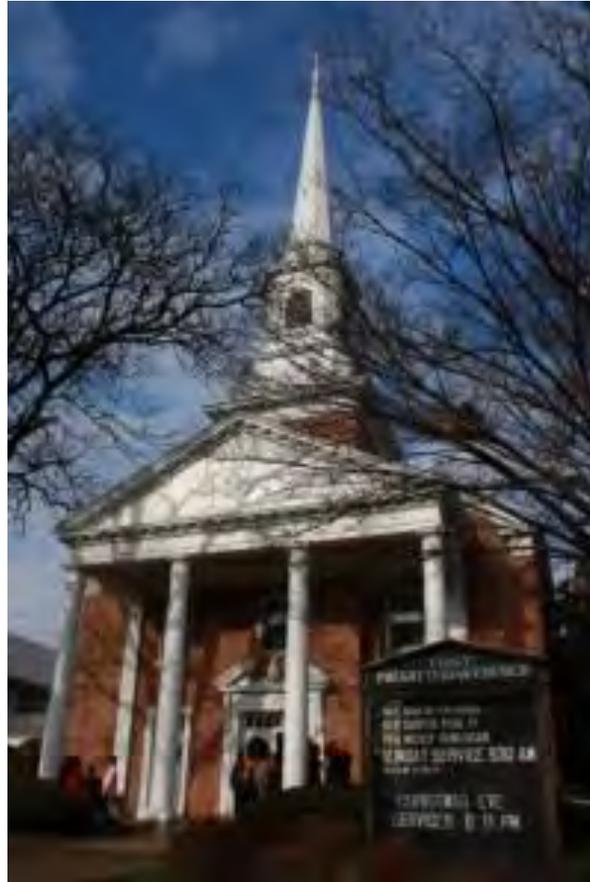


# MISSION STUDY REPORT

## First Presbyterian Church Metuchen, New Jersey



Prepared by the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen  
270 Woodbridge Avenue  
Metuchen, New Jersey 08840  
March 23, 2015



## **Congregational History**

First Presbyterian of Metuchen traces its history back to 1664, when the American colonies were first being settled. With such a long history, the church has undergone countless changes as the colonies became settled and governments of the church and the new nation became organized. Throughout the centuries, the church has experienced many periods of extreme growth and decline. The church has held worship services and Sunday school classes in several different locations throughout the Metuchen area.

The original meeting house of the church in Metuchen was built at its current location in 1717. In the centuries that followed, several expansions and renovations have taken place in order to meet the needs of the congregation and surrounding community. The current sanctuary and education building was completed in 1958. Today, another expansion of the Social Center has just been completed.

At what some members consider the height of the ministry, First Presbyterian Church boasted 2,321 members. Church school enrollment included 175 teachers and 1,200 children and youth. Twelve scout troops, both boys and girls, used the buildings, and 70 students were enrolled in the confirmation class. Members also participated in the New Church Development of Oak Tree Presbyterian Church.

In the last decade, the congregation has made great strides in the youth ministry program and Indonesian Fellowship ministry, and has engaged in two substantial capital campaigns and major building projects. Today, the church averages 250 in worship, boasts handbells and vocal choirs for all age groups, and runs a food pantry that serves 200 people each week. In addition to the church's many activities, the facilities and grounds provide meeting space for countless community groups and events.

Today, our congregation sits at the brink of new possibilities, excited about the next step of our faith journey. As we look toward the future, we recognize the growing diversity and amazing cultural shifts taking place in our community and are prepared to minister to the needs of this changing population.

## **Statistical Data and Interpretation**

In 2015, First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen participated in the New Beginnings program sponsored by the Elizabeth Presbytery. This next section includes an interpretation of data collected as part of that program.

## TEN-YEAR TRENDS

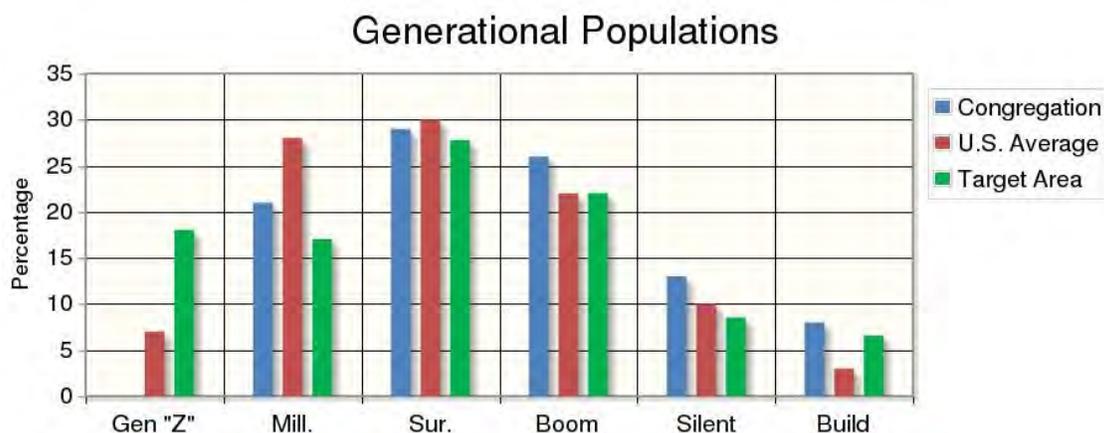
### *Membership and Average Worship Attendance*

Trends in membership and Average Worship Attendance (AWA) offer clues about the health of the congregation. Over the past 10 years, membership has declined 18% and average worship attendance and has declined 17%.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Membership</b>	855	846	847	702	711	712	711	714	711	699
<b>AWA</b>	300	250	250	250	215	250	270	275	250	250

### *Generational Populations*

The following graph shows the ages of participants in the congregation and the ages of those who live in the community. The blue bars show the percentage of participants in the congregation in each category. The red bar is how that compares with the total population of the United States, and the green bar is the breakdown compared to the community. The data related to the red and green bar comes from the U.S. Census Bureau.

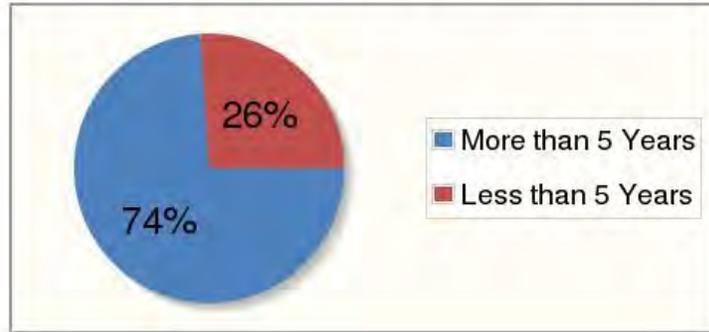


The chart shows that 48.8% of the congregation is of the Boomer generation or higher, while 37.16 percent of the wider community is in that category. The split between older and younger generations is very close to that of vital congregations, with 51% in the younger category and 49% in the older group. Vital congregations normally have a 50 – 50 split.

### **Member Tenure and Location**

The majority (74%) of members of First Presbyterian Metuchen have been in the church more than five years, with 26% of members having been involved less than five years. A large majority of Metuchen members live in the neighborhood immediately surrounding the church.

## **Participant Tenure**



### **PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT**

Measuring how people participate in the life of their congregation illuminates what kind of church we have – and our priorities as a congregation. Through interviews and a review of the annual church calendar, the New Beginnings program measured the kinds of engagement people have with the church in four categories.

## **Participant Engagement**



- **Direct Mission Service — 47%:** These are congregationally organized expressions of service to the wider community. Examples include mission trips, serving hot meals to people in need, or tutoring school children. Direct contact that allows participants to build relationships with the people being served is a key part of these activities.
- **Relational Development — 35%:** These are activities where the purpose is deepening relationships. It could include social events, like meals, fellowship groups, “game nights,” etc. These groups may feature devotion or prayer time, but they are primarily social in nature. Fundraising activities are included in this category.
- **Spiritual Development — 13%:** These are activities whose purpose is direct spiritual or discipleship growth. These could include prayers groups, Bible studies, Sunday school classes, or similar gatherings hosted by the church.
- **Decision Making — 5%:** These are committee meetings and administrative groups that plan ministry activities.

New Beginnings believes that, ideally, there should be an equal balance of spiritual, relational, and missional activities, with each around 30% and with decision making around 10%.

The New Beginnings assessment found the congregation **OUT OF BALANCE** in two ways:

#### 1. **WEAK ON SPIRITUAL ACTIVITIES**

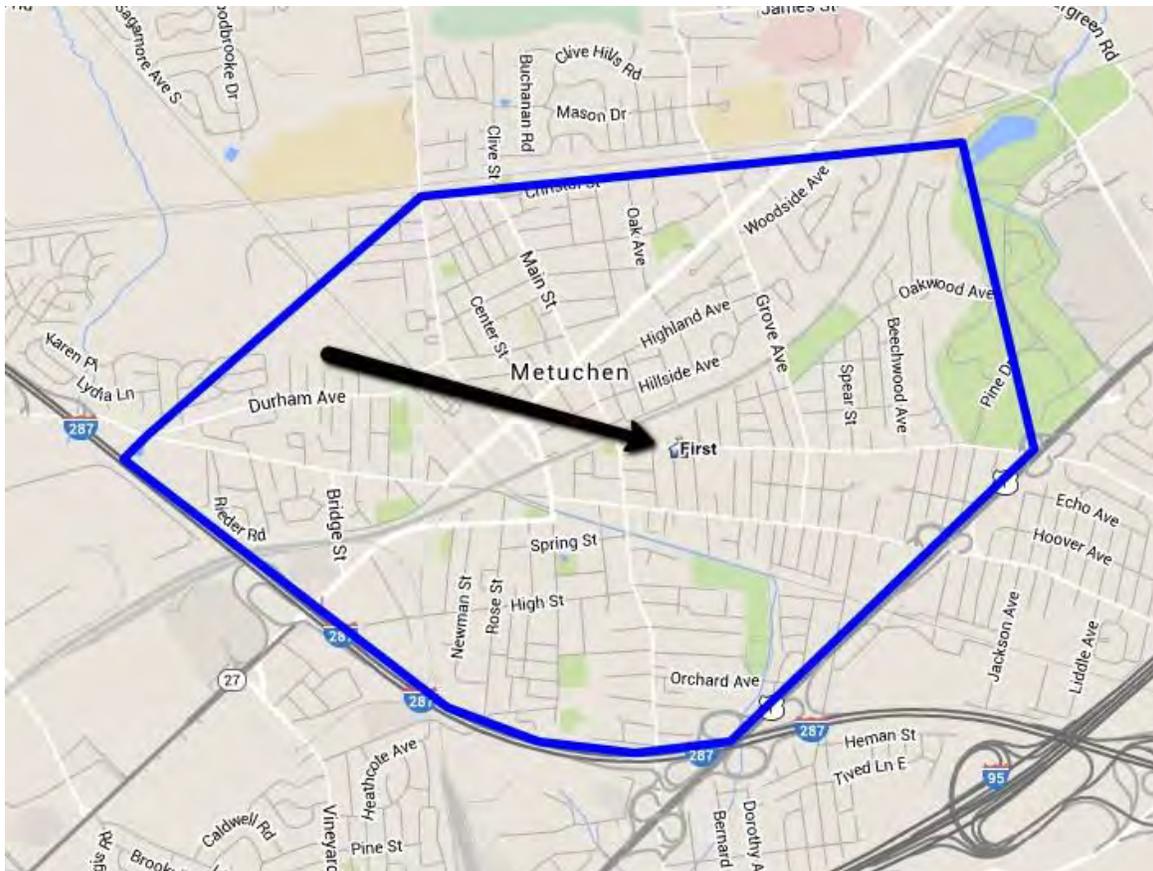
This pattern emerges when a congregation has gotten so busy having fun together or doing service together that they forget to engage in the very things that make church life different from any other group in the community. A lack of spiritual activities will lead to a congregation that does not grow spiritually from year to year and so depends on routine more and more.

#### 2. **LOW PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT IN DECISION MAKING**

Although the low percentage could be demonstrating the openness of the congregation in allowing full participation among its members, it could also demonstrate the need to discern the members’ passion in order for them to be more actively involved in ministry.

## THE COMMUNITY

The area used for the demographic information in the New Beginnings report is captured in the map below:



The boundaries are based on township lines, main streets, commercial areas and psychological boundaries, as well as what was observed during a windshield tour and the homes of members.

Metuchen is experiencing a growing level of diversity. As people move into town, Hindu and Muslim populations grow, making the area much less Protestant than it has been in the past. Many nearby community members are part of the Catholic or Jewish traditions, and most larger churches in New Jersey are Conservative Evangelical. Although there has been a strong ecumenical spirit among mainline denominations in Metuchen for several decades, the changing demographics invite questions about how the congregation will continue to “be the church” in the future.

Experian (a very large credit service and data-collection company), has developed profiles of groups or subcultures that share similar behaviors, social characteristics, attitudes and values based on multiple socio-economic and life-stage factors.

The area surrounding First Presbyterian of Metuchen is predominantly populated by two subgroups described by Experian as “Suburban Style - Settled in Suburbia” and “Booming with Confidence – Aging of Aquarius.” Below are some key characteristics of each of these groups.

***Settled in Suburbia*** - Upper-middle class families and empty-nesters living in established suburbs

Characteristics

- Predominantly white
- Middle-aged (40s and 50s)
- Married with older children or no children living at home
- May have aging parent living in the home
- Work white-collar jobs - professional and technical fields, likely both in the couple working
- Nearly one third have someone in the home whom is retired
- Describe political views as middle of the road
- Involved in their communities - belong to arts groups, veteran’s clubs, etc.
- Average in terms of philanthropy - donate to health, education, political, and environmental groups

***Booming with Confidence – Aging of Aquarius*** – upscale boomer-aged couples living in city and close-in suburbs

Characteristics

- Predominately white households
- Household heads primarily between the ages of 50 and 65
- Married couples with high educations
- Most are at the peak of their white-collar careers
- Grown children with 20% of households containing a young adult
- Lead comfortable, contented lifestyles
- Frequent the theater, museums, antique shows, and classical music concerts
- Like to exercise, and have favorite sports of golf, yoga, sailing, and power boating
- They love to travel
- Are fans of both traditional and new media
- Progressive in their social views, but their politics have taken a turn to the right
- Spiritual people with a practical outlook on life
- Belief in equality and support a number of causes financially

## ON-LINE OFFERINGS

In today's socially networked world, many people approach a congregation virtually before ever going to the physical location of the church. People of all ages are likely to experience the congregation initially through their attempt to find it on-line.

Metuchen's webpage is easy to find and to navigate, with up-to-date information that focuses on members and visitors alike. The information on the site is current. The congregation's Facebook page also contains up-to-date information.



## FACILITIES

When considering a congregation's resources, it is important to determine if the facilities are of appropriate size for the current congregation. It is also important to consider whether there is a growing list of deferred maintenance issues of other features that may inhibit the vitality of the congregation.

Based on First Presbyterian of Metuchen's Average Worship Attendance, New Beginnings' assessment is that it really only needs 58% of its current space.

The buildings and landscaping appear to be very well maintained. The condition of the parking lots and walkways provide safe entry into the handicapped-accessible facility.

Based on the average worship attendance, the current sanctuary usage is within the appropriate capacity range.

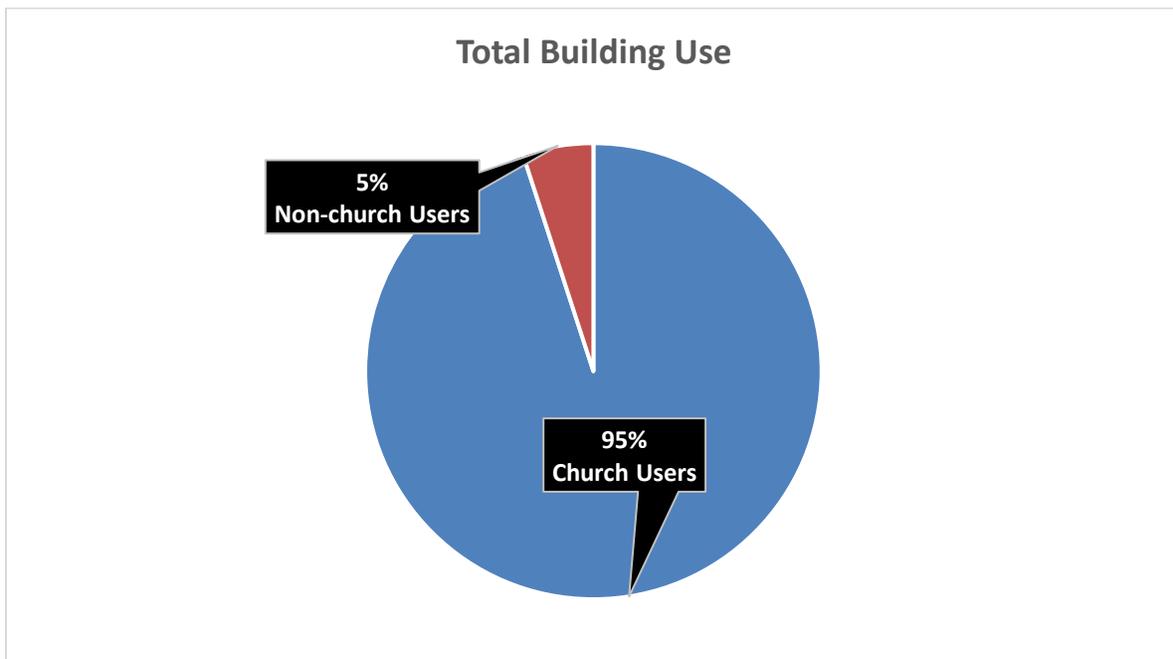
Gathering and fellowship spaces provide comfortable spaces for fellowship, Bible study and other activities. The newly constructed kitchen is totally updated and would easily pass health department regulations. Education classrooms are free of clutter and show no obvious child safety hazards.

The outdoor areas of the church property demonstrate the congregations' commitment to area youth by providing a baseball diamond, age-appropriate playground equipment, and beautiful seating areas.

The congregation has taken great strides to catch up on maintenance issues over the past several years. The most pressing maintenance project at this time is to update/replace the sanctuary windows.

### USE OF THE FACILITIES

The church building is a valuable resource for both the congregation and the community. A good indicator of a congregation's willingness to engage a community is by looking at how the church uses this resource. A quick look at the following chart demonstrates that the church allows outside groups to use the facilities, in addition to supporting groups sponsored by our church, including scouts, various music groups, bible studies, etc.

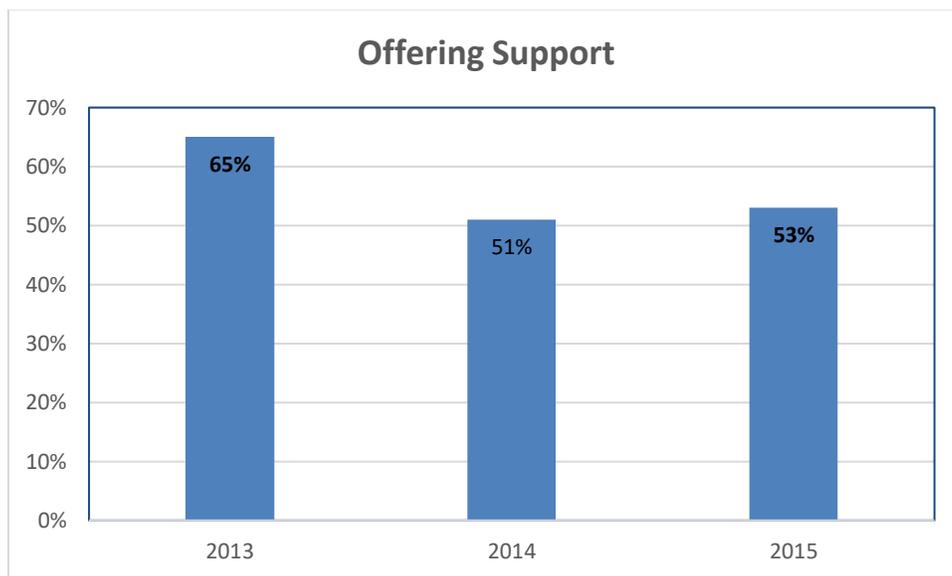


## FINANCES

Congregational finances are fairly complicated because each congregation tracks its income and expenses very differently. Congregations tend to have a lot of “restricted” funds, which can only be used for specific purposes, and which may or may not enhance the ministry of the congregation. In this review, New Beginnings did its best to evaluate the financial strength of the congregation based on the norms they have observed from many congregations.

### *Income*

They first reviewed the congregation’s income sources. At the minimum, a congregation should support its expenses with at least 70% of its income coming from offerings. Over the last three years, Metuchen has fallen below that percentage. Congregations that rely too heavily on outside sources of income will often compromise their ministry for the needs of those who provide outside income.



The overall income picture:

Operating Income	2015	2014	2013
Contributions	\$557,749	\$584,712	\$548,625
Interest from Investments	\$177	\$128	\$198
Building Use Income	\$38,785	\$32,691	\$34,771
Transfers from Other Accounts	\$259,941	\$266,939	\$249,920
Capital Campaign / SCR	\$158,117	\$200,271	\$ -
Commuter Parking	\$28,335	\$27,820	\$2,161
Buildings & Grounds	\$ -	\$800	\$ -
Cemetery	\$500	\$450	\$350
Contingency	\$2,307	\$10,275	\$ -
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,045,911</b>	<b>\$1,124,086</b>	<b>\$836,025</b>

This congregation has found ways to generate income through the use of the facility and grounds, but is still heavily dependent on transfers from other accounts in order to balance the budget. Even with the capital campaign in progress, contributions and member's willingness to support other fundraisers remains high.

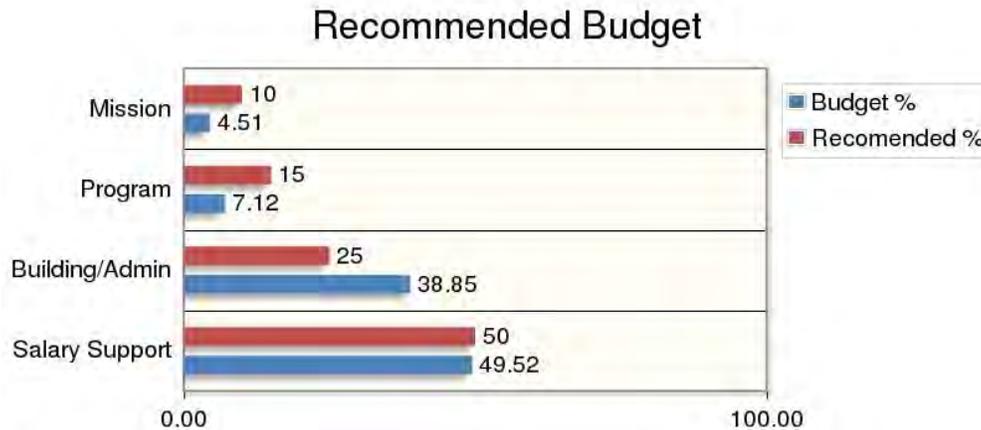
### **Revenue**

When New Beginnings considers the expenses of the congregation, they group them in four main categories; Salary Support, Building and Administration, Program Expenses, and Mission Giving.

1. **Salary Support** includes salaries of all church staff and benefits associated with employing them. Such benefits would include social security offsets, health insurance, pension etc. It does not include costs such as auto expense or office reimbursements. Most congregations will expend about 50% of their income on salary support. Experience has shown that congregations that exceed 50% in this category are rarely over paying their pastor. In fact, most New Beginnings congregations fall short of average salaries for their region. The salary amount is not too high but the percentage of the budget allotted to salaries is too high, short-changing mission, outreach and program.
2. **Building and Administration** costs are those associated with running the church office and the building. Typical costs include insurance, utility bills, maintenance and yard upkeep. A typical congregation will support building and administration costs with 25% of their income. Congregations that are not "right-sized" find themselves paying more for facilities, usually at the expense of their program.
3. **Program Expenses** are costs associated with running a program. This would include faith development, evangelism, and worship materials, choir music and supplies, advertising, and other resources and supplies that enable the program to operate. This is usually about 15% of a church's budget. Since this is the place where most congregations can control spending they will usually decrease their spending in this category first.

4. **Mission Giving** is giving that the congregation has contributed to both denominational mission causes as well as local mission causes. Mission giving trends are about 10% of a vital congregation’s budget as a starting point. Congregations will often reduce their mission spending after depleting their program spending.

The graph below identifies these categories and compares the suggested percentages (labeled “recommended”) to First Presbyterian’s budget. While the recommended percentages are not set in stone, they do represent the averages commonly suggested in church development circles.



Churches that have sustainability issues are typically over on their spending for building/admin or salary or both. When this happens, typically program spending is cut to compensate and if the slide continues, eventually mission gets cut as well. Yet program spending reflects the investment in the congregation’s participants as leaders and doers of ministry and mission giving is an essential component in being outward oriented. The values reflected in spending patterns will affect who is willing to affiliate or support the congregation. Younger unchurched people are less likely to want to support what looks to them to be internal expenses (building/admin and salary) and more likely to want to support spending that goes to mission or the equipping of people to be in mission.

With the current construction taking place on the Social Center, it is understandable that the congregation would be spending higher amounts than normal on the building, leaving program and mission budgets at lower levels.

In addition to the sources of income, the congregation also has some investments plus the estimated value of the property. This is outlined in the table below:

<b>Assets and Investments</b>	
<b>Property Value</b>	\$7,217,805
<b>Investments</b>	\$0
<b>Savings/Reserve</b>	\$0
<b>Memorial Funds</b>	\$37,366
<b>Endowments</b>	\$4,629,398
<b>Checking</b>	\$9,587
<b>Designated Fu</b>	\$525,154
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$12,419,312</b>

The congregation also has two loans with Metuchen Savings with a total balance of approximately \$823,299. The congregation is CURRENT with its total monthly payment of \$7,049.95.

In light of the financial information above, this congregation has **ADEQUATE FINANCIAL CAPACITY** for ministry. That is to say the income streams are adequate for meeting the expenses of the basic ministry of this congregation. That is not to say the congregation does not need to improve its financial position.

## SUMMARY

### History

The congregation was formed nearly 300 years ago when the American colonies were first being settled. Much of congregation's energy through the years has been on youth ministry and developing an Indonesian fellowship program. We have engaged in two substantial capital campaigns and major building projects, the second one being updating and expanding the Social Center.

While the community that the church serves has grown by 10.55% in the past 10 years, our membership and average worship attendance has declined. We need to adapt in order to effectively reach the community again.

### Current Congregation and Community

The congregation's members are comparable to the community in terms of age and is very close to New Beginning's recommendation of 50 – 50 split between younger and older age groups, with 51% in the younger category and 49% in the older group.

Although the diversity level of the surrounding community is not reflected in our current membership, the congregation recognizes the ethnic changes in the community. We currently employ an associate pastor who is responsible for the Indonesian Fellowship ministry.

Nearly three quarters of our members have been part of the church community for more than five years and the majority live in the neighborhood.

Participant engagement is focused primarily on missional services and relational development, with a smaller portion focused on spiritual development and decision making. We need to work toward a more balanced 30 – 30 – 30 level for missional services, relational development, and spiritual development.

### Programs and Mission

The church has a robust *youth ministry*, with a history of leading both church and community youth in participating in Humanity program projects across the country for over 25 years. Our children and youth programs serve children from age 2 through senior high.

- 130 children and youth participate in church school
- 101 children are enrolled in our Community Nursery School
- 44 – 55 youth participate in the Habitat for Humanity mission trip each year, along with 24 adult volunteers
- 150 children attend our summer Vacation Bible School (VBS)
- 50 children attend our summer Multicultural VBS

First Presbyterian has a long history of excellence in *music programming*. We have:

- 10 choirs, including 5 vocal choirs and 5 bell choirs
- 110 people participate in our choirs
- 3 music professionals lead our music programs

*Mission outreach* is in our hearts – and at the heart of everything we do. We provide financial and support to:

- Eight New Jersey cities
- Amandla Crossing in Edison, NJ
- Kiddie Keep Well Camp in Roosevelt Park, Middlesex County, NJ
- Elijah’s Promise Community Kitchen in New Brunswick, NJ
- Three mission workers who grew up in First Presbyterian of Metuchen
- Three Presbyterian missionaries

Our local hands-on mission provides:

- Food for 60 families every month (food pantry ministry)
- Food baskets for 50 families every Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter
- Home-cooked meals every month for families at the Ozanam Family Shelter

### **Facilities Evaluation**

The present facilities are well maintained, with little to no deferred maintenance. We have minimal usage of our facilities by the outside community. Our current capacity exceeds that which may be needed by our current congregation.

### **Financial Reviews**

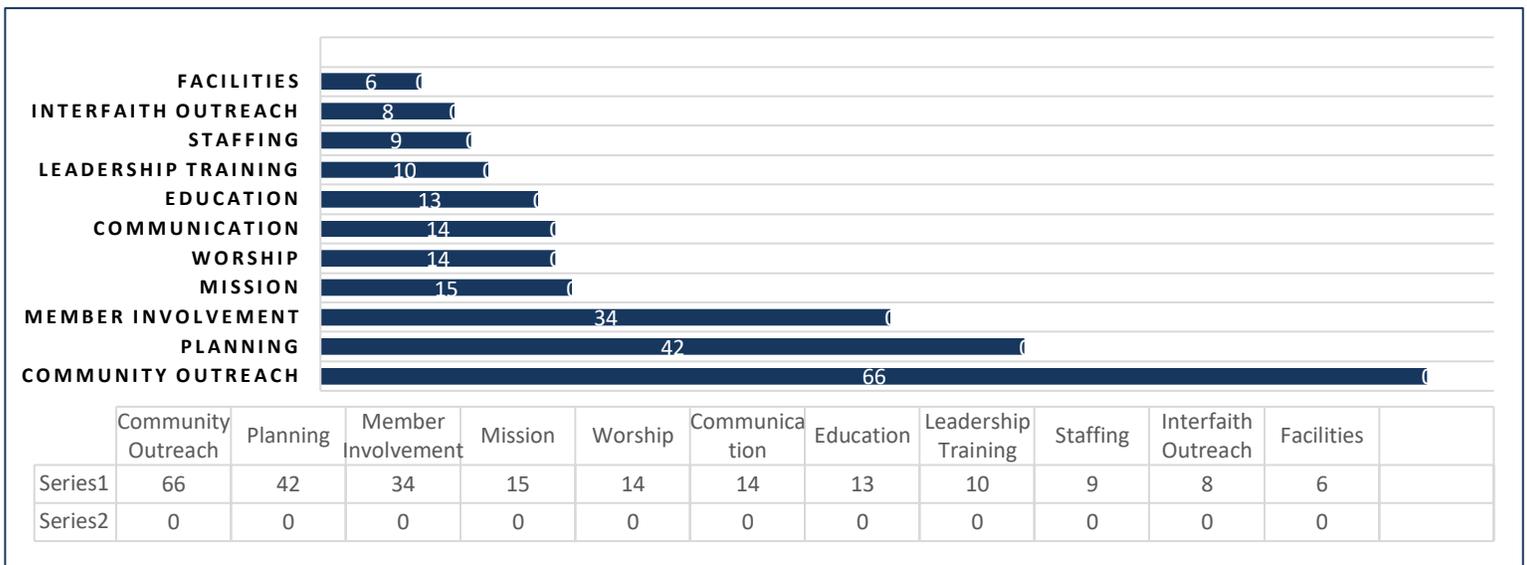
The congregation has adequate financial capacity of its ministry, however, we are heavily dependent on transfers from other accounts in order to balance the budget.

## WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE NEW BEGINNINGS PROGRAM

We learned many important things from completing the New Beginnings Program. One important learning was that **our members are very committed** to First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen as demonstrated by the strong leadership and active participation in the program.

- 9 New Beginnings Committee Members led the process
- 37 Facilitators and Assistant Facilitators led 18 discussion groups
- 104 people actively participated in the discussion groups, including 14 youth
- 150 total participants (the goal was 125 total participants)

Based on compilation of data from the small group discussion, we identified 11 categories of action that are important to members.



**Community outreach is very important.** Members want to put more emphasis on serving our community. This was the most often mentioned item in the Small Group discussions. Outreach includes finding ways to actively engage all age groups, hosting community events, leveraging existing programs and facilities, participating in community events, and becoming a more welcoming and affirming church.

**Thoughtful planning needs to be part of our on-going progress.** We need to analyze the needs of our community to determine how to be of service, better understand the needs and talents of our own members, and clarify our internal organizational structures in order to be more effective. Importantly, we need to establish a mechanism for continual evaluation of our outreach and program goals.

**Programs to increase member involvement should be implemented.** We should find ways to get all members actively involved, as well as re-connect with absentee members.

**Mission programs should be expanded.** Members want us to become a missional church.

**Alternative worship opportunities should be explored.** This can include a variety of worship times and types.

**Communication is important for both internal and external engagement.** Our church needs to do a better job of conveying to both our members and our community who we are and what we do.

**Education programs should be implemented.** These programs should include more Bible studies and second hour forums.

**Our leadership training is lacking.** We need to provide more substantial training for our church leaders to improve lay leadership and mentoring. We also need to train members for visitation and mission work.

**Our staff is excellent, but we have a couple of needs.** Members want to have consistent, long-term leadership for our youth groups, regardless of our youth pastor situation. We need a staff member who is specifically focused on communication to the church community and the community at large.

**We are interested in fostering more Interfaith outreach.** We should find ways to work with other churches and faith-based organizations.

**Our facilities are very good, but we have some opportunities to further improve them.** Renovating the Chapel and creating better fellowship space in the Education Building are two things we should be looking at long term. The New Beginnings Assessment highlight some signage issues we should address.

At the end of our New Beginnings Small Group meetings, the compiled data from the groups was presented to and accepted by Session. An in-depth discussion of the data was facilitated by Rev. Cheryl Galen, Transitional Leader of Elizabeth Presbytery, during a one-day special Session meeting. As New Beginnings Strategic Planning Committee has been appointed and is developing a strategic plan for executing new programs and activities from the New Beginnings program over the next one to two years.

### **First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen - Mission Statement**

We are a welcoming and diverse congregation that serves God by improving the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of people in our community and beyond through worship, education, fellowship, music, and mission outreach.

## **First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen - Vision**

To be an all-inclusive, connected, and loving community mobilized to serve.

### **On Calling a Pastor**

Having completed the New Beginnings process, we have a good understanding of the passion and needs of our congregation. We will be searching for a full-time Senior Pastor who can help us reach our goals and fulfill our mission.

### **Characteristics of the Pastor we hope to call** (taken from the PC (USA) Ministry Information Form)

- 1. Spiritual Maturity** – Shows strong personal depth and spiritual grounding; is seen by others as trustworthy and authentic; nurtures a rich spiritual life; seeks the wisdom and guidance of appropriate mentors.
- 2. Preaching & Worship Leadership** – Is a consistently effective preacher and worship leader; is able to inspire from the pulpit; communicates a clear and consistent message through sermons that are carefully prepared; projects the identity and character of the congregation through worship leadership presence.
- 3. Communicator** – Advances the abilities of individuals and the organization through active listening supported with meaningful oral and written presentation of information.
- 4. Interpersonal Engagement** – Displays a consistent ability to build solid relationships of trust and respect inside and outside of the organization; engage people, organizations, and partners in developing goals, executing plans, and delivering results; use negotiation skills and adaptability to encourage recognition of joint concerns, collaboration, and to influence the success of outcomes.
- 5. Motivator** – Creates and sustains an organizational culture which permits others to provide the quality of services essential to high performance. Enables others to acquire the tools and support they need to perform well; and influences others toward a spirit of service and meaningful contributions to mission accomplishment.
- 6. Public Communicator** – Demonstrates a comfortable ease when speaking in a variety of settings (both small and large groups); is effective at addressing a variety of topics; can get messages across with the desired effect.
- 7. Collaboration** – Has a natural orientation toward getting people to work together; fosters open dialogue; lets people finish and be responsible for their work; creates strong feelings of belonging among group members; is a good judge of talent and can accurately assess strengths and limitations of others.
- 8. Decision Making** – Makes effective decisions, balancing analysis, wisdom, experience, and judgment; is aware of the long-term implications of choices made; is generally regarded as offering solutions and suggestions that are correct and effective.
- 9. Willingness to Engage Conflict** – Steps up to conflicts, seeing them as opportunities; reads situations quickly; good at focused listening; can identify common ground and elicit cooperation from others in crafting mutual solutions.

- 10. Compassionate** – having the ability to suffer with others; being motivated by others pain and is called into action as advocate; is motivated by caring for others while concurrently keeping the organizational goals clearly in focus.
- 11. Organizational Agility** – Is astute about how congregations and/or organizations work; knows how to get things done through formal and informal channels; understands the importance of supporting good policy, practice, and procedure; appreciates the power in the culture of a congregation; is politically savvy.