

***MISSION STUDY
TASK FORCE
REPORT***

To The
***FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF DUTCH NECK***
At
PRINCETON JUNCTION, NEW JERSEY

OCTOBER 2009



Preface

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³ With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵ They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Acts 4. 32-35

12 for just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

14 Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

1 Corinthians 1: 12-26

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I. INTRODUCTION

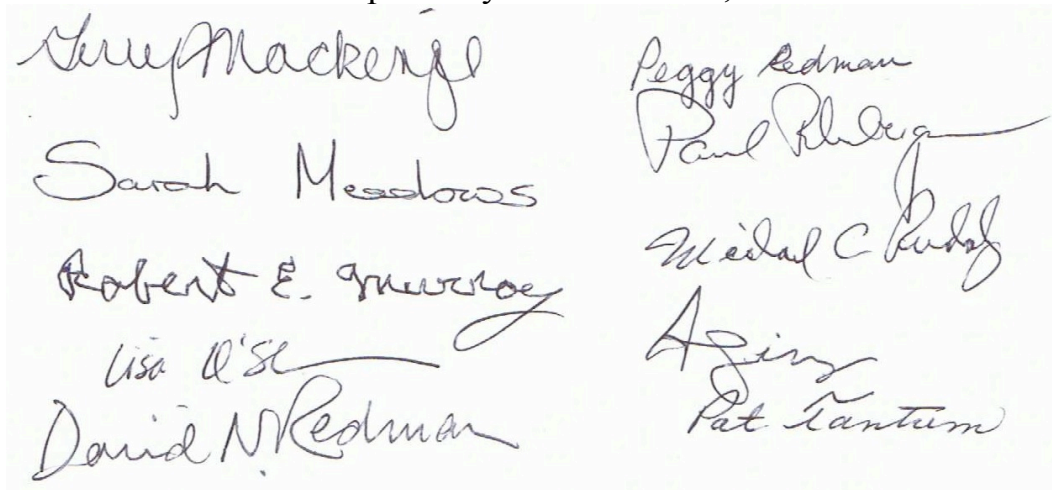
This report represents the culmination of work conducted by the Mission Study Task Force of the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck to:

- Examine the identity of the church
- Relate it to the surrounding community, to the larger Church, and the world
- Gather data and receive the perspectives, opinions, concerns, and hopes of the congregation
- Discern what it has been called to do and where it is being called
- Provide direction for the future of this church
- Position the church for the selection of a new pastor.

The Mission Study Task Force was formed in April 2009, and completed its work in late October 2009. The members of the task force were:

Gerry Mackenzie
Sarah Meadows
Robert Murray
Lisa O'Shea
David Redman
Peggy Redman
Rev. Paul Rhebergen, Interim Pastor
Michael Ruddy
Aaron Sizer
Pat Tantum.

This report is presented to the Session for its consideration and acceptance, and to the Congregation. It is submitted respectfully on October 31, 2009.



Handwritten signatures of the Mission Study Task Force members, arranged in two columns. The left column contains: Gerry Mackenzie, Sarah Meadows, Robert E. Murray, Lisa O'Shea, and David N. Redman. The right column contains: Peggy Redman, Paul Rhebergen, Michael C. Ruddy, Aaron Sizer, and Pat Tantum.

II. REPORT SUMMARY

As we prepare to call a new pastor, Session appointed the Mission Study Task Force to ascertain what our members and friends see as who we are as a church, the challenges we face, and the sort of pastor we will need to lead us through those challenges. The Task Force gathered a huge amount of information in many forms and listened hard to what we were being told. We can summarize our recommendations under five major areas or concerns.

1. **Spiritual Life.** Members of the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck are largely satisfied with our congregational worship, but many strongly expressed the need to open up our worship to fresh ideas and practices and to create new venues for us as individuals to share more fully our faith life with others.
2. **Congregational Life.** At all levels, our members want to be and feel as if they are being included in the life of God's church at Dutch Neck. This means continuing to greet visitors warmly, but it also means re-engaging our own members who have disengaged from church, making sure everyone knows what's going on and has a chance to participate and serve, and expanding our relational ministries.
3. **Children and Youth.** It is time to reexamine comprehensively our children's and youth education and fellowship programs with the goal of better integrating children and youth into the worship life of the church, bringing them fully into the mission programs we support, and re-framing confirmation as the beginning of young people's commitment to and active involvement in the life and work of the church.
4. **Governance.** Church governance needs to be more transparent in every way. New models of pastoral leadership must be examined, and because we must rely on lay leadership, we must reinvigorate our committees, invite and cultivate new leaders, and be more willing to take risks. While we must live within our financial means, we need not define our leadership narrowly.
5. **Communication.** We as a church must communicate better with individuals and communities at every level. We must communicate more effectively with our own members, youth and adults, Session and committees to congregation. With respect to the surrounding community, we should not be hiding our light under a bushel, but rather telling others about the good things we are doing. In all of this, we must do so by judiciously employing all the tools at our disposal, from newspapers to Twitter.

III. IDENTITY

The Church in a Changing Community

The history of the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck has been characterized by both impressive longevity and dramatic change. From its official organization in 1816 until the mid-twentieth century, Dutch Neck served as a civic and religious center for the surrounding farming community. Initially composed of the descendants of early Dutch settlers, the congregation grew steadily through the nineteenth century. With the exception of our education building, which was built in 1965, Dutch Neck's property, by 1885, looked much as it does today. The church's pastoral staff has been as durable as its facilities; a mere thirteen senior pastors have served since 1816, averaging tenures of fifteen years. Our pastors have exerted influence in the larger Princeton community, as well as in the Presbytery of New Brunswick and the denomination as a whole.

Despite this physical and pastoral stability, however, Dutch Neck's recent story has been one of precipitous change. In the past fifty years, West Windsor has been transformed from a quiet, rural community into a populous suburban center. The community enjoys convenient access to New York and Philadelphia but is insulated from urban overcrowding and other problems, making it an attractive choice for younger professionals with families. The immediate vicinity of the church has seen a population increase of more than 70% since 1990. The community today is affluent (median household income is greater than three times the national average), highly educated (75% college graduates), and "traditional" in family structure (76% are married, and 94% of these have children). While the church has retained elements of its former identity—most obviously in the continuing presence and involvement of longtime Dutch Neck families—our congregation has changed to reflect the surrounding community's affluence, education level, family structure, and lifestyle.

The Mainline in a Changing Culture

Dutch Neck Church has also faced challenges common to Presbyterian churches in general. The decades since the 1950s have witnessed the steady erosion of the Protestant mainline's cultural prestige; the moral authority, denominational cohesiveness, and public visibility that American Presbyterians enjoyed for much of their history can no longer be taken for granted. Presbyterians occupy a changed place in a culture that, while remaining predominantly religious, regards the institutional church as an optional part of spiritual life, rather than the

necessary corporate expression of a shared faith. Just so, Dutch Neck has ceased to be the center of the community—physical, spiritual, or otherwise. Mainline churches have also struggled to retain children and youth, and the relatively low birth rate among members of the Baby Boom generation has made it difficult for the church to reproduce itself. Likewise, the Presbyterian Church has done a poor job of fostering ethnic diversity, even as new forms of immigration have swelled, particularly Asian and Hispanic populations since the 1960s (and for the Dutch Neck community, East Asian and South Asian families in particular). White middle-class cultural assumptions—often unrecognized by Presbyterian churchgoers—have been an obstacle to inter-ethnic communication. Theological and political pluralism, on the other hand, have become celebrated hallmarks of the PC (U.S.A); this same trend, however, has sometimes made it difficult for Presbyterians to find common ground, and has in many cases worked to diminish openness and intimacy. Difference has been embraced in theory while remaining unaddressed in fact. Altogether, American Presbyterians have struggled to adapt to these changing circumstances, and the result has been a sharp decline in membership over the past half-century.

Our Church

All of these changes have had major implications for our ministry. Church participation at any level can no longer be assumed; many other social, recreational, and ideological alternatives are steadily encroaching and force the church to define its own distinctiveness more sharply. Rising educational levels have inclined Dutch Neck away from a pastor-centered model, but lay-centered ministry has not taken root. Time in the congregation members' lives, for both youth and adults, is at a premium, as long commutes and busy lifestyles force families to adjust priorities. The church's human resources have become scarce even as programming has expanded, and we are often called upon to do more with less. We have experienced frequent turnover in our associate pastors and, in part because of our memberships' own mobility, in our lay program leadership. Responding to the felt needs of suburban families, Dutch Neck's Christian education has emphasized religious formation for children and youth, but has sometimes neglected the same for the time-strapped parents and other adults upon whom the guidance of the young church depends.

Membership and participation at DNPC, while outperforming the Presbyterian national average, have declined in the last ten years. Total membership has fallen 7%, to 498, since 1998. Some of these losses have come from members' relocation or death, but many have come from disaffiliation. More significantly, perhaps, average worship attendance in 2008 stood at 126, down 27% since 1998,

and representing a mere 25% of our total membership. While membership remains relatively high, then, participation is low and continues to decline. Equally worrisome, DNPC diverges markedly from West Windsor in ethnic and age profile. We are overwhelmingly Anglo, while our community is 38% Asian. We are significantly older than the local population; 74% of those who returned the congregational survey are 45 or older. These features are not atypical of PC (U.S.A.) congregations, but they indicate considerable liabilities for our church's membership health and connection to the surrounding community.

Today we have an opportunity to honor the memory of our early members and the long and significant history of the church by creating a new and current story for our church's future. The First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck, blessed with a strong family of faith and tradition, is challenged now to engage the transformed situation in which the church finds itself. It is called to reach out into our changing community to share our faith and fellowship, to be more inclusive, and more relevant. It is called to meet and shape the needs of an increasingly busy and distracted culture. It is called to stronger congregational life, heightened personal commitment, and more significant theological reflection, with the final purpose of serving Christ more effectively in our community and the world.

IV. CONGREGATIONAL STUDY FINDINGS

We give strong expression to our denominational and congregational heritage. The Dutch Neck congregation's approach to individual salvation is through the growth and deepening of our faith in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It is through the activities of worship, education, devotion and caring for each other and those in need elsewhere that our faith becomes manifest.

Worship and Spiritual Growth

Over 85% of our congregants feel that Dutch Neck provides a meaningful worship experience; many feel this is what we do best. Consistent with national trends, however, attendance at DNPC worship services has decreased over the past decade. Many would like to see and feel more energy in the worship service, while others would like a more contemplative feeling. Many would like to explore more varied liturgical styles in our worship services. To our members, the church feels open and welcome, while visitors are greeted warmly and report feeling welcome.

Music is a very important and highly valued part of the worship and devotional life at Dutch Neck. We are blessed with many talented musicians of all ages. Members of the chancel choir and hand bell choir provide fine music, yet the number of participants has declined. The adult chancel choir, for example, has shrunk to a dangerously small size. There is strong congregational interest in expanding the music program to incorporate more diverse styles into our services.

The adult educational program, which is often seen as somewhat academic, is well-received by its regular participants, but the congregation expressed the need for more varied options and topics in order to reach a broader group.

Most importantly, there is a strong need, even yearning, for opportunities for the adults in the congregation to explore and articulate their faith in trusting and supportive environments.

Community and Commitment

As a church, we have a strong history of mission activities and close friendships forged in service. We are quick to help each other in times of trouble. The mission study's summer gatherings revealed clearly that many people remember the stressful times—births, illnesses, deaths—when the church gave support as being the times when the church was at its best and most powerful in our lives.

Forty percent of our members have attended Dutch Neck for 20 years or more. Our membership has declined, however, at a time when the community around us has almost doubled in population. Our racial/ethnic profile is much less diverse than that of the surrounding area. While some of us say we are pleased with the number of fellowship opportunities available, attendance at fellowship events has also fallen off. Yet we hear people who attend saying, “We should do this kind of thing more often!” as they leave. We are tolerant of differing perspectives within our faith, but are often reluctant to take risks in trying new programs or in opening up to others about our own life of faith.

A once-thriving Session committee structure has declined, with some committees virtually ceasing to function and fewer people taking on the responsibility of running and caring for the church. At the same time, some members who have been told that Session or the pastors do not need their input feel rebuffed and distrustful, afraid that their input or offers of help are unwanted. And though we initially welcome new members warmly, many feel that we should do more to follow up by seeking them out proactively to join committees, service projects, or fellowship events.

Stewardship in all senses needs to increase. Our congregation membership reflects relatively high income levels, for example, yet in recent years we have been unable to achieve a balanced budget. We have many talented and highly educated members, but we heard in many comments from the survey that “The same people are on committees time after time,” and some members do not step forward to offer their talents and time to serve the church.

Communication

We have a church web site and weekly e-mailings, with detailed announcements sent to the congregation. Members who are less familiar with email and unable to receive the weekly printed bulletin on Sunday, however, feel left out regarding church activities. But there is evidence of a deeper problem. Some people feel as if they are being kept out of the loop regarding church activities and decision-making. Finally, we engage in little publicity to the outside community regarding even the simple facts of our worship services and other church activities.

Children at Dutch Neck

While we have had a longstanding and successful program of religious education and fellowship for our children and youth, these ministries have faced challenges in recent years. Many in the congregation recall the church and the youth program as havens for their children. Today children too young to sit through worship with their families have a parallel worship time geared to their developmental level. Many of our teens provide worship music—vocally, instrumentally or both. Our children and many others from the community attend our Vacation Bible Camp each summer. The adults and youth who run the camp put in a great deal of work, but also reap as many rewards as the children do.

Yet church school attendance and youth fellowship participation has declined overall. Our children's choirs have more members than the average Sunday's church school classes' total, which this year so far is 17. Many of our youth quit coming to church and church school once they are confirmed. While most are happy with the content of the classes, there is a need to develop a more structured approach and have more consistent leadership for each age group. The desire to stop holding children's church school classes during the regular Sunday morning worship hour was consistently voiced in the conversations and gatherings.

Dutch Neck's Engagement with the Wider Community

Many in our congregation participate actively in area-wide service activities such as the CROP walk, Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, Habitat for Humanity, Crisis Ministry, and Children's Home Society Easter baskets, school book bags, and Christmas presents, among others. Yet we are less involved than before in face-to-face involvement in our community, and it seems as if a higher proportion of our outreach consists of giving money and material, but not of ourselves in mission. Our church's interactions with the Windsor-Hightstown Area Ministerium, for example, and active support of the New Brunswick Presbytery have diminished. It also seems that sometimes our interest in mission activities is valued more for its enjoyable social/fellowship benefits than for their main purpose of serving God's children in need.

Members think we are not doing enough to contact new people and welcome them into our church community. At the same time, individuals are reluctant to volunteer themselves for such outreach. There remains a division of viewpoint within the congregation regarding the prioritization of focus on our congregation's own health and growth *versus* a greater commitment to the increasing needs of the outside world.

V. VISION OF MINISTRY – LED BY GOD AND AS SPOKEN BY OUR CONGREGATION

In this section we ask the questions **Where is God calling us as a congregation? What is our potential?** And offer answers in several broad but important categories.

Congregation

Our congregation has a deep commitment to building a strong sense of community across the generations. Members are eager to “grow the church,” not only by creating an environment that will be welcoming and attractive to new people seeking a church home, but also by re-engaging our congregants who have disengaged from church activity. Dutch Neck is, as we heard again and again, a welcoming church to newcomers, but often fails to engage them and integrate them successfully into the ongoing life of the church. We therefore see the need for our church to move and grow by means of the following:

- Re-engaging current members who are inactive, or minimally active, through direct outreach and improved communications within the church and outside it to the community at large
- Offering programs and creating an environment such that individuals seeking a church home will be attracted to and feel welcomed at Dutch Neck
- Building on that strength of welcoming visitors/newcomers by weaving them into the fabric of church life/finding roles for them upon their initial engagement with the church
- Improving internal communications to keep congregants informed of church ministries and opportunities for service, using tools such as the recent “Seeds” brochure, program listings on our website, and program directories
- Helping members discover their own gifts for ministry and service by proactively matching these gifts to opportunities in the church
- Providing activities of various lengths and levels of commitment that will serve to strengthen interpersonal connections
- Developing mentoring opportunities to strengthen relationships between generations
- Offering fellowship activities that strengthen the bonds between current and prospective members
- Providing spaces of respect and trust in which our members feel comfortable articulating their faith and doubts and receiving support and understanding.

Programming

As individuals, we are active and committed members of our church communities. In our church life, we seek a variety of programs that speak to our need to understand and grow in our faith, to be active in mission, and to teach others. For our future, then, we envision a multi-program effort that:

- Establishes a variety of education, spiritual, social and support programs across the lifespan of our members
- Uses the gifts and talents of members in both planning and implementation
- Schedules programs and education such that the whole community can engage in shared weekly worship
- Publicizes its activities to the community at large
- Finds ways to turn programs into practices so that the learning can become a part of each member's faith life.

Spirituality

The nature of our spiritual life is of deep concern to many of our members. In some of our gatherings and conversations we heard metaphors of depletion: “we’re running low on fuel,” “our tank is out of gas,” “the batteries are low and need recharging.” We feel strongly, as a congregation, the need to replenish, grow, and develop our spirituality. We have heard about, and some of us have experienced, ways in which we can begin to renew our spiritual vitality, for example women’s retreats, and the men’s small-group prayer breakfasts. For most of our members, congregational worship stands at the center of our spiritual experience. Our vision, then, is to nurture a closer relationship to God through:

- Environments that allow members to hear the word of God
- Sermons that touch on everyday life, are challenging and thought-provoking, and are spiritually moving and inspirational
- A varied mix of musical styles in worship—such as the Princeton Seminary’s Traveling Choir’s offering on October 4th
- Education/spiritual growth through a variety of settings, methods, times.

Children and Youth

We believe that serving our children and youth well over the long term is a key ingredient for growth, greater engagement by members in church life, and overall spiritual renewal. This emerged as a priority in every aspect of the data-gathering process. Our “Conversation” on this topic clearly articulated the need to integrate the education of and service by children and youth into the larger life of the church. The congregation expressed a strong commitment to providing a safe and comfortable environment that allows children of all ages to learn about, question,

test and thereby strengthen their faith in God. This commitment should be the basis for their life-long engagement with the Church and with their spiritual life. In our ministry, then, we should be:

- Providing a strong base of Biblical knowledge and platform for spiritual development for children ages 2-18
- Engaging children of all ages in Sunday worship at several levels (e.g., young church fellowship, older children worshipping with their families in the sanctuary, robust children's Sunday School after church) and on a regular basis
- Delivering programs at times that are convenient for them, their families and the church at large, both on Sundays and during other parts of the week
- Providing a meaningful confirmation experience that leads to a full, sustained, and continued engagement in church/spiritual growth
- Offering children/youth of all ages opportunities to serve both locally and in a larger community
- Modeling the faith life by providing opportunities for long-term mentoring.

Governance

A number of issues emerged in relation to the pastoral staff, to Session, and to committees. Congregants expressed a desire for leadership that is more open, both in terms of reaching out to include more people and in communicating issues, programs, and decisions more effectively. We recognize too that there is a different but related question on the minds and hearts of many: what are appropriate—and affordable—models of church leadership for Dutch Neck? We must strengthen church administration and operations by:

- Improving communication between church staff/leadership and congregation
- Using a variety of tools to communicate to the congregation the workings of Session and related bodies of the church
- Directly involving laity in planning and leadership of church programming
- Identifying and eliminating barriers to involvement so as to create an environment of inclusion.

Community

Our last Congregational Conversation delivered a clear message that we must minister to ourselves in the near future, so that we can become better able to serve the communities beyond Dutch Neck Church. But spiritual energy can flow in several different directions at once, and we recognize that, for some, serving others gives them the connection to God in Christ and an energy that they can bring back to Dutch Neck. It must be our mission as a church to engage in both local and

global outreach and care, according to God’s call, Christ’s example, and the history of the church. We seek to engage in the community at multiple levels:

- At Dutch Neck – in caring for and supporting our members, being there for each other, and building our congregation’s spiritual life
- In the Mercer County community – to continue to support local needs (identified as one of the church’s strengths)
- With local churches and worship centers – by increasing interactions
- Globally – by creating awareness of and responding to global needs with both money and personal missional engagement.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations which follow are directed, under several headings, to the two bodies that have the responsibility for the spiritual growth and health of the congregation at the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck: Session (according to the Book of Order) and those who are the ministers of the church, that is, all the people of Dutch Neck Church.

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

1. Session should give the highest priority to initiating the pastoral nominating process in as timely a manner as possible after the discussion and acceptance of the Mission Study Report.
2. The Pastoral Nominating Committee should include at least one member of the Mission Study Task Force to ensure that the history, processes, and findings of the Report are carried forward.
3. In consideration of the priorities and directions for our church, and in light of our financial situation, Session is encouraged to explore alternative models to two-pastor leadership. New models, as well as those that have worked well in the past (such as, a head pastor and director of Christian education) should be considered, as well as having both paid and volunteer lay leaders in positions of leadership and responsibility. Within these models, it is very important that the church maintain an individual with a theological background and expertise who is clearly and visibly dedicated to children and youth ministry.
4. To the congregation and Session: The life of our church will require leadership that encourages greater risk taking. This should be demonstrated by leadership that fosters greater experimentation and acceptance of new ideas and practices. The church needs to consider a new pastoral model that will allow more members to feel that their gifts or efforts are really being used effectively.

5. Accordingly, we identify for Session and the Pastoral Nominating Committee the following roles that we feel are crucial for the new pastor to play:
- a. **Worship leader** - As we have repeatedly noted, many believe that worship is one of our church's strengths, while a significant minority hope that we will begin to explore new directions in worship. A pastor who is especially sensitive to the dynamics of worship will help us preserve what is good in our current practice while leading us toward more diverse and vital modes of expression.
 - b. **Caring Presence** - The pastor is a major, if not *the* major, face and presence of a congregation. That presence must be warm and caring, able to put people at ease and relate comfortably to the many different kinds of people who come to our church. He or she must visibly show God's love for all. A healthy introspection and a strong connection to his or her own faith are also desired qualities.
 - c. **Inspirer** - For a variety of reasons, e.g., probable changes in staffing, diminished participation and membership, strong lay leadership will be of great importance in the next chapter of Dutch Neck's life. A commitment to cultivating, motivating, and resourcing congregational leadership will be a critical asset in the new pastor.
 - d. **Communicator** - We have identified communication, both internal and external, as an issue of major concern. Communication involves some very important pastoral skills, such as understanding one's audiences, empathizing with those to whom communications go, identifying potential causes of misunderstanding or resentment, and prioritizing one message over another when programs compete for visibility. Dutch Neck will need a pastor who can both direct and mediate what we hope will be increasingly significant endeavors in communication.
 - e. **Educator** - Educational tasks are at the base of many of the priorities that we have identified during the mission study process. These priorities suggest the importance of at least two pastoral traits: one, a strong inclination toward pedagogy, that is, the nuts and bolts of teaching others; and two, perhaps more importantly, the ability to identify, believe, and compellingly communicate the message and

relevance of a particular subject, for example, how a particular passage of scripture speaks vitally to the congregation at this time.

- f. **Diplomat** - Our church is full of smart, opinionated people who sometimes disagree. If expanded lay leadership indeed becomes a reality in the next few years, then a pastor who can mediate among diverse personalities, ideologies, and approaches; who is skilled at inviting people to the discussion table, sorting and framing the issues; compromising; and creating harmony out of apparent chaos would greatly help improve both the inclusiveness and effectiveness of the church's leadership structure.

FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

1. As a congregation we must cultivate active engagement with matters of faith through expanded opportunities for theological, ecclesiological, and sociopolitical dialogue. We should emphasize public articulation of faith, especially among adults, in part through expanded conversation-style adult education offerings.
2. The congregation has expressed a yearning for more opportunities to experience God both individually and together. Spiritual growth often happens through relational experiences in small groups. Session must encourage experiences that provide intellectual, educational, and social support for spiritual development.
3. Efforts should be dedicated to celebrating our congregational rituals and to helping them to become practice. A focus should also be placed on helping families to experience God at home throughout the week.
4. Session and/or the congregation should initiate serious discussion about the uses of time as ethical and theological choices.

CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

1. Session is encouraged to find proactive means of following up on changes in members' participation and presence in the worship and mission life of the church. This effort must be balanced with respect for members' privacy.
2. Session needs to craft strategies to seek members of all ages and generations to share their gifts of time, talent, and faith. Session and the congregation

both should consistently find ways to celebrate members' contributions, whether large or small.

3. Session should discuss and implement specific plans to incorporate new members and interested parties into the fellowship and educational offerings of the church, find ways to make people feel welcome and needed, and develop and implement strategies to encourage new members to be more involved in church leadership. Strategies for doing this may include establishing a mentor program for new members and having ushers seek out and welcome visitors.
4. Address demographic “holes,” for example: singles, our young people in local colleges, and younger adults with and without children.
5. Session should foster an environment by which individuals are encouraged to initiate and lead a variety of group activities. Such activities can be of varying lengths of time and run the gamut with respect to purpose – spiritual, study, social, athletic, special interests, etc. The women of the church, for example, have created several models of effective, meaningful personal spiritual associations—retreats, Cornerbrighteners, book groups. The men of our church, however, generally have not. Session should consider experimenting with different models of men's associations to help strengthen their spiritual life.
6. As noted in the “Communications” section, we recommend that the café conversation model* be used as an effective tool to hold periodic conversations on current topics of interest. Topics can come from Session, the Deacons, Committees, or members at large.
7. Implement strategies to enhance the feeling of support and fellowship among members of the church so that when problems arise in people's lives it is easier to speak to members of the church family in an atmosphere of security and trust. Experimentation and risk taking in programs, fellowship, and outreach activities should be encouraged among church leadership and the congregation.

*Structured conversations on a specific large topic or question, at tables of 4 people, with one person the “table host” and “memory” of the discussion. After c. 15 minutes of discussion, the host remains at the table while the three others move on to different tables to continue discussing the question. Participants write or draw ideas on the paper tablecloths, which become a sort of record of the conversations.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

1. Session needs to tackle the difficult question of how Dutch Neck should best educate its children and youth. Timing, content, and methods are key issues. While diverse perspectives emerged through the Mission Study Task Force, there was an overwhelming belief that education be scheduled to allow all members of the church to attend the regular Sunday worship service. This is in the context of a larger vision in which all church members would dedicate Sunday morning to worship followed by an education hour. Consideration should be given to offering education in non-traditional ways throughout the week. At minimum, Session must conduct a comprehensive assessment of what is currently in place, to identify what is working and what is not.
2. We must create more opportunities for youth to become engaged in church leadership. This may mean modifying the “one-year” youth appointments to session and deacons and seeking out youth to serve on all Session committees.
3. Confirmation emerged as a priority issue. We recommend that the class continue to stress the theme for both the confirmands and their families that confirmation represents a *beginning* to the spiritual journey, not its end, and one’s entrance into full participation in the life of the church. Session and the congregation should find more effective ways to realize this commitment by the confirmands and their families.
4. As mentioned in the “Faith and Spirituality” section, we need to encourage the overall development of Christian education and practices in family life through a more deliberate integration of children, youth, and adult programming.
5. Greater coordination is needed between adult education and high school Christian education in the planning of courses and other opportunities.
6. A mentoring program should be established to pair post-confirmation youth with church members.

THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY

1. Revitalizing ourselves as a church is necessary for increased growth. Our new leadership must recognize the need for us to maintain our outreach to existing programs (e.g. TASK, Habitat for Humanity, Children's Home Society); at the same time we must have our pastoral leadership reach out ecumenically to connect with other churches and organizations. We need to be more inviting to people of differing ethnicity, race, family structure, sexual orientation, and religious traditions.
2. As stated in the “Communications” section, Session must find ways to strengthen communication externally, increasing the church’s visibility through newspaper, web, and other media.

SESSION

1. Session needs to find ways to re-make itself so as to appear, and be, more transparent to the congregation. Improvements are needed in communication and dissemination of information, so that members feel in touch with rather than excluded from the decision making. A greater spirit of openness between the session and members must be established whereby congregants are encouraged to express themselves and are heard by officers with an open mind. Improvements may include publication of the session agenda in advance of meetings and the addition of a standing session agenda item that allows members of the congregation to offer comments.
2. Session should also take steps to focus on its charge to nurture the spiritual growth and health of the church while maintaining its role in church administration and decision-making.
3. Session should convene an *ad hoc* committee inclusive of session and non-session members to re-visit the issue of session size. Evaluation of the issue should include an open forum for discussion (possibly a café conversations) during which members of the congregation have an opportunity to hear the pros and cons of various options, and to express any concerns they may have regarding session size.
4. Session should focus on stewardship in two ways: by creating mechanisms to encourage congregants to identify and use their resources (time, money and talents) for God and the life of the church, and by finding new ways to strengthen the financial resources of the church.

COMMUNICATION

1. A robust, two-way communication strategy should be established between Session and the congregation to allow for continued dialogue and input about the Mission Study Task Force's findings.
2. For the church as a whole, a comprehensive communications plan is needed that encompasses web, e-mail, and print media and serves to better inform the congregation and the larger community about Dutch Neck's activities and programs. A new Communications Committee may need to be created, or a single person identified, to accomplish this objective. Some of the possibilities that have been identified include posting staff members' job descriptions on the church website, circulating Session minutes automatically to all members via e-mailings, and advertising regular events and special activities in local media.
3. Each committee's charge and meeting schedule and agenda should be regularly and freely available to the congregation. Each committee should identify and promote ways in which members and friends of the congregation can serve in temporary or *ad hoc* positions.
4. Session should identify a single contact person who can direct inquiries from members and non-members to the appropriate person or resource.
5. As referenced in the "Session" section, Session is encouraged to strengthen communication internally, with an emphasis on improving accessibility and generating consistent, standardized guidelines for leadership positions and committees.
6. The congregation found the café conversation to be an effective tool for sharing and engaging in conversation related to church matters. Session is encouraged to gather people to continue the conversations initiated in the Mission Study process, as well as to engage church members in a broad array of learning and discussion opportunities.

WORSHIP AND MUSIC

1. Introduce additional varied and creative elements (liturgical, contemplative, contemporary, and multicultural) into corporate worship. Give special attention to the education and guidance of the congregation in worship. In the interest of fostering a more interactive, participatory experience in church, the Worship Committee, in addition to the pastor and lay liturgist, might identify and incorporate a “music liturgist” into the service where and when appropriate.
2. The Worship Committee should name an *ad hoc* subcommittee comprised of music staff, pastoral staff, worship committee members, congregants and perhaps consultants to develop a strategy for implementing # 1 above. The goal should be to make worship, including music, more accessible to the congregation at large. This might mean balancing traditional hymns with more diverse (e.g. eclectic; interactive, popular) forms of music, introducing different kinds of congregational prayer, and encouraging different kinds of sermons.

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

Our Statement of Vision currently says:

The First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck
With Christ as our center,
we are led by the Holy Spirit
to be a dynamic, interactive, innovative church,
inspired to reach out to one another,
to our community,
and to the world.

Adopted April 2005

1. We recommend that this Statement of Vision remain as it is because, although we have much work to do in order to realize its goals, as this report attests, we believe it continues to reflect the vision of ministry in this report.
2. Reexamination of and changes in this statement should take place only after a new pastor has been installed and should be the work of the whole congregation.

APPENDICES

- 1. Description of The Process**
- 2. Church Planning Inventory - Member Survey**
- 3. Church Planning Inventory – Results**
- 4. List of Boards and Committees**
- 5. List of Programs**
- 6. Compilations of Survey Comments, Mission Study Gatherings, and Congregational Conversations**

APPENDIX 1. Description of the Process

Forming a Mission Study Task Force to study the congregation and its current and future mission was the first step in calling a new pastor for the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck. A committee of initially seven members was constituted in April, 2009, consisting of Gerry Mackenzie, Bob Murray (Elder), Peggy Redman (Elder), David Redman, Michael Ruddy, Pat Tantum, Aaron Sizer, and Interim pastor Rev. Paul Rhebergen. We anticipated the study would take about six months.

April-May: The Task Force held its first meeting on Wednesday, April 29, 2009, and agreed to augment the committee by two more people. The interim pastor shared information with the group about the basic tasks of a mission study:

- To remind people of their Biblical and historical *calling*
- To examine their *identity* as a congregation
- To reflect upon the content of their *ministry*
- To review their *programs*
- To explore the *processes* used in their life together, and
- To articulate a set of *conclusions*, including a statement of mission and goals.

In the same vein, we considered the questions or issues that we wanted to address in the study:

- What has our mission been, what it is now, and what will it be going forward?
- How will the church grow in the future?
- What do the people want the church to do for them?
- How does the church fit into the community? How can we fit better?
- Listen openly and honestly to the program interests of the congregation.
- Consult with as wide a variety of people as possible.
- That the diversity of the congregation and its input into this process be reflected in our conclusions.

We agreed that the membership of the task force and our contact information should be printed in each church bulletin and began to look at survey instruments by which to begin a data-gathering process. We agreed to meet weekly, usually Wednesday evenings, with some breaks during August.

By our second meeting, May 13th, Sarah Meadows (Deacon) and Lisa O’Shea joined the task force, and by the third meeting we had chosen officers: David Redman, Chair; Gerry Mackenzie, Vice-Chair; and Sarah Meadows, Secretary. We reviewed and discussed several surveys to administer as our first data collection. We chose the Church Planning Inventory of the Hartford Institute for Religious Research. This survey was long but comprehensive, with questions in nearly all of the key areas on which we wanted to hear the congregation’s views: tasks of the church, the qualities of programming, traits of a pastor, community engagement, as well as demographic and congregational profile questions which we felt we could compare usefully to data about our surrounding community. As copies of the questionnaires were being ordered, we examined these other demographic data sources, including local, regional, national, and Presbytery information:

- Dutch Neck Church Ten-Year Trends: <http://www.pcusa.org/tenyeartrends/report>
- Hartford Institute for Religion Research: <http://hrr.hartsem.edu>
- Local and area demographic data and trends, from U.S. Census data: <http://www.pcusa.org/research/demograhics>
- Precept Demographics: <http://www.preceptgroup.com>

June: The Task Force distributed c. 450 CPI surveys to the congregation in four ways: a) pick up outside church right after Sunday worship, b) hand-out at the Church Picnic, c) a small number mailed out, and d) by hand delivery of the remainder by the Deacons’ networks, some Session and Task Force members. Distribution took place over the two weeks from June 6 to June 20. We extended the deadline for the return of the surveys from June 28 to July 3, and mailed to the Hartford Institute the 156 surveys we received early in the week of July 6.

We organized home gatherings moderated by the interim pastor and focused on a series of questions, the same for every gathering, about the strengths and weaknesses of the church, the characteristics of the group, and the traits need in a new pastor.

July-August: The first mission study gathering took place on July 3, and the last one was held September 2. The initial plan was for the gatherings to take place in people’s homes. This happened for half of the 12 gatherings; the other half took

place at church after Fellowship Time. This was due primarily to families' summer vacation and travel plans. The interim pastor transcribed the notes he made during the gatherings so that the task force could review all responses.

These data, plus the voluminous written comments from the survey and the table covers and "wall notes" from the congregational conversations, were handled in a very specific and useful way. We transcribed all of the comments from all three sources, put them into an Excel spreadsheet, and tagged and sorted each comment by a number of broad subjects. These databases could then be sorted and rearranged so that members of the Task Force could focus on, for example, all statements about Worship, or Pastor; or could sort the comments by meeting date, or question number. This proved to be an invaluable resource to us as we tried to digest and make sense of all that people had said over a three-month period.

At the end of the first week in August, the survey report from Hartford Institute came back. It not only contained the statistical summary of the 156 respondents but also 17 pages of comments, which ranged from a sentence or two to hefty paragraphs. The Task Force spent the remainder of the month drawing out major points and themes from the survey data and comments.

September-October: With the interim pastor's guidance we planned three Congregational Conversations, each one centering on a major theme we had as a group identified from the data so far. The conversations took place in Fellowship Hall on three successive Sundays, September 20 and 27, and October 4. Each meeting used the café conversation as the means to generate a wide sharing of views. During the final 15 minutes of each meeting participants shared what they had heard as the consistent themes, and these comments were recorded. The questions for the conversations were:

September 20: How can the church best serve children, pre-school through teenagers?

September 27: How should we enhance our congregation's spiritual life?

October 4: What is the community our church is called to serve?

Also in September we identified writing teams of two Task Force members each to begin drafting sections of the report on Church History and Identity, Strengths and Weaknesses, and Our Vision of Mission. Drafts were shared, critiqued and refined later in the month, as we discussed the outcomes of the Conversations.

In October and after the last Congregational Conversation ended, we discussed and settled on a full outline of the report, redrafted and critiqued sections, developed recommendations and a summary, and put the final report together for Session and the congregation.

APPENDIX 2: Church Planning Inventory - Member Survey

(Copies will be made available in the church office.)

APPENDIX 3: Church Planning Inventory – Results

(Copies will be made available in the church office.)

APPENDIX 4: List of Boards and Committees

The following is a listing of the Boards and Committees at the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck include:

- **Adult Education Committee**
- **Board of Deacons**
- **Cemetery Committee**
- **Children's Ministries**
- **Congregational Fellowship Committee**
- **Congregational Nominating Committee**
- **DNPC Cooperative Nursery School Board**
- **Facility Care Committee**
- **Mission Committee**
- **Personnel and Administrative Committee**
- **Session**
- **Stewardship and Finance Committee**
- **Worship and Sacraments Committee**
- **Youth Ministry Committee**

APPENDIX 5: List of Programs

The various programs at First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck and include:

Worship

- Our major worship service is held from 9:30 to 10:40 on Sunday morning, with an additional abbreviated service at 11:15 on the Sundays when we serve communion during the school year (generally the first Sunday of the month)
- Elders, seminary interns, and members of the confirmation class serve as liturgist
- Members of the congregation serve as ushers and greeters. Our expectation is that each member of the congregation (scheduled by the Deacons) will be an usher or greeter each year
- Music is supplied by an adult chancel choir, a cherub choir (ages 4 ½ - 2nd grade), a junior choir (grades 3 – 8), a bell choir, and additional instrumentalists and singers from the congregation, as well as our excellent organist and pianist
- Eucharist is celebrated about once a month. Baptisms are celebrated as needed
- Young Children's Worship – Children ages 3 through kindergarten leave the worship service in the sanctuary and take part in a time of worship that is structured like the adult service (gathering, listening to God's word, giving thanks to God, sharing a feast, and a benediction) designed for these children's developmental level.

Spiritual Growth

- Kids' Kingdom (workshop rotation model church school) – Children in grades 1 – 5 leave the worship service in the sanctuary and take part in a learning activity based on a Bible story. Grade levels spend a few weeks cycling through a variety of activities on the same story, then present what they have learned from that story to the rest of the congregation during a worship service
- Christian Education classes for youth in grades 7 & 8 and 9-12 are held most Sundays of the school year in the CE building from 11:00 to 12:00
- A church school class for adults is held most Sundays of the school year in the CE building from 11:00 to 12:00. While the classes vary in lengths from 1 week to 5 weeks, each is structured so that people can fully participate without having attended previous classes
- A men's prayer group meets for breakfast on Wednesday mornings
- Newcomers' classes – led by the pastor, adults who have an interest in joining the church share their faith journeys, learn about what it means to be a member

of the First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck, and meet with the Session. The class meets for 3 weeks occasionally during the year, with new members joining the church soon afterward

- Confirmation class – students who are interested in joining the church (often 8th graders) meet regularly throughout the school year, attend worship services faithfully, take part in mission activities, meet with a mentor, and meet regularly throughout the school year to study what it means to be a Presbyterian and a member of the Dutch Neck church. Their year of study culminates on Pentecost as the students share their statements of faith and are welcomed as full members of the congregation
- Montreat Youth Conference - Youth and youth leaders attend the Montreat Youth Conference near Asheville, NC, for a week during the summer.

Fellowship

- Members of the congregation host a fellowship hour with a snack right after the 9:30 Sunday worship service. Our expectation is that each member of the congregation (scheduled by the Deacons) will host fellowship hour each year
- Junior High Youth Fellowship – middle school youth meet weekly on Sunday evening for fun, fellowship, food, and contemplating how to live as a Christian in the everyday world
- Senior High Youth Fellowship – high school youth meet weekly on Sunday evening for food, fun, fellowship, and contemplating how to live as a Christian in the everyday world
 - Members support both youth fellowships by cooking them dinner
- Potluck suppers with various themes (movies, mission, Ash Wednesday simple supper and Eucharist)
- Pancake breakfasts provided by the Deacons
- Advent event – the entire congregation joins the children in a morning of making wreaths and other decorations
- Caroling
- Christmas ornament exchange
- Women’s weekend retreat
- Church School picnic – the committee organizes a congregation-wide celebration at the end of the school year
- Men’s Softball – team participates in league of local churches each Spring.

Service

- Preparing and serving lunch at Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) on the fourth Wednesday of each month. There is an ongoing collection of food for TASK.

- Driving senior citizens to the West Windsor Senior Center
- World Sewing group meets in room 5 (upstairs) in the CE building the first Tuesday of each month during the school year at 10:00
- Cornerbrighteners II meet at members' homes the 3rd Thursday of each month to do community service, converse, and enjoy each others' company
- Construction project – for a week during the summer a group works on a construction project, such as Habitat for Humanity in Trenton
- Deacons and staff arrange
 - Visitations and other service to congregants in cases of illness, funerals, or other needs.
 - Arrange rides for shut-ins
 - Do check-in call two-to-three times a week to shut-ins
 - American Red Cross blood drive
 - Collections of supplies for the Children's Home Society in Trenton (back to school backpacks, Christmas gifts, and Easter baskets)
- Church World Service projects – CROP Walk, Blanket Sunday
- Additional special offerings.

And in support of all of this

A nursery is available for infants and toddlers form 9:15 to 12:15 each Sunday.

APPENDIX 6: Compilations of the Survey Comments, Mission Study Gatherings, and Congregational Conversations

(Copies of this material will be available in the Church office.)