did \_\_\_\_\_, I'd ask my friends to come
- The things that concern me about the Congregation are \_\_\_\_\_
- What was happening the last time you really felt we were doing God's will?



Results were recorded by Parish Group leaders and submitted to Mission Study Team.

#### *6) Demographic Trending*

To help provide more contexts on some of the areas uncovered in surveys and workshops, and draw comparisons to previous studies - The Mission Study Team secured most-current demographic data for our church “trading area” - the area surrounding Hilltop from which we draw our congregation. Data included population growth, make-up of households, economic factors such as employment type and incomes and ethnicity.

To confirm assumptions about our “trading area” we asked the congregation to identify their residence on an area map.

#### *7) Community Leader Interviews*

Members of the Mission Study Team interviewed key community leaders to help balance our internal view of the Church and our communities with those of elected officials, educators and local business people. Four interviews were conducted. Demographically – those interviewed agreed that the local population appears to be “getting younger”. Ideas for involvement in the community included: Participating in the Borough’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2006 (E.G: A night of music at Hilltop). 2, Joining with the Council on Affordable Housing to “rehab” a home in Mendham. 3. Helping the Recreation Comm. with a possible Friday night coffee house for high school kids. 4. Finding a way to share community events with seniors via videotape. 5. Parenting classes made available to local schools.

#### *8) Key Directions Workshop*

A six-hour workshop was led by Rev. Hayes on November 13 to review data compiled to date and again probe Session and Deacons on priorities given the results of Mission Study work to date. The workshop yielded a list of 14 action areas that can help "bring the congregation closer to the health and wholeness God wishes for us" (Rev. Hayes)

#### *9) Reaching out to the non-responders*

The Team estimates that through this entire process of meetings and surveys, we have heard directly from less than half of the membership. In an attempt to understand better what’s on the mind of those we don’t see or hear from regularly, a one-question survey was mailed and e-mailed to a list of people we identified as non-participants or infrequent participants. “If Hilltop did this: \_\_\_\_\_, I’d participate.” Out of 85 members contacted, we did not receive a single response.

#### *10) Use of Other Data available*

Members of the Mission Study Team also used other data to help understand trends. Historical data and previous Mission Study reports, compiled for the committee by Elder Jack Crouch, included:

- Previous Mission Studies (1995)
- Previous Church Information Forms (1995, 2001)

- Attendance and Stewardship Trends
- Previous Demographic Studies
- Miscellaneous Reports on Long Range planning, staffing, etc.

### *11) Update of the Mission Study and Search for a New Pastor*

In 2004, it was clear that the church would be searching for a new pastor beginning some time in the next two years; however, Pastor Harris had not given an indication of the point in time that he would elect to retire. This Mission Study was undertaken to satisfy the dual purpose of: a) an overall evaluation of the work of the church, and b) to be prepared for the time that it became necessary to search for a new pastor. Following Pastor Harris' retirement in July 2006, the session contracted with our Interim Pastor, Diane Curtis, in the fall of 2006 and initiated the work to update the Mission Study (completed in the spring of 2007). The committee worked to insure that this document was both consistent with the data collected in 2005 and that it accurately reflects the work of the church in 2007. This Mission Study Report was expanded for use by the Pastor Nominating Committee that will be elected by the congregation in 2007.

### **Project Timeline**

- The Mission Study Team accepted the Charter on 3/24/04
- Alban hired 4/1
- Information gathering from 5/18 to 12/04
- Reviewed and accepted by Session – March 2005
- Distributed to the Congregation – April 2005
- Update – Spring 2007

### **Key Findings**

#### **God has blessed us.**

Through every phase of interaction with the congregation, it has been clear that we recognize that God has blessed this congregation since our first worship service in 1738. In virtually every exercise, core strengths of our church were talked about, celebrated and given thanks for in prayer.

Further, the findings suggest that we are not dealing with issues that are so deep or so erosive that it endangers us – rather, they appear cyclical in the life of normal congregations. In many cases, our strengths and weaknesses are predictable when looking at data from U.S. Congregational Life Survey and when we layer-in the demographics and lifestyle of our area, and the times in which we live.

In short, we appear to be at a point where we need to make adjustments rather than wholesale changes in our approach to fulfilling the Mission Statement we have crafted, and our approach to fulfilling God's own mission statement for us as individuals and as a Church.

#### **Who are we?**

- We're a mid-size church with an average of about 200 in worship each Sunday, and about 100 others occasionally attending to non-participants.

- We're a community church – most of us live within 10 minutes.
- We're blessed with a strong base of older retirees who provide core Church leadership and financial support.
- We are a program-focused church with professional staffing allocations to handle program load.
- We're blessed with far-above average affluence and high levels of education.
- As a result – our expectations are high for performance in all areas. Many in the congregation are leaders and decision-makers in their present or past professional lives. We tend to be more competitive in nature. Our expectations for leaders are high.
- We are very active in Mission – exceeding national norms for both through Church-led programs and non-church mission programs.
- We seek intellectual stimulation as well as spiritual growth.
- We value the history and traditions of this church in this community.
- We tend to be more reserved in our approach to evangelism and tend to be traditional in our approaches to worship.
- We are “active-communicators” - in frequent contact with our friends and the world of information around us. We are comfortable with communications technology.
- Because we are “doers” we are stretched for time at every level – soccer, baseball, homework, school boards, volunteer activities, business travel.
- We like to socialize with our friends – our best friends may well be outside the Church.

**Abbreviations Used in the Following Sections:**

USCLS – US Congregational Life Survey; CHI – Congregational Health Inventory; UN – Unwritten Workshop; HH – Hilltop History Workshop; LW – Leadership Workshop; KDW – Key Directions Workshop; PG – Parish Groups

**The core strengths:**

Across all studies, the following trends in response were evident. These are strengths *valued by the congregation* spanning Worship, Fellowship, Education and Mission. We should invest our time, financial resources and prayers to maintain them. At the same time - we must leverage these strengths to address our challenges.

- We place great importance on nurturing the Christian development of our youth through Sunday School and music programs. (USCLS, LVW, UN, HH, KDW, PG's)
- We have an extremely vibrant music program at all levels. (USCLS, LVW, CHI, UN, HH, PG's, KDW)
- We maintain a strong sense of tradition and continuity in the community. (USCLS, LVW, UN, HH, PG's)
- Our facilities are excellent - Our Church on the hill is a physical beacon for God's love in the community. (LVW, UN, HH, PG's, KDW)
- Our congregation is generous with their time and money – allocated to a wide range of Church-sponsored mission. At the same time, more than most congregations - we are very active in non-church-sponsored mission – we are very community-focused (USCLS, LVW, UN, HH, PG's)

- We place great emphasis on our range and depth of programs – including Christian Education at all levels. (USCLS, LVW, UN, HH , PG's, KDW)
- We believe that Mission programs are important, have improved over the years and are strong. (KDW, LVW )
- We are seekers - continually looking to nurture our spiritual growth. (USCLS, LVW, UN, HH , PG's, KDW)

### **Our challenges:**

Similarly, the various studies uncovered areas of concern. These are barriers, making the fulfillment of our mission more challenging. Six areas emerged as key challenges.

1. There is a need for further developing our individual spiritual growth, (USCLS, LVW, CHI, UN, HH , PG's, KDW).
2. The sense of belonging and togetherness we want within the Church community is waning, (USCLS, LVW, CHI, UN, HH, PG's, KDW).
3. We readily acknowledge that we attract new members, but we're not particularly good at embracing them once they've joined. *Yet we agree that it's something God wants us to do*, (USCLS, LVW, CHI, UN, HH, PG's, KDW).
4. While our facilities are great, parking is not. We also lack fellowship areas in the church for pre or post service activities, (PG's, UN, KDW).
5. Our lay leadership is strong but burnout is happening. We also have a high percentage of leadership from the senior church population. These are both sources of attrition, (USCLS, LVW, CHI, HH, PG's, KDW).
6. Though strong on many fronts, the total experience of worship needs to contribute more toward growth in our spiritual lives as well as help us connect with each other, (USCLS, CHI, UN, HH, PG's, KDW).
7. There is concern about our approach to finances. Concern ranges from our perceived inability to fund the depth of programs we maintain to stewardship strategies. These concerns are present despite our relative affluence, (UN, PG's, KDW).

### **Other areas of importance:**

- Many in our congregation believe we lack direction and focus – of those that believe we have direction; only about half are excited about it, (USCLS, CHI, UN).
- The relationships and bonds between the pastor, leadership and the congregation are perceived to be in need of strengthening, (USCLS, CHI, PG's).
- We are not comfortable in sharing our faith in the community, (USCLS, CHI, UN, PG's,).
- Lack of parking may inhibit us, (PG's, KDW).

### **Seeing the common theme:**

In addition to results observed in the various Mission Study exercises over the course of nine months, The Mission Study *process*, in and of itself, has allowed us to see more clearly what God might want for us – to experience His grace to its fullest and to

accomplish all that He wants us to do – we need to grow closer together as a church community – indeed addressing a key goal in our mission statement. - Continue *the work* of Jesus Christ by loving God, God’s world, each other and ourselves.

And, to answer the challenges posed in the Committee charter; - examine “all that we do together” and “transforming individual journeys into a pilgrimage”.

From the beginning – we witnessed this at the committee level as the group of nine came together as the Mission Study Team. We are from varied backgrounds representing various unofficial “groups” within the Church. There were few entrenched friendships prior to the establishment of the committee. Yet quickly, through our work together and through prayer our skills became evident to each other. Our personalities were revealed. Responsibilities and tasks were accepted. We shared our feelings openly in prayerful moments and in the course of the regular committee discussions. We laughed together. Criticism was open and easily accepted.

That same effect was evident in the workshops and Parish Groups staged as part of this exercise. The empirical evidence gleaned in each exercise is critical to the planning process, but through the act of coming together from various spiritual and life stage compass points, new levels of interpersonal comfort among participants were created. Opening these doors allowed participants to more easily open the door to hear God’s word and allowed us to focus our thoughts on how we may serve to our fullest potential in Worship, Education, Mission, Fellowship and Outreach.

These two examples are microcosms of Hilltop as a whole. This observation is also consistent with national trends and with corollaries reported in the U.S, Congressional Life Survey. Whether it’s a group of nine, or a group of 200 – developing a greater sense of belonging, understanding, compassion, openness and love for one another through fellowship will allow God’s energy to flow strong through all that we do and allow us to fulfill the Mission Statement as a pilgrimage.

### **Applying the Theme:**

Operating on the premise that enhancements in fellowship have the potential to drive improvements in all areas – a model is suggested wherein Fellowship activities serve as the catalyst for refinements in Education, Mission and Worship. This is illustrated in Illustration #2.

As a system, improvements in those areas will in turn feed back into improvements in Fellowship. But the cycle needs to start somewhere.

To that end - A “**Fellowship First**” approach will:

- Develop bonds spanning the major church constituencies – “Mature”, “Young Adults”, “Boomers” and “Youth”. This means finding areas of common interest and delivering ways to bring them together – ultimately to the Glory of God. Using group observations some general hypotheses about generational trends, the concept is illustrated in Chart #2.
- Leverage the common interests that already exist on an individual or small-group basis to create new church friendships. The Sanctuary Choir is a perfect example of

how common interests have created a vibrant source of joy and togetherness – friendship united to praise God in music - fellowship that spans generations.

- Offer a doorway of friendship to our communities. Specifically - the communities within our church who we rarely hear from; the community of people in our towns who are looking for a spiritual home, and most importantly - the greater community of God, led by our examples of discipleship.



## Illustration #1

# Greater Fellowship Will Yields:

Openness and Candor

Trust

Communications

Sharing

Comfort

Fun

Respect

Numbers

## Which can help build on our existing strengths and address our challenges:

### Education

- Adults will engage in Christian Ed more readily when friendships and shared interests are present.
- Our Confirmation classes will be more apt to keep their church connections if they have bonded within and outside their class.
- Recruiting motivated teachers becomes simpler with familiarity
- Discerning the specific educational needs of the church become evident through an open church community.
- Education will lead to deeper spiritual searching/development as openness and trust progress through sharing

### Worship

- Friendship means clergy and the congregation will know better how to “connect” in worship thereby driving spiritual growth and narrowing a perceived gap between the pastor, leadership and the congregation
- Worshipping “together in togetherness” can be more satisfying than worshipping in isolation – potentially driving a greater sense of awe, praise and inspiration.
- The joy of our friendships and togetherness will shine through to those who visit us – looking for a Church home – we will welcome them into our house, and have activities for them to participate in so they’re not “lost”. Rather, they become fully assimilated into our Church Family.
- Who knows? We might even clap after a great hymn or a dynamic, strong sermon.

### Mission and Outreach

- Mission activities will be supported even more strongly when friends engage friends, or when larger groups take on Mission responsibilities (e.g.: Soup Kitchen)
- Groups of “church friends” are more apt to engage in community mission than individuals, thereby making it easier and more likely that our faith in God can be shared openly in outreach and evangelism.
- Community Fellowship in traditional and non-traditional events allow us to share our faith and praise with other church congregations in the community, and attract those looking for affiliations.
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## Which will help us fulfill our mission:

*Continue the work of Jesus Christ by loving God, God’s world, each other and ourselves*

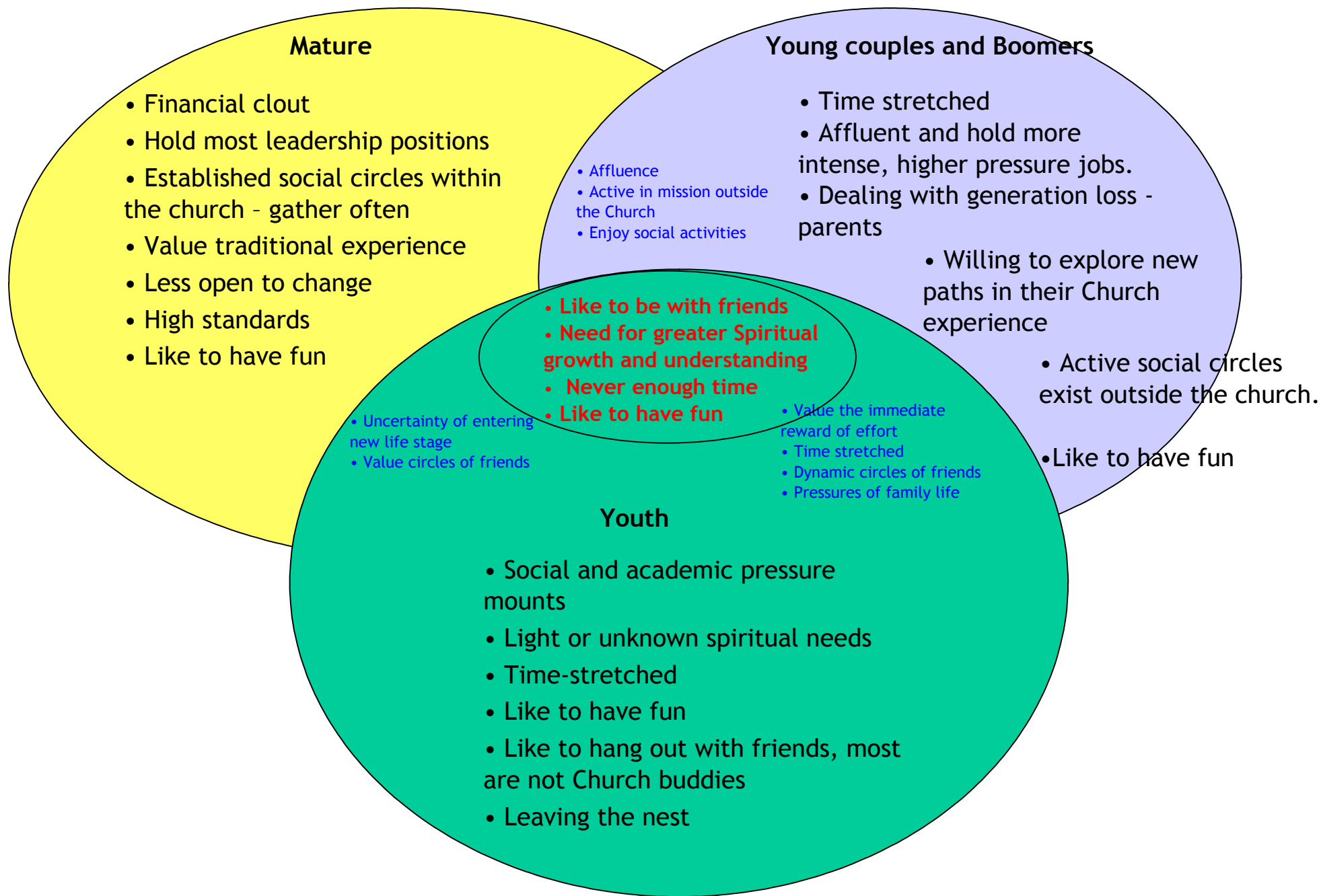
*Commit to the growth of faith*

*Acknowledge and proclaim the presence and power of God*

*Spreading the good news*

*Caring for those near and far*

Illustration #2 - Congregations within the Congregation - Finding commonality for fellowship. This is included only as an interpretation of what we heard in group exercises, and the basic understandings of "life stages". It may help guide certain Fellowship approaches.





## Leveraging our Strengths and Enhancing Fellowship to Address our Challenges

Using the combined findings of all exercises and data as well as the recommendations that emerged in the final Leadership "Key Directions Workshop" - a list of our key challenges was developed. - The way in which we address these challenges link back to our core strengths as a congregation, and the premise that enhancement in Fellowship will help us in almost every challenge area. Our core strengths are indicated by underlines

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### **Challenge #1: Spirituality. What can we do to address our congregation's desire and God's desire for us to deepen our spiritual lives and become His disciples?**

“...Let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts. And you will always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
*Ephesians 5:19-20*

#### **The Approach:**

Use fellowship to fully open inspirational “channels” between clergy, leadership and the congregation. Open channels will allow God’s praise to flow unimpeded and provide an opportunity for people to share deeper spiritual needs.

Use fellowship to create more awareness of spiritual opportunities and an aura of togetherness within those activities.

Leverage the strength of Christian Education (CE) - Continue to offer a range of CE programs, making them even more accessible to church constituencies. Consider tailoring content on a life stage basis. Realize that some programs need to be accessible on a time basis (i.e. it’s impossible to get younger parents on weekends) and, make them accessible on a content basis - Many felt that programs can be "too advanced". We may need more entry-level, Christianity 101 programs. It's the "Windows for Dummies" phenomenon.

Leverage our comfort level with technology - Can we help receive God's word and grow together spiritually through the use of the Web as a way to learn and communicate? It's not incongruent with fellowship.

Continue to nurture the strength of our music programs - Our faith is celebrated and renewed through music, yet music tastes vary. We need to continue to provide opportunities for musical expression and enjoyment in every service, and not establish inflexible music definitions for each service. That will only broaden the gaps on our congregation. As many parish group participants said, we need to "loosen up" a little in worship. Music is part of that equation.

#### **Near-term (Within 12 months) implications for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- Worship - Conduct more ad hoc worship services based on timely Spiritual needs.  
Cost: TBD

- Worship/Christian Ed/Pastor – Revive or spin off “Year of the Bible” to provide study focus and spiritual fellowship. Cost: \$0
- Pastor/Deacons/Session: Develop methods of measuring the level of “unmet spiritual needs” in the congregation. How will we know if we’re improving? Cost: \$0
- Worship/Fellowship - Learn about nurturing spirituality by hanging out with other congregations. Cost: \$0
- Christian Ed – Add Entry-level Christian Ed 101 programs – Cost: TBD
- Worship/Fellowship – Host inspirational speakers, perhaps linked to our congregation’s “life stage” issues. Cost: TBD
- Communications - Provide “menus” of existing spiritual growth opportunities, communicated often and simply to congregation. Cost: \$0
- Christian Growth - Organize Hilltop House library and web resources around personal life stage needs. Cost: \$0
- Consider study of the “Spiritual Classics” such as John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Cost: \$0
- Continue successful and high potential programs such as Alpha and Bible Study Groups and Parish Groups. Consider more focus on sharing and personal testimony. Cost: \$0

**Longer-term implications (12 months plus) for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- Christian Growth/Pastors/All - Develop a “Culture of Discipleship” within Hilltop – creating both awareness for Scripture’s lessons and opportunities to express Discipleship in action. Cost: TBD
- Plan a “Spiritual Life Conference” for Winter 2006. Cost: \$1,000
- Develop alternative time periods for sharing the good news – Sunday mornings are tough for many.



**Challenge #2: How do we answer the Congregation’s desire for stronger sense of belonging? Can we use fellowship as a means tighten the bonds?**

“Now all of us, both Jews and Gentiles, may come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us. So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. We are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We who believe are carefully joined together, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.”  
*Ephesians 2:18-22*

**The Approach:**

Restore Fellowship as a high priority for the Church based on its ultimate function in the process.

Consider building even more fellowship activities that attract participation based on common interests rather than geographic proximity or "parishes". - EG: More activities aimed at "soccer parents". If youth sports is deemed responsible for negatively impacting Church participation - turn that interest into a way to attract participation within the congregation, and from our community. How? Show World Cup games widescreen in Fellowship Hall. Sponsor clinics for our young players. Run parent/child games. Use the strength of our outstanding facility.

The same logic applies to other large, yet "unconnected" interest groups within the congregation - parents of high school students, readers, car nuts, travelers, personal investors, teens. Even shut-ins have common interests. The pastor at Hillside Lutheran, a former or present weight lifter, offers a class for teens called True Strength – combining weight lifting with teaching that Jesus is their true strength.

Do things that are FUN! (Many people in the study reported that they think we're too stiff and longed for more activities such as "Auction Night", circus trips and other onsite and offsite activities. Let's not compete with outside interests - let's find a way to be more in tune with them.

Ultimately – we'll find that our congregation spends more than an hour of their week with us.

### **Near-term (Within 12 months) implications for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- Form and fund the Fellowship Committee. Cost: TBD
- Fellowship - Pre-church congregational pancake breakfasts. Cost: \$0
- Ushers/Greeters – Work for 100% name tag use. Cost: \$0
- Fellowship - Major quarterly, church-wide social. Cost: \$0
- Fellowship - Involve the community in our fellowship events. Cost \$0
- Fellowship/Worship - More "religious entertainment". Cost TBD
- Fellowship/Mission - Discussion groups led by known topic leaders - such as alcohol and drug awareness.
- Fellowship - Create events by areas of targeted interest. Attendance may be lower, but perhaps more intense.
- Fellowship – Consider off-site family events such as trips to circus, museums, sporting events.
- Fellowship/Building and Grounds - Wide screen Super bowl Sunday (or similar broadcast entertainment event) in Fellowship Hall for whole community
- Fellowship: Reexamine Parish Group construct, perhaps rebuild based on interest/life stage basis versus housing proximity
- Fellowship/Mission – Take a bus trip to visit our mission-supported agencies in Newark.

### **Longer-term implications (12 months plus) for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- Expanded fellowship areas (Perhaps expanding the Fletcher Room and/or Choir Room

- Plan a church-wide retreat for 2006. Cost: \$500
- Large-scale Mission trip taking youth and adults together. Cost TBD
- Think about buying a bus. Cost ? (Perhaps shared cost with Mendham Interchurch)

**Challenge #3: How to do a better job of welcoming and assimilation of new members? How do we re-engage with inactive members? How do we “tend our flock? Members? How do we re-engage with inactive members? How do we “tend our flock”?**

“Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example. And when the head Shepherd comes, your reward will be a never-ending share in his glory and honor.”

*1 Peter 5:2-4*

**The Approach:**

We saw clearly in the "Unwritten Norms", that participants consider this what we want to do, and "What God would want us to do"). To accomplish this - Use “low-pressure/hard-to-say-no-to” fellowship tactics as a way to introduce inquirers to the Church and our members.

Over-communicate with new members and best prospects for re-assimilation. Personal engagement and welcome led with fellowship or worship opportunities rather than committee assignments. .

**Near-term (Within 12 months) implications for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes:**

- Reinvigorate the Welcoming Committee for newcomers. Cost: TBD
- New Member/Outreach Committees - Introduce Church Leaders at New Members Dinner. Cost: \$0
- New Member/Outreach Committees - Introduce system to identify and preempt loss of “at-risk” members. Cost: Modest
- Fellowship: If we find we’ve attracted a larger group of members of similar age, interest, or lifestyle – build fellowship activity around that type of member. Cost: TBD.
- Pastors – Look at ways to offer recognition of newcomers in worship or other venues. Cost: \$0
- Call and write the newcomers after first visit. Cost: Modest
- Better solution for spotty name tag participation. Cost: TBD
- Christian Ed/Fellowship – Identify new Sunday School participants and develop similar methods of welcoming them (and in turn, their families) Cost: \$0

### **Longer-term implications (12 months plus) for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- Studies show that longer periods of “pre-membership” yield members more likely to be fully engaged in the Church. Our pre-membership period is short in comparison. – We should look at the benefits of extending this period and deepening the devotional experience as a prelude to membership.

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### **Challenge #4: How do we identify and attract our Leaders? How do we expand our leadership ranks? How do we prevent “burnout?”**

But among you it should be quite different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must become your slave. For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many."  
*Matthew 20:26–28*

#### **The Approach:**

It was recognized in many exercises that we are experiencing burnout within the leadership ranks. And, our leadership also tends to come more from the senior population of the Church. Ironically, in a community and a Church known for its leaders in the business world - we find ourselves needing ways to continually attract new people. Recruiting leaders requires familiarity with people's interests, talents and motivations. This can be accomplished via impersonal surveys of interests and traditional interview processes borrowed from the business world. However - we'd rather be identifying the potential within the congregation based on really knowing the people we want to move into leadership. We'll know them because we've worshipped together, had a meal together, or watched a kid's game together. Again - the core benefits of Fellowship will allow us to better see who our next leaders will be. And, that Fellowship will in turn help those leaders raise their hand even before asked. Leadership should evolve to the point where people are asking us to serve, not vice versa. The servants become the leaders.

Fellowship may also allow us to identify more "doers" - People who are willing to share their time and talent to put plans into effect. Members responded, through Parish Group input, that they consider their time to be an important, yet often unrecognized gift to the Church. Tapping this reservoir of talent will allow our leaders more of a chance to lead and direct - an explicit need pointed out in Mission Study exercises.

### **Near-term (Within 12 months) implications for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes:**

- Session - Establish a Recruitment Committee at Session Level to match skills to tasks.
- Recruitment Committee - Through our successful youth programs - begin to identify and nurture the next generation of leaders. Hopefully other congregations are doing same for us.

- Recruitment Committee - Develop a clear plan of succession – committee work – to apprenticing to leadership
- Recruitment Committee - Monitor for burnout, preempt loss
- Recruitment Committee - Focus on candidate first in committee roles, not immediate roles as leaders.
- All - Make more people aware of the role of each leadership body in the church. Many people called for Leadership positions are unfamiliar with what the various groups do.

**Longer-term implications (12 months plus) for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- All – led by Pastors - Use our full array of resources, including the power of prayer to create more awareness for the “Theology of Service”
- Recruitment Committee - Develop a clear plan of succession for current leadership
- Recruitment Committee - Develop training programs to help assimilate our new leaders
- All – Build much stronger training programs for new elders

**Staffing:**

Current Staffing: Based on what’s been observed the basic staffing structure in place is serving the needs well. There are no performance issues that are considered major hurdles. US Congregational Life Survey results suggest that tightening the bond between the pastors and the congregation will likely occur through actions recommended in this report. Some actions are the pastors’ responsibility. Others actions are leadership’s responsibility such as increasing the feeling of belonging through spiritual growth and fellowship, and developing and sharing a clear vision for our Church.

Future Considerations: If we modify or expand certain areas such as Fellowship, Christian Ed and Outreach, it will put pressure on the pastoral staff to help plan and cover. We need their leadership, participation and inspiration. Will we stretch them too thin? How can we best assign responsibility?

In terms of pastoral succession, the findings of this study will help inform the PNC process. More specific background findings can be used as needed.



**Challenge #5: Worship is a complex issue for any church. Preferences vary for style, content, even logistics such as times and dress codes. How do we continue to grow by offering worship and praise experiences that account for these preferences?**

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.  
*Psalm 29:2*

**The Approach:**

Through all the surveys and workshops -it is clear that as a congregation, we share a common expectation for our worship experience - to experience God's joy, wonder and

inspiration. The majority of the participants in this study experience this - but not to the degree they'd like. We fall well below averages for Presbyterian churches nationwide.

The study also demonstrated that while we are fairly homogeneous in demographic terms - when it comes to specific ways to improve the worship experience - we're quite different.

Music is viewed as a key component - yet our musical tastes for Sunday mornings vary - Traditional is preferred, yet there's a call for more contemporary music even among "9:30'ers".

Sermons, preaching and homilies are important to us. We expect motivation from the pastor. We value the traditional, yet in parish group feedback - the words "dynamic" and "higher energy" emerged often as a need, as well as messages using practical examples.

It's suggested that we continue to look at refinements in our approaches, rather than significant shifts. New ideas should be respectful of our deeply rooted value for tradition, yet cognizant of how our needs and tastes vary across the congregation. The Congregational Life Survey noted that less than half believe we're ready to try new things. We should have the confidence to experiment with new approaches.

### **Near-term (Within 12 months) implications for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- All – Remind ourselves often that worship is not simply an hour on Sunday mornings – that God calls us all to worship in our every action, every day of our lives.
- Pastor – Consider techniques for more “dynamic” preaching
- Pastor - Consider preaching with more practical, tangible examples
- Worship/Pastors - Engage our children/youth more in the 20 minutes they're in Church.
- Exchange Sunday worship visits with a “sister congregation” to learn more about what makes for a rich worship experience.
- More music variety
- Keep the current system in place for children in the short term.
- Take a slightly longer break midway through service for greeting, rather than a light passing of the peace.

### **Longer-term implications (12 months plus) for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes**

- Explore keeping the children in full worship (and implications for Sunday School)
- Experiment with alternative days for contemporary worship to accommodate weekend conflicts
- Experiment with moving the contemporary service to the sanctuary

It's hoped that the Worship Committee, after considering this entire report looks at the new opportunities for our worship programs to enhance our spiritual growth through the worship experience. Approaches should be respectful of our deeply rooted value for tradition, yet cognizant of how our needs and tastes vary across the congregation. The Congregational Life Survey noted that less than half believe we're ready to try new things.

We should have the confidence to try new approaches - confident that God will always show up for our services, no matter what we do.

## Challenge #6 – Financial/Stewardship

“Blessed are those who are generous, because they feed the poor.

Proverbs 22:9

*"You make a living by what you make; you make a life by what you give."*

Winston Churchill

### Observations:

In parish groups and workshops, we heard members express concern about the staffing requirements and associated costs for various programs. There is a common belief that we offer staffed programs that are not supported financially and this is troublesome. The Unwritten Norms exercise and other studies showed that our congregation tends to lament that stewardship is a one-per-year event, and that when considering Stewardship we may devalue volunteer hours as a way to serve God and community. There is a belief that alternative ways of financial giving are not maximized. (Estate planning, auctions, etc.). We need digestible, year-round status of our finances.

Looking at the demographics of our Congregation, it not surprising that we may sometimes tend to view our financial gifts as investments, rather than gifts to God. We expect tangible, measurable returns such as greater participation in programs and better quality of things we've purchased. We should balance this with the success criteria God has established for our gifts – a spiritual and faithfulness ROI. Scripture encourages giving as an act of devotion rather than duty.

### Near-term (Within 12 months) implications for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes

- Stewardship – Develop a life stage approach to stewardship appeals. (Better “scripts” for teams making the appeals)
- Stewardship/ Endowment Committee – Continue to nurture processes to encourage “special gifts” such as endowments, gifts of stock, real estate, etc. Need to make people more aware of this.
- Stewardship – Investigate *designated giving* as an incremental source of funding, and to allow opportunities for more personal connections to causes. It will be important to not trade off pledge dollars for designated giving.
- Continue to explore the motivations for pledge levels. Develop ways to test the hypothesis that if we successfully address our key challenges – financial commitment will increase.

### Longer-term implications (12 months plus) for our facilities, staffing, budget, policy and processes



- Stewardship – Consider contracting a consultant to provide advice on capital campaigns.

### **Other issues uncovered that should we should continue to work on:**

#### **Youth**

Across all exercises, our Youth were considered among our most important assets.

Suggestions for growing this asset include:

- Building a contemporary service based on the needs and tastes of youth to increase participation.
- Offering more family events.
- Making adjustments in the 9:30 service to make it more welcoming and meaningful for the youth.
- Inviting confirmed youth to participate in committees and services
- Developing leadership skills in youth
- Establishing a teen center - a safe haven for our community's youth.

#### **Communications**

In practical terms, the congregation is composed of "active communicators". We have lots of communications tools and we use them with ease. We need to use them even more. No matter what we do - be it planning for an event, or planning for our long-term growth, we must communicate often with the congregation and make information easily accessible. "On-demand" methods such as the web will make this easier.

On an interpersonal level - it was noted in exercises that conflicts do exist, yet we do not resolve those conflicts through "open communications". Open communications would be defined as one-to-one dialogue between those involved, or bringing issues of concern directly to leadership. In several instances - we heard that issues of conflict are difficult to communicate to Session - some even suggesting that the only way to be heard is to serve on a committee. (An "unwritten norm") There are no immediate actions recommended, the assumption, again is that as the church family grows tighter, trust and interpersonal communications will improve.

#### **Planning**

The studies show that our congregation is dubious about the value and return on planning:

- Most people, including leadership do not think we have a clear vision
- Most aren't "excited" about our future
- Most believe the planning documents we create are useless

Steps should be taken to *communicate* the findings and recommendations of this study when appropriate. Most important - the work should be presented in a format that allows each and every member who participated in the studies, and even those who did not to see personal connection points signaling Leadership's desire to discern the congregations needs and to develop paths to meaningful and visible improvements.

Not surprisingly, it's recommended that we look to a time of fellowship to communicate findings and recommendations to the congregation, and make all reports and our Team easily accessible to those who we may not see in person.

### **Is this just another report to go on the shelf?**

The congregation expects that - we'll not let it happen. It's recommended that the Mission Study Team or a successor group follow up this study by:

- Semi Annual Check-ins with Session to observe progress based on Mission Study findings and actions recommended.
- Consider one-year follow-up surveys on areas of most concern.
- Without relegating Parish groups to focus groups, use them to help gauge awareness and satisfaction levels of activities spawned by Mission Study.
- Prepare a highly condensed version of this report to serve as a simple decision-making tool for use in leadership venues.

### **Conclusion:**

Both tangible results and those that are harder to discern must measure the success of this report. For guidance, we turned to Scripture. Two passages are offered here:

“Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church—about three thousand in all. They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity — all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.”  
*Acts 2, 41-46*

The core themes: Believing together, together believing – *fellowship and spiritual growth*; Peter’s example of testimony, *outreach and leadership*; parting with our possessions and goods – *Devotion over duty*. And the breaking bread from house to house – *Fellowship*

“Let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.”

*Hebrews 10, 22 – 25*

The core themes: Have faith in God, faith in ourselves. Work together – committed to the challenges He has made clear to us. And through our work, commit *to turning our individual journeys into a pilgrimage of high joy and deep purpose.*

### **Mission Study Update and Contrast with Prior Findings:**

A series of seven meetings led by our Interim Pastor, Diane Curtis, were held where members and friends of the church were invited to share in the discussion of desired traits or characteristics for our new pastor. The questions that were prepared and discussed at each of these meetings included:

1. If you were asked to describe Hilltop Church using a list of adjectives, what would you say?
2. What factors do you think influence the level of participation of members of our church?
3. The pastor is usually considered to be the primary leader in the church. What leadership traits do you think are important in the pastor who fulfills this role?
4. One of the pastor's primary roles is to assist and encourage the congregation in spiritual growth. What characteristics does a pastor need to fulfill this role?
5. When you think about a new pastor for Hilltop Church, are there additional traits and characteristics you expect that person to have that have not been mentioned? If so, what are they?

The general responses obtained may be summarized as follows:

### **Relevant *Verbatim* Comments from the Gathering Groups:**

The following individual comments were culled from meeting notes, (the list is not quantitative data).

<i>Members described the church as:</i>	<i>Contrast with the prior round of meetings:</i>
Friendly	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Low expectation of selves	Not mentioned in 2005
Family oriented	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Collaborative // ecumenical	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Historical	Consistent with 2005 data collection
We encourage Bible study	New—in 2005 we felt we needed more introductory level classes
Air of peacefulness	New—in 2005 tensions were more common
Stuffy	Consistent with 2005 data collection

Welcoming	Consistent with 2005 data collection when the concern was inability to assimilate new members
Right—sized church	New—this concept was not expressed in 2005 when the discussion seemed to be about growth or not changing rather than too big or small
High expectations for the pastor	Consistent with 2005 data collection
The church to go to in this community	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Focus on music	Consistent with 2005 data collection

<i>Factors impacting the level of attendance or participation:</i>	<i>Contrast with the prior round of meetings:</i>
The experience of worship—traditional or contemporary	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Spiritual satisfaction	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Geographical spread of towns surrounding the church	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Children’s activities outside of, or competing with church	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Feeling included and connected—especially newcomers	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Minister	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Visitor parking near the sanctuary	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Linking people to activities // ministries (assimilation)	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Friendship // belonging	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Receiving inspiration	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Sports // activities // second homes	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Don’t get enough out of the service	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Getting newcomers connected to the church—need to emphasize this item	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Own conversation // cliques	Consistent with 2005 data collection

Restructure the worship service schedule to accommodate time for Fellowship and Church School	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Wide Variety of Fellowship activities and opportunities	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Need comfortable situations to meet people	Consistent with 2005 data collection
Need comfortable situations to meet people dealing with divorce // support groups = relevancy	Consistent with 2005 data collection

**Administrative Leadership:**

<i>Our Pastor is more about:</i>	<i>Our Pastor is less about:</i>
Firm with decisions.	But not a brick wall.
Up to speed with the “corporate” mentality of some members of the congregation.	But does not let the corporate mentality interfere with the primary goals of the church.
Comfortable with staff supervision and the administrative duties of the position	Less about letting the administrative duties overwhelms the priorities of spiritual leadership.
Able to evaluate and take decisions based on the needs of the entire congregation.	Less about catering to the wishes of so-called “power-blocks”.
Able to identify and engage the talent and skills of many people in the congregation.	Less about over-relying on the usual group of leadership volunteers.
Open and approachable on all administrative issues.	
Delegates easily and intelligently.	
Comfortable with both big/program church issues and small church issues.	Less about experience leaning heavily one way or the other.
Comfortable with communications technology.	Not willing to let e-mail replace personal interaction.

**Spiritual Leadership:**

<i>Our Pastor is more about:</i>	<i>Our Pastor is less about:</i>
Scholarly	But not to the point where understanding and relevancy is lost.
Inspirational and motivational	Less about reading over-prepared sermons.
Well grounded in theology, fluent in the Bible.	Over-estimating the congregation's ability or willingness to grasp super-complex theological points.
Passionate about spiritual growth.	
Strong, engaging, provocative, <i>entertaining</i> communicator in the pulpit.	Less about being "preachy" or pedantic.
Challenges the congregation to think, react, engage, and accomplish.	Less about seeking mediocrity or complacency.
Able to connect theological points to relevant issues for the congregation.	Vagueness—things the congregation can not grasp or act upon.

**Personal Traits:**

<i>Our Pastor is more about:</i>	<i>Our Pastor is less about:</i>
Appealing to all age groups, particularly our youth.	Being the "right person" for any particular age or interest group in the congregation.
Highly energetic.	
Very active and visible in the church and the community.	Less about "cloistering" or spending too much time in the office.
Warmth and charisma in the pulpit, and in everyday activities.	Less about self-importance.
Highly approachable for all ages.	Less about being "hard to talk to" for any particular age.
Extremely relevant for all ages—understands issues impacting every demographic segment in our market.	Less about being locked into limited or comfortable frames of reference.
Easy assimilation into our church, community and culture.	

Strong sense of family.	Less about being isolated from family environments.
Good sense of humor.	Less about being stoic.

**S/he might have the following characteristics:**

- **Very familiar with issues facing affluent, suburban**
- **Already active in their community. Need to see him/her at Shoprite or Kings.**
- **Has worked in Church facing many of our issues. Has shown backbone.**
- **Very outgoing and energetic**
- **Very familiar with issues facing affluent suburbs – everything from teen drug use to corporate style church leadership**
- **Solid educational credentials**
- **Accomplishments in past include those relating to energizing youth and fellowship.**
- **Able to translate complex theological issues to relevant, everyday examples**
- **Wide cultural tastes/tolerances including music, art, literature**
- **Able to preach or teach on a high intellectual level when called for.**
- **Good sense of humor.**



## **Proposed Action Steps to Address the Challenges Identified by the Mission Study:**

### **Core Strengths:**

- We place great importance on nurturing the Christian development of our youth
- We have an extremely vibrant music program at all levels
- Our facilities are excellent - Our Church on the hill is a physical beacon for God's love in the community
- We place great emphasis on our range and depth of programs – including Christian Education.
- We are seekers - continually looking to nurture our spiritual growth

### **Key Challenges**

Based on findings of all the research we conducted, there are six primary areas, identified as “Key Challenges” for this congregation. While the focus of the original Committee was to identify the challenges, the following are specific recommendations for short and long term actions, based in many cases on input from the Congregation form the study of 2005, with committee or individual responsibilities noted.

### **Challenge #1: Address our congregation's desire and *God's desire* for us to deepen our spiritual lives and become His disciples**

#### **One Year:**

- Worship: Conduct more ad hoc worship services based on timely Spiritual needs.
- Christian Ed: Offer more entry-level Christian Ed 101 programs
- Christian Ed: Offer study of the “Spiritual Classics” such as John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

#### **3 Years:**

- Worship/Fellowship: Host inspirational speakers, perhaps linked to our congregation's “life stage” issues. Offer opportunities for sharing and personal testimony.
- Christian Growth/Pastors: Develop a “Culture of Discipleship” at Hilltop – creating both awareness for Scripture's lessons and opportunities to express Discipleship in action
- Pastor/Deacons/Session: To measure progress, create plan to measure the level of “unmet spiritual needs” in the congregation

### **Challenge #2: Use Fellowship as a way to answer the Congregation's desire for a stronger sense of belonging.**

#### **One Year:**

- Fellowship: Plan off-site family events such as trips to circus, museums, sporting event, also speakers/events for specific topics e.g. drug/alcohol awareness, lifestyle/age events
- Deacons: Re-examine Parish Groups and perhaps rebuild based on interest/life stage basis

- Fellowship/Mission: Take a bus trip to visit our mission-supported agencies in Newark.

**3 Years:**

- Buildings and Grounds: expand or re-configure the Fletcher Room and/or Choir Room
- Fellowship: Plan a church-wide retreat
- Christian Ed/ Buildings and Grounds: Establish a community teen center and program

**Challenge #3: Do a better job of welcoming visitors and assimilating new members; Re-engage with inactive members, Tend our “flock”**

**One Year:**

- Pastor: Look at ways to offer recognition of newcomers in worship or other venues
- Pastor/ printed in Bulletin: Remind worshippers to be more welcoming by moving to the center of the pews
- Greeters/Worship: remind worshippers to wear name tags, offer temporary name tags to new-comers
- Christian Ed/Fellowship: Identify new Sunday School participants and develop similar methods of welcoming them (and in turn, their families)

**3 Years:**

- New Member/Outreach Committee/ Deacons: Devise plan to identify and preempt loss of “at-risk” members; create proactive plan to reach visitors and members
- New Member: Look for ways to deepen and lengthen the devotional experience as a prelude to membership
- Buildings and Grounds: Members and visitors are deterred by lack of parking near church— plan for expansion; designate visitor parking

**Challenge #4; Plan to Identify and attract our Leaders; Expand our leadership ranks; Prevent “burnout”**

**One Year:**

- Nominating: Continue recruitment sub committee to match skills to tasks, to begin to identify and nurture the next generation of leaders, develop plan of succession, focus on candidate first in committee roles, not immediate roles as leaders
- Committees: Find ways, in addition to annual report to help congregation understand the committee role and function
- Christian Ed./ Growth: Develop leadership skills in Youth

**3 Years:**

- Pastor/ Nominating and Committee heads: Develop training programs to help assimilate all new leaders

- New Member/ Recruitment: Expand and use data base to identify interests and abilities
- Nominating: Invite confirmed youth to participate in service and on committees

**Challenge #5: Recognizing that worship is complex and personal, and that preferences vary for style, content music, logistics and even dress codes, offer worship and praise experiences that bring to and keep worshippers at Hilltop Church**

**One Year:**

- Pastor: reminder to congregation that worship is not simply an hour on Sunday mornings that God calls us all to worship in our every action, every day of our lives
- Worship: to be open to new ideas for worship by asking congregation to share meaningful worship experiences (and bulletins) that they have had at former churches or other churches they have visited
- Worship: Take a slightly longer break midway through service for greeting, rather than a light passing of the peace
- Worship/ Christian Ed: Plan for more involvement of youth in services

**3 Years:**

- Worship: Periodically survey congregation for feedback on current services and suggestions for change or new worship opportunities

**Challenge #6: Financial/Stewardship**

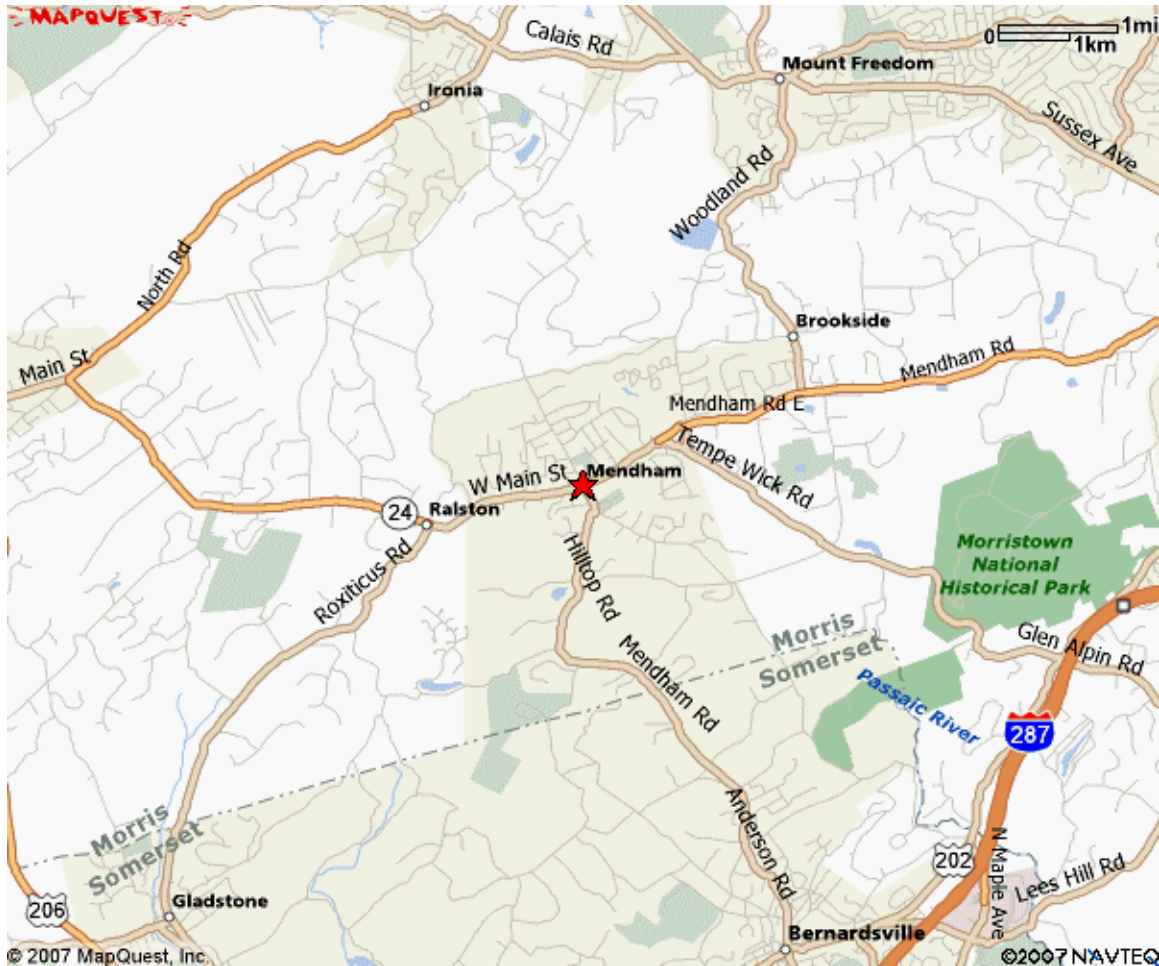
**One Year:**

- Stewardship: Develop a life stage approach to stewardship appeals. (Better “scripts” for teams making the appeals)
- Stewardship/ Endowment Committee – Continue to nurture processes to encourage “special gifts” such as endowments, gifts of stock, real estate, etc. Need to make people more aware of this
- Explore other sources of income outside of the Stewardship campaign to fund church activities, maintenance and plans

**3 Years:**

- Stewardship: Consider contracting a consultant to advice on capital campaigns
- Stewardship: Continue to explore the motivations for pledge levels; develop ways to test the hypothesis that if we successfully address our key challenges, financial commitment will increase

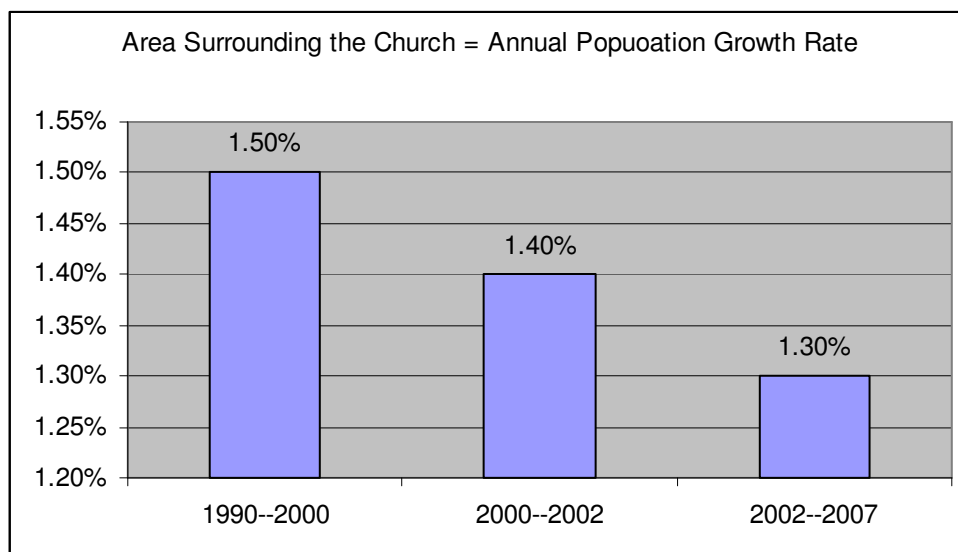
## Community Context:



The area served by First Presbyterian Church, Mendham, New Jersey is generally confined to about a 9- to 12-mile radius surrounding the church. This includes: Mendham Boro, Mendham Township, Chester Township, as well as extending to the north into Randolph and to the south into Somerset County toward Bernardsville. The purpose of this summary is to provide a brief description of the population that could attend the church, and accept the demographic data as representative of the community around the church.

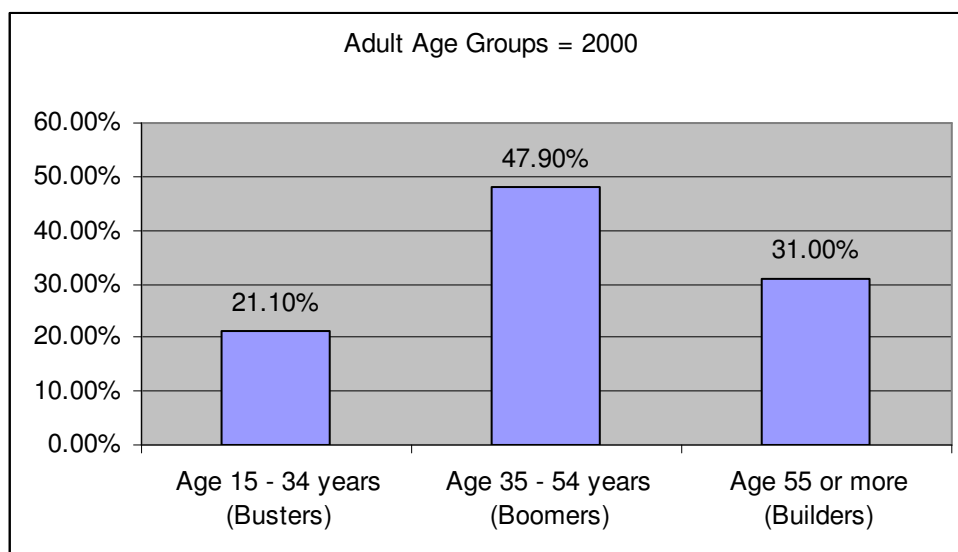
Of the 8.41 million residents of the State of New Jersey (2005 census) there are 481,139 people living in Morris County. In the specific area that First Church serves, there are about 26,779<sup>1</sup> residents, (up from 25,354 in 2002; estimated to grow to 27,807 by 2007). The population growth rate for the area is slowing slightly from 1.5% per year in 1990 to 1.4% in 2000—2002 with population growth estimated to be 1.3% annually in the period from 2002 to 2007.

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau; *Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2005*

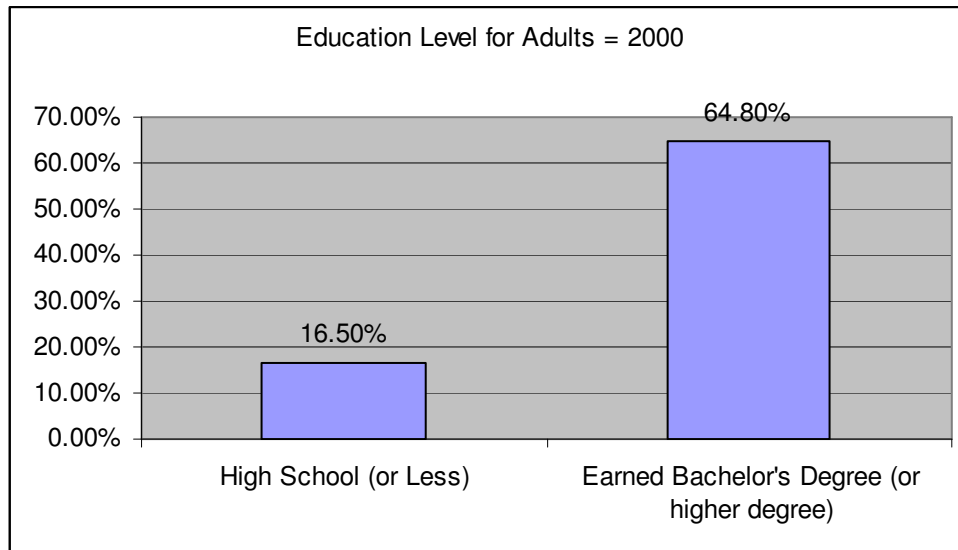


From the 2000 census, there were 20,050 adults and 6,729 children counted within the area served by the church. The median age is 42.9 years. The major generational groups represented include “Boomers” (age 35 to 54 years) and “Builders” (age 55 or more). There are 3,488 “households” in the area served by the church, with more than 80% reported as “married couples”; less than half the households reported children under age 18. The family structure counted most frequently within the land area served by the church can be described as “*very traditional*” due to the higher number of homes represented as “single-family” and “two-parent” within the area served by the church when compared with the growing number of single parent homes across the US. The average household size was 3.01 persons, and the average family size was 3.27.

The education level attained by the adults living within the area served by the church is very high: the number of adults reporting earning a Bachelor’s degree, (or higher degrees) was 64.8% of all adults, (compared to 24.4% across the US). Of this group, 29% of the adults in the area surrounding the church reported having earned graduate or professional degrees.

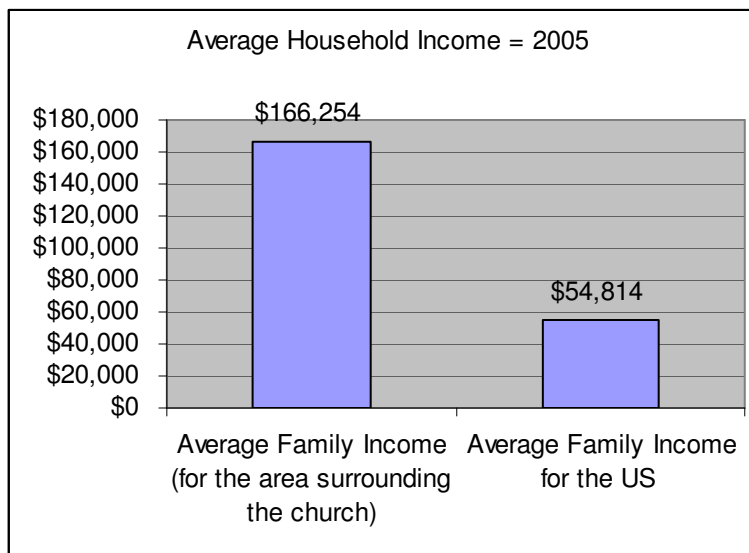


The “Baby Boom” group is largest segment of the population in the area surrounding the church as it is across the US, (ages 35 to 54 years). There is a smaller number of young adults in the community than the number of children or teenagers. Specific age-group ministries may be required to reach out to children, youth, young adults or senior adults. Also, singles ministry may be focused on recent college graduates, on support for recently divorced persons, the bereaved, or some combination of these.



The educational attainment of adults may indicate the need for focused ministry. Less education does not mean less intelligence, but it may mean a different vocabulary is appropriate to communicate with the congregation at worship. For example, a more educated community may expect more sustained reasoning during the sermon in contrast with what another congregation that represented the US average education levels would prefer. The Presbyterian Church has ministered effectively to people in all occupational groups; however, different approaches are usually most effective with each group. For example, most congregations want a mix of both programs and special events. The white collar workers tend to prefer the long-term possibilities of programs, while blue collar workers tend to think special events are more important.

From the 2000 census, the Average Household Income reported for the area served by the church was \$161,367, or 230.9% above the US average.



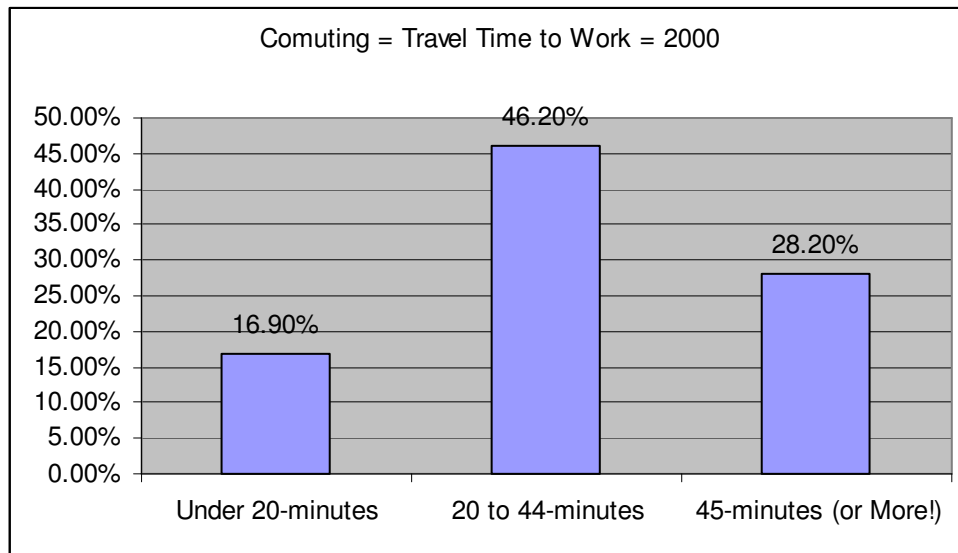
It is interesting to note that this area surrounding Mendham, NJ is ranked as the 17<sup>th</sup> wealthiest community in the State of New Jersey. The area is located on the southern border of the 10<sup>th</sup> wealthiest US County, Morris County. The median household income reported for the area surrounding the church was \$146,254; this is notable because the area around the church at least according to the Census Bureau even wealthier than two famous locations, Greenwich, Connecticut (\$99,086) and Beverly Hills, California (\$102,611).

Considering the very high average annual household income for the area surrounding the church, the willingness to pledge and the gifts to the general operating budget of the church have been low; however, the giving potential should be described as extremely high, as characterized by willingness to give to specific needs and to disaster relief, etc. One of the facts identified from the Church Mission Study was that our congregation tends to spread out their financial giving (and their volunteer time) across a variety of causes. But much of the involvement is outside of church activities. Our (surveyed) congregation's involvement with social causes and mission is nearly twice national average. It is important to note that the church budget does not reflect substantial contributions to "pass-through" giving (including One Great Hour of Sharing, Crop Walk, etc.). There are many "good causes" competing for contributions and for the time and talents of members of the congregation. One hypothesis is that members of the congregation expanded their involvement with outside mission or philanthropy at a time when the church went through a low point of mission giving, (when our mission budget was almost nothing) and have continued to support programs external to the church.

A population of at least 2,500 is required to consider an area "urban", while a population of at least 50,000 people is considered "urbanized". The area surrounding the church can be considered "suburban" or "rural—non-farm". It is interesting to note that only 0.5% of the population of the area served by the church reported earning their living from farming.

Churches generally consider the total travel time to work as an indication of the

maximum travel time that a family would consider to drive to church. While those already interested in worship may drive longer distances to attend, their neighbors are unlikely to join them. This factor may represent a practical limitation to the number of people that it is possible to attract from the 9- to 12-mile circle about the church to attend Sunday worship, (this “ministry area” included the land area described previously). Frequently, the timing (start, duration and end times) for church programs from Vacation Bible School to Adult Education classes, to fellowship programs to Sunday morning worship services all depend on the time that area commuters return home.

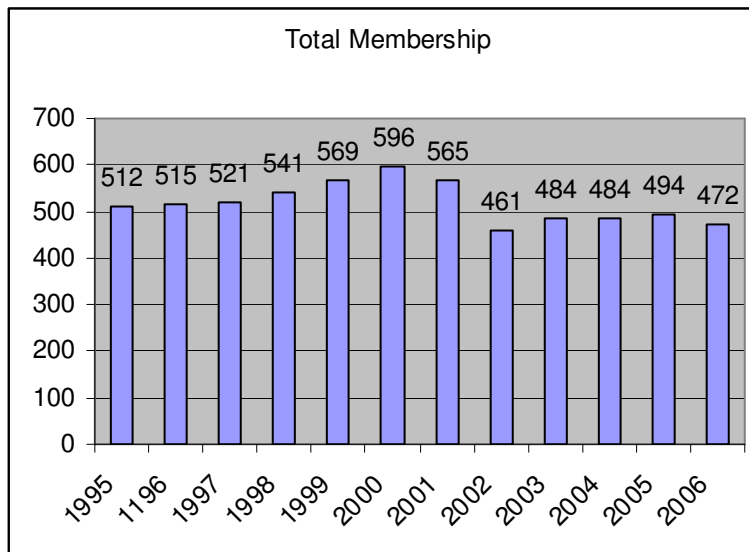


More than 80% of adults living within the area surrounding the church report commuting times from 30- to 60-minutes each way, or more.

The travel time must be considered as a clear conflict with church programs. Members of the congregation have many other activities to prioritize from school programs, exercise, sports, other community activities, reading, preparing for work, and planning family logistics.



## Membership—First Presbyterian Church



This chart shows the number of members of the congregation<sup>2</sup>. The general conclusion is that over the past five years, the church membership has remained relatively constant<sup>3</sup>. The size of First Church, Mendham is larger than the national average, (472 members compared with 212 members in 2005). Nationally, about 25% of all congregations in the denomination are small churches, ( $\leq 50$  members) with another 23% of all churches in the denomination report between 51 and 100 members.

This stability in membership at Mendham is favorable, in contrast to the overall denomination where there has been a consistent trend since 1995 of declining membership. On average, the Mendham congregation is very similar to the national average in that most members are white, (98.7% at Mendham compared with 92.9% in all US congregations) and there are a few more female members than male, (54% to 46% in Mendham compared with 58% and 42% across all churches).

It is interesting to note that the Mendham congregation's reported average contribution per member was \$990 or about the same as the 2005 average for all PCUSA congregations, (\$984.57). The reported average contribution per worship attendee at Mendham was \$2,895 which is larger than the PCUSA average of \$1,913.64.

<sup>2</sup> PCUSA: *Research Services: Ten-Year Trends: 2005*

<sup>3</sup> Annual Report: *Statistical Report of the Session: 2/11/2007*