

OLD BONES AND NEW LIFE

Mission Study Overview

The Mission Study Committee presented its report to session in September 2006 with absolute confidence that the Holy Spirit is present in the life of the congregation as God works to breath new life into old, dry bones (Ezekiel 37). Our interim period has not been just a time of reflection about our future, but also a time of reorientation and initial, yet bold steps to become the church God would like us to be.

For example, session took a leap of faith last spring in deciding to hire a youth leader without knowing the funding source; in response, a number of our members made additional commitments to our 2006 budget. A “Reach Out” campaign established personal contact with every church member or family unit over the summer, to learn about their joys and concerns, update our data base, and encourage all members to come share in our worship, education, and fellowship. Weekly adult education classes have been reinstated, and plans are being implemented to stimulate and enrich congregational fellowship. Communication about key session decisions and church events has increased, a new website is on line, and the quality of The Pipe Organ is vastly improved. With God’s grace and our members’ support, First Presbyterian Church of New Vernon (FPCNV) will continue to build upon this momentum in the years to come.

Thus, the Mission Study’s central focus is not on increasing membership or financial support, however necessary these may be. Rather, our goal is to transform our own individual lives, that of the congregation as a whole, and the world around us in accordance with God’s will. Steadfast, energetic, inspired, and inspiring pastoral and lay leadership are required in this place and time; with the commitment and support of the congregation, we believe that God will set us free to begin a new communal life of faith in Christ.

Major Themes

A revised Mission Statement and eight goals for 2006-2010 were recently adopted by session, targeting three overarching areas suggested by the results of the spring 2006 congregational survey and the Mission Study Committee’s additional research and analysis.

1. Strengthening Our Community of Faith

Survey results, both the data and the written supplementary comments, indicate a yearning for more substantive, meaningful, and joyful connections among us in worship and fellowship after Sunday services. There appear to be no deep divisions among us, for

which we are thankful. But there are subtle differences in age, socioeconomic characteristics, theology, and faith origins. Members' primary social contacts often lie outside the Church with family and friends who are not FPCNV members and with civic and social groups ranging from the volunteer fire department to school and other township boards to various country clubs. Other than a few after-church events and the annual Christmas dinner, no church social activities had been offered until spring 2006. An eroded sense of community had resulted from all these factors; one-quarter of survey respondents don't believe the Church – members and staff – would reach out to them were they absent from church consistently for some period of time, and another quarter of whom don't know whether the Church would do so. Our challenge is to overcome these barriers and strengthen relationships among us.

2. Becoming a Learning Community

A learning community is at the heart of a church that is Reformed and reforming. In particular, faithfulness requires us to understand better how our beliefs impact all aspects of our daily lives. As a church, we need to provide regular opportunities for children, youth, and adults to gather outside of worship for prayer, Bible study, theological discourse, and conversations with other people of faith. The characteristics of a learning community apply to many other facets of our life as well, whether it is learning the name and background of the person sitting across the aisle from us on Sunday morning or better equipping lay leaders through officer training and development.

3. Claiming New Power as Members through the Holy Spirit

It is unlikely that FPCNV will ever offer the breadth of programs characterizing neighboring, larger Presbyterian churches in Morristown, Basking Ridge, Liberty Corner, and New Providence. There is, however, room for considerable improvement in our programs and services, with those improvements depending to a significant extent on the empowerment of the laity. Theology and practicalities tell us that we simply cannot leave all the work of the Church to the pastor, and during the last several months we have seen growing lay team efforts in areas we once might have delegated to church staff in communication, reaching out to our membership, and senior high social events and mission activities. Broad congregational commitment and support are needed for this church to prosper, and we believe such participation is less an obligation than it is a means for our members to find additional purpose, meaning, and fun in their lives.

Mission Statement

The mission of the First Presbyterian Church of New Vernon is to continuously discover God's love and spread it near and far.

As followers of Jesus Christ we are committed to:

- Being open to the Holy Spirit who empowers us to lead Christian lives.
- Experiencing God's grace by exploring and sharing our faith in worship, study, and service.
- Nurturing the spiritual growth of one another through active and consistent participation in worship, education, Bible study, and prayer groups.
- Preparing our children and youth for a life of faith through Sunday School programs, youth led worship, service projects, and fellowship activities.
- Actively growing our church by sharing the joy and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
- Caring for one another through shared concern, personal relationship and fellowship.
- Nurturing a community in which all feel welcomed, safe and supported.
- Serving God as stewards by giving generously of our time, talents, and financial support.
- Supporting and actively participate in outreach programs to those in need wherever they may be.
- Encouraging and supporting members of our congregation in pursuing Christian service through candidacy and mission work.

“We welcome you to the embrace of God's love.”

Goals for 2006-2010

I. Worship: Create inspirational and relevant worship services centered in Jesus Christ so a diversity of people can praise God, gain faith and hope, be equipped to fulfill Christian responsibilities, and feel part of our fellowship as a community of believers.

II. Enrich Our Life Together: Increase opportunities for spiritual growth, deepening of our faith and applying it to daily life, intellectual stimulation, fun and fellowship.

III. Children and Youth: Expand meaningful opportunities for the participation of children and youth in Christian education, worship, fellowship, ministry, and service.

IV. Mission and Outreach: Fulfill the commitment of the Church of Jesus Christ to minister to the needs of the poor, the sick, the lonely and the powerless, locally and throughout the world; to help establish Christ's just, peaceable and loving rule in the world; and to be a visible presence of our church in this community.

V. Membership: Reach out to inactive, active, and potential new members to share the good news of our church life and to maintain connections with important events in their lives.

VI. Communication: Increase connections to members, friends, and the larger community to promote understanding of and involvement in our worship, ministries, programs, and activities.

VII. Participation: Be intentional about (1) expanding church members' involvement in all that we do and (2) increasing members' support of FPCNV through sharing God's story and Christ's love in prayer, service, community, and gifts.

VIII. Leadership: Develop Session's and Deacons' capacity for the most effective and efficient decision-making and implementation.