

**First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton Square  
Hamilton Square, New Jersey**

## **Mission Self Study Report**

**As amended and approved by Session  
June 16, 2005**

**Mission Self Study Team:**

**Terri Burd  
Robert Fisher  
Paul Neu – Chair  
Evan Rothera  
Linda Weltmann  
Linda Woodman**

**Rev. Susan D. Reisinger - Advisor**

## Table of Contents

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Page</b>
Summary	3
Statement of Purpose	4
Vision Statement for 2005-2008	4
Our Mission Context	5
The Congregation	5
The Community	6
Critical Gaps	7
Three Year Plan: September 2005 – August 2008	8
Background	8
Focus Areas	8
One Year Action Plan: September 2005 – August 2006	14
Team Comments	16

## **Summary**

The Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton Square commissioned the Mission Self Study Team in the summer of 2004 to redefine the Purpose and Vision of our congregation, to define who we are as a church, to define the community we serve, and to develop a general plan of action for supporting our calling both within our congregation and to our community.

The team's final report is designed to answer each of the requirements presented to us by the Session. The self study team was fortunate to have a well developed Statement of Purpose and Vision Statement already in place. In this instance, our task was to update both statements, ensuring they fully capture the calling of our congregation. The resulting statements are found on page four of the report.

We utilized the resources available through the Percept Group, Inc., a market research company specializing in church related analysis. These resources assisted us in defining who we are as a congregation, defining exactly what community we serve, and in identifying where there are significant differences between the church and the community. Percept has worked with over 25,000 churches and is actively used by over 90 presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church USA. Through the use of Percept's survey materials and data bases, along with a small group program within the church, interviews with congregation and community leaders, and US census data, we were able complete this segment of our report.

The most important and detailed sections of the report are the Three Year Plan and the One Year Action Plan. Both plans grew out of the current activities of the church, actions coming from the previous Five Year Plan which ends in December 2005, and the needs of the congregation and community which came out of the surveys, small groups, and interviews. The Three Year Plan is focused on five key areas: education, growth, worship, member care, and church management. Each of these five areas are addressed with lists of key actions for the next three years. The One Year Action Plan defines critical actions needing to take place in the first twelve months. Many of these actions are ground laying activities which will provide the support, talent, and development of the leaders necessary for our congregation to succeed in its vision over the next three years.

## **Statement of Purpose**

We glorify God at the First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton Square, New Jersey, through the making of and caring for disciples, by

- communal worship of God
- encouraging and equipping members to provide and receive nurture, education, fellowship, and care
- reaching out to fellow Christians, to those in physical need, and to those spiritually apart from Christ

## **Vision Statement for 2005 – 2008**

We believe God calls the First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton Square to be an active, welcoming and growing congregation. We interpret God's vision for our church to be one of growth in spirit, growth in numbers of active worshipers, and growth of service within our community.

We, individually and as a congregation, endeavor to be more prayerful in seeking God's will and to be more energetic in living our faith. We are charged to nurture, educate, and care for one another, paying particular attention to integrating new worshipers and new members into our church family. We are called to reach out in witness and service, especially to the spiritually and physically needy in our local community.

We believe God intends us to continue as a neighborhood based congregation. God has provided us with a wonderful facility so we may grow and serve our community. We seek to preserve, deepen, and strengthen the spirit of the church family through a variety of choices for spiritual enrichment, service, and stewardship.

To God be the glory! Amen.

## **Our Mission Context**

### **The Congregation**

The First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton Square, New Jersey can trace its origins to 1772 and has very deep roots in our community. Our congregation is broadly spread throughout the major age groups; our members range from youth making their initial commitment to Christ to a strong and active group of retirees. A quick glance at the individual members will reveal a mix of long term local residents and a somewhat transient population. Members of our church make a concerted effort to be warm, friendly, and inviting to our community and to the visitors who come to our church facilities.

We place a very strong emphasis on serving our young people through an extensive Sunday School program and Vacation Bible School. Furthermore, we have an active youth fellowship program under the guidance of a full time youth director. Offerings to our youth include multiple service opportunities, mission trips, Bible studies, and assisting them in establishing connections and friendships.

Our church family loves music. We place a significant emphasis on the extensive choral and instrumental music programs in our traditional worship services. These musical programs provide a ministry for all ages. Our Contemporary Worship Service focuses on Praise in word and music. Supporting the spiritual needs of our congregation and community is vital to us, hence our commitment to offering a variety of worship experiences.

Opportunities are provided for adult education and fellowship. Adults may choose from Bible study, educational topics, home groups, service projects, and social programs and events. Additionally, our biannual church wide retreat to Camp Johnsonburg provides a break from the routine of everyday life and is helpful in strengthening the bonds with God, our families, and our friends.

We are very supportive of the Mercer County Interfaith Hospitality Network, also known as IHN. This county wide program provides support for homeless families by supplying a place to stay, food to eat, companionship, and moral support, to aid and abet the families in their efforts to extricate themselves from the cycle of homelessness. The churches which are involved in this program take turns hosting these families for a week at a time. Our church is a proud founding partner of this organization.

We are nearing the end of a five year plan, implemented in 2000. One of the key elements of this plan was the completion of a major addition to the church building. This addition was opened for use in the fall of 2004. A capital campaign continues to pay down the remaining loans, so the financial burden will be lifted sooner than originally planned. The addition provides the church with augmented classroom space and meeting rooms, plus a music room and updated offices for the staff. It also allows us to refurbish existing space to update our library and to create dedicated nursery facilities for our youngest worshipers.

In 1995, we determined that we were a mid-sized church and we needed to focus on two major objectives. The first objective was the provision of better spiritual enrichment for our congregation and the second objective was continuing the trend of growth in our numbers. During the next five years we implemented several programs to address these objectives. Since 2000, we called our first full time Associate Pastor to focus on evangelism and we hired a full time youth director. Our regular Sunday worship attendance has grown from approximately 200 to 300 people, while our total membership has held reasonably steady at just over 500 members.

## **The Community**

We define the community we serve by five zip codes (08610, 08619, 08620, 08690, and 08691). These zip codes cover a large portion of Hamilton and Washington Townships. A little over 80% of our membership resides within this area. This geography ("the Community") is home to almost 100,000 people and is comprised of urban areas, suburbia and newly developing neighborhoods on what had previously been farm land. The Community has transitioned quite significantly in the past 20 years and is now composed of over 70% white collar workers. Consequently, we are witnessing an increase in the commuting time to places of employment.

The US Census data for the Community shows that for the past five years the population growth, which was quite modest, has been slower than the national average. However, several new developments have been opened in the past five years and a new high school is opening in Washington Township (Robbinsville). Additionally, Hamilton Township is experiencing a marked increase in the amount of housing for senior citizens. There is a broad level of economic, lifestyle, and racial diversity within the Community. However, Anglos are the dominant race, as they encompass 83% of the population, versus the 68% national average.

The Community is predominantly Catholic in religious preference: 35.4% of the population. The second largest group of 12.7% has no religious preference. 10.6% of the community is Methodist, while the Presbyterian/Reformed group has the sixth largest preference at 7.2%.

The November 2004 Percept® Congregational survey and report ranked our Community as stable, in regard to the structure and concerns of the family. The traditional married couple and two parent family are the two most predominant family groups. Hopes and Dreams, with 33% of the population, is the concern area that seems to be most important to the Community. This means that people are concerned about: financial security, finding better health care, opportunities for recreation and leisure, and obtaining a satisfying job.

Surprisingly, the Percept study identified the fact that 24% of the Community is concerned with Basic Needs. This group of people is concerned about day to day financial worries, maintaining a basic health care plan, having an adequate amount of food, their personal health, opportunities for employment, and being able to afford housing and child care.

### **Critical Gaps between the Congregation and the Community**

The Percept Survey identified four specific areas where our congregation and the Community are quite different:

**Education:** Our Congregation has a broad range of educational levels, but the average is higher than the Community. Recognition of this gap can be an asset when developing more effective methods of reaching within our congregation and out to the Community.

**Faith Receptivity:** Since our current Congregation has a much higher level of faith receptivity than the general Community; we face the challenge of determining out how to share our faith and how to use it as a magnet to draw in people who are outside the church.

**Diversity:** In terms of economic, lifestyle, and racial groups, our Congregation is much less diverse than the general population of the Community. Given that Presbyterians are only about 7% of the population and there is a wide variety of worship styles available throughout the Community; this does not come as a surprise. We recognize our limited diversity and strive to maximize all opportunities to support and nurture both inquirers and visitors to our church.

**Change:** We are more open to change as well as new ideas and opportunities than the Community. Knowing the Community is less likely to embrace change, we need to be sensitive to their more traditional needs and comfort levels as we reach out in service to them.

## **Three Year Plan: September 2005 – August 2008**

### **Background**

The Three Year Plan is the end result of ten months of study, research, interviews, prayer, thought and interpretation by the Mission Self Study Team. We have narrowed the multitude of choices available for our congregation to pursue during the next three years into five general areas of focus: education, growth, worship, member care, and church management. Within each area, the Mission Self Study Team has developed listings of the specific items needing action, with recommended targets and projects.

Historically, our church has based its longer term vision on a five year plan. Encouragement from our interim pastor, advice provided from the Percept program and general business experience led us to narrow our focus. These resources taught our team that it is difficult, if not impossible, to accurately plot a congregational direction for such an extended period of time. Hence, we adopted the three year window of planning. The Three Year Plan will be further supported by a more detailed one year action plan for each of the three years. A new action plan is developed at the end of each current year, accounting for the present state of programs and projects and setting new, specific goals for the next twelve months.

Acceptance and implementation of the Three Year Plan and the One Year Action Plan creates a framework for the Session to guide the committees and members of the congregation with definable, measurable actions and goals.

### **Focus Areas**

Education: We enjoy an active and vibrant education program. Our goals for the next three years start with continued support for the strong Sunday School and youth programs already in place. The development and implementation of an enhanced process for recruiting, training, and supporting teachers, leaders, and assistants is critical for the ongoing success of all educational programs. We need to be more creative in looking for additional time slots to provide educational programs for our children, youth, and adults. Adult programs need to be evaluated and supported for both bible study and meaningful religious, family and personal development topics. Finally, if we desire educational growth into the next decade, we need to begin defining and developing a call for a Christian Education Director to oversee all aspects of education.

- Children and youth
  - Sunday School: (150 pupils, steady for past 3 years) Work to maintain and grow the program by 10-15% over the next three years
  - Vacation Bible School: Continue to support and promote within the church and local community
  - Children and Youth Programs: Complete the youth room, continue with youth mission trips, develop a long term leadership and commitment for the Christian education program, including the PJ's and senior youth programs, continue support for Johnsonburg campers
- Recruitment and training of teachers/leaders/helpers
  - Volunteers, the backbone of our children and youth programs, need to be continually developed
  - Encourage new people to work as team teachers and helpers within the Sunday School programs for children, youth, and adults
  - Look to supply training and resources for both our new participants and our experienced teachers/leaders and helpers
- Look at new times/more opportunities
  - Study options for higher levels of participation by children and youth by offering some of our regular Sunday morning programs and other educational opportunities at different times during the week
- Adult programming
  - Continue to support Bible study opportunities
  - Expand Sunday and evening class offerings to include recommendations coming out of the Percept® congregational survey and small groups
    - Expand and repeat the Purpose Driven Life seminar, utilize topical studies
    - Offer programs on marriage/marriage enrichment and parenting
    - Provide timely health care and financial care topics
    - Actively promote and pursue outside interest for introductory classes on faith
- Look towards calling a Christian Education Director
  - As a church looking to grow both in spiritual enrichment and in numbers of worshipers, we should consider hiring a Christian Education Director to coordinate, develop and implement the growing program choices we seek to create for our children, youth, and adults.

Growth: We are pleased that our worshipping congregation has grown from 200 to 300 people since 1995. However, it is not enough for this church to simply say that it wants to grow; we must be fully committed to the idea. We do not want to

be a church where our entire focus revolves around getting people in our doors and then let them drift aimlessly. We need to care for these visitors and potential members. One of the ways we will help the congregation to grow is by instituting a committee on evangelism. The committee will focus on ways to reach out into the community and to welcome visitors and inquirers into our church. We also need an ongoing program wherein people can learn about individual evangelism and can receive specific training and information on how to express their faith.

- Numerical growth
  - Increase active worship attendance by 3% each year
  - Target weekly worship attendance at 330-350 by the autumn of 2008
- Institute a committee on evangelism to work with the Associate Pastor
  - Develop and implement long term, specific program for increasing visitors from the Community for worship and other church activities
  - Investigate new methods of communication; press, local cable TV, radio, placement of bulletin boards, contact with new retirement communities
  - Increase visibility of our church in the Community
  - Become more involved in community service projects and events
  - Become a resource to the Community
  - Create subcommittee of members to seek out and welcome new visitors each week and acknowledge and encourage repeat worshipers
- Develop or bring in a program for individual evangelism
  - Teach individuals how to talk about their faith
  - Prepare our members to answer questions about our church and what it has to offer the Community
  - 100% support from the leadership (Elders and Deacons) of the church
  - Develop process or program for encouraging members to invite their friends, neighbors and colleagues to worship

Worship: Worship and spiritual growth are cornerstones of who we are as a congregation. Our goal is to grow the level of participation in worship by all ages and groups in our congregation and our Community. Music is a means of worship expression, a source of inspiration, and also a source of fellowship. We want our music programs to continue flourishing and draw even more participants to the various choirs, groups, and ensembles. Lay members are to be encouraged to increase their participation in all areas of worship, as well as on committees or projects. We need to promote and educate our congregation and our Community on the various styles of worship available every Sunday morning, particularly the contemporary service. A new, additional type of retreat, geared toward individuals who are recognizing God for the first time, or those who want a deeper relationship with God needs to be investigated. Finally, growth of prayer by individuals and all groups will be encouraged. Classes for those who do not know

how to pray or fully understand the concept and power of prayer will be developed.

- Maintain and support musical programs
  - Do not lose sight of the value of our current musical program
  - Encourage more participation
  - Use it as a tool to bring in more worshipers
- Participation by lay members
  - Increase participation by lay members in being liturgists, ushers, greeters and helping to straighten up the church and property after services
- Promote our different styles of worship services
  - Visitors and potential members need to be aware that each service has its own style; they need to be informed so they can choose a style suitable for them
- Stabilize the contemporary service
  - Move toward permanent positions for musician(s)
  - Encourage lay participation in the service and in leading the singing
- Spiritual retreats
  - Provide or recommend retreats geared for individuals seeking God for the first time or those looking for a deeper relationship with God
  - Investigate organizations providing this type of program
- Prayer groups with more options
  - Encourage the growth of prayer in all groups
  - Evaluate creating new specific prayer groups
  - Consider a “prayer 101” class, leading those who may not know or understand how to pray
- Community has a lower faith receptivity
  - Do not forget this fact when “promoting” our Church and its programs
- Encourage more child participation in worship
  - Encourage parents to bring their children to worship services

Member Care: Member care is where we are able to demonstrate God’s love for each other. This special care starts with our youngest worshipers by providing a safe and welcoming nursery. We need to offer special programs to reach out to young adults and retirees. It is time to build an understanding of the talents, gifts, occupations, and interests of the congregation that we may better serve each

other. With a fuller grasp of our abilities, we can focus our efforts on supporting our congregation's physical, spiritual, and emotional needs.

- Complete and implement a comprehensive plan for nursery care
  - Create a process, procedure, and program to provide regular nursery care
  - Implement the program as quickly as possible
  - Review plan every six months
- Discovering our individual gifts: rebuild an understanding of the talents, occupations and interests of the congregation – for helping one another and the community
  - Hold program for current congregation
    - 100% participation of current church leaders
  - Follow-through with new worshipers and new members
  - Implement talents throughout life of church
  - Potential for a congregational “yellow pages”
- New member care
  - Explore mentoring of new members and new, regular worshipers
  - Provide new members with more exposure to committees and organizations within the church
  - Create a process to guide new people through their first 1-2 years as part of congregation
- Congregational Care: Focusing the congregational resources on church and family needs
  - Consider implementation of Stephen's Ministry
    - Explore as an option for congregation to minister and support each other in times of crisis, and personal or group need
  - Develop opportunities for members to mentor one another, by specific interest, talent, gift, or age
  - Form an organized network for assistance within the church
    - To individuals: Driving, shopping, home assistance, handyman, etc.
    - To the church: handyman, office assistance, etc.
  - Connect with young adults
    - Assess special events and programs geared toward young adults
    - Reinstitute the writing to college students program
  - Increase opportunities for fellowship to help meet recreation and leisure needs, assimilate new members, and help retain all members

Church Management: We need to maintain focus on the key elements of running the day to day operation of our church. Prudent management of our financial resources, completion of the final aspects of the addition, the development of a plan for the maintenance of the expanded facilities, and a new stewardship plan are required for the continued health of the congregation. New areas requiring attention include the enhancing and updating of the website and the institution of a formal, annual planning process.

- Focus on what we currently do well
  - Good and prudent management of our financial resources
    - Includes budgeting, property planning, record keeping, and investment
  - Completion of final aspects of the addition project
  - Develop a plan for maintenance of the expanded facilities
- Institute a formal, annual planning process
  - Committee goals should be tied to actions in the One Year Action Plan and to specific aspects of the Three Year Plan
  - Session or an appointed subcommittee reviews the One Year Action Plan and track the attainment of the Three Year Plan every year
    - Responsible for development of the next One Year Plan
- Stewardship plan
  - Rebuild from the loss of strong supporters who have moved from area
  - Educate members and friends on the concept and need for good personal stewardship and tithing
  - Continued support of annual budgets, and payment of building loans
- Expand and update content of the church website
  - Make the website an integral part of our overall communication plan
  - Appoint a webmaster to manage all aspects of the site
    - Continually update information and graphics
  - Create awareness of site availability within the congregation and the Community as a key communication tool
  - Encourage usage on a regular basis

## **One Year Action Plan: September 2005 – August 2006**

The achievement of the direction and general goals of the Three Year Plan for 2005-2008 is dependent upon a set of strategic actions planned during each of the three plan years.

During year one of the Three Year Plan, the Mission Self Study Team recommends action on five key programs. These programs are to receive specific focus by the Session and the congregation as critical building blocks for the future.

### **1. Understanding/Discovering Your Gifts**

A formal program for the entire church family to explore individual interests and uncover talents and gifts

- Done individually for personal knowledge
- Allows people to understand their known and unknown gifts
- Opens each of us to new possibilities for service, action, participation, evangelism and leadership through encouragement of the congregation
- Allows congregation to reassess where our gifts and talents reside

### **2. Complete and Implement a Comprehensive Plan for Nursery Care**

Create a process and procedure to provide regular Nursery Care:

- All church services
- Broaden care to include major meeting nights and special events
- Provide continuity and easy transition as new volunteers become involved
- Develop guidelines concerning security, procedures, responsibilities, etc.

### **3. Plan and implement a process for long term support of the Contemporary Worship Service as it grows and attracts new worshipers**

Support the evolution of the service:

- Pastoral guidance / assistance
- Formation of a permanent plan for music, via volunteers and hired musician(s)
- Lay support on a weekly basis: liturgists, greeters, and ushers
- Promotion within the Community

#### **4. Plan and Complete Renovation of the Youth Room (Room 7) to support our youth ministry**

Team of youth and leaders to develop plan to complete room:

- Complete renovation and physical transformation
- Provide the youth with an extra sense of ownership
- Re-energize the youth with commitment from the church
  - Support the youth center status of the room
  - Look into extended hours of availability

#### **5. Initiate a committee on Evangelism**

A critical factor in our long term plan is continued growth of our congregation:

- Organize a committee/subcommittee of Session
  - Work with Associate Pastor
  - Focus on evangelism, growth, and reaching out into the Community
- Utilize first year for planning, training, and defining future path

## **Team Comments**

The Mission Self Study Team believes we have been successful in interpreting the multitude of data presented to us through long hours of discussion, evaluation and prayer in developing the presented report and plans. We thank all those who contributed to our effort and supported us in our endeavor. The entire study process has been both rewarding and exhausting. The Mission Self Study Team respectfully submits our report to the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of Hamilton Square.

Terri Burd  
Robert Fisher  
Paul Neu  
Evan Rothera  
Linda Weltmann  
Linda Woodman

May 17, 2005