

Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville

Congregational Self-Study Planning Committee
Report to the Congregation

January 25, 2004

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Summary

The congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville is proud of its 305-year history and hopeful about its future.

Our overall membership has been quite stable (in the high 800s) for years, with about thirty members joining and leaving each year as individuals and families in our mobile society move to new places. Our congregation includes active members from the mid-teens to well over 90 years old, with a healthy balance of men and women. We are also diverse in terms of members' personal, social and denominational backgrounds. We are less diverse racially and ethnically than the surrounding community, and less than we would like to be. We hope for ways to continue welcoming new members from more diverse backgrounds while affirming what is good about our past.

Our congregation shares a common Reformed confession of faith in God and in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet we in Lawrenceville do not expect all members to interpret or express this faith in the same way. More than by details of dogma, we understand ourselves to be bound together by common values that flow out of our shared faith. We value truthfulness in worship and in life. We value inclusiveness, fellowship and community. We value service to others, and other applications of faith toward improving our world. We have a particular commitment to helping children and teenagers learn about God and grow in Christian community. We value learning – at all stages of life – about our faith and its application to personal and community living. We value our historic buildings and our traditions but we are willing to adapt to changes in our world and in our society.

Our members have many opinions about what in this church is worth preserving, and a lot of ideas about how to strengthen aspects of the church that are important to them. These aspects are listed below, roughly in order of how often members have mentioned them in our “congregational conversations”:

- Worship and Music
- Congregational Life
- Programs for Young People
- Mission Outreach
- Adult/Lifelong Education
- Other program areas
- Facilities
- Finance and Stewardship

Different members have offered different specific suggestions, but there is an enormous amount of consistency about the vision for our future that congregation members supplied through the self-study process. Members' comments also revealed that there is an enormous reservoir of tolerance, open-mindedness, and respect for the opinions of others within the congregation.

At this stage in our congregation's life, our vision for the future is more a sense of direction than a blueprint. We want to preserve many aspects of our church that we value, but we also hope to strengthen our church in many specific ways. From this comes the summary sound-bite for our vision, “preserve and strengthen.”

All of this presents an exciting opportunity for leadership in the next several years, both for those serving as church officers (elders, deacons and trustees) and for our next pastor and associate pastor. There is a very strong base upon which to build, and a great sense that our congregation can continue to grow and become stronger in the coming years. Our congregation is ready for new leadership.

The self-study process invited members to comment on the characteristics we seek in our next pastor. Once again, members offered many thoughts and suggestions. The composite picture that emerges will be very helpful to the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) that will begin its work this month.

The CSSPC wishes to thank all of those congregation members who participated in the self-study process. We hope that each of you will recognize your own input within this report, and we hope that the report helps each of us to celebrate the rich mosaic of faithful persons that makes up the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, and to rededicate ourselves to help in the shaping of its future.

Background – Our Church and Its History

*Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come ...
From everlasting Thou art God, to endless years the same.*

The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville is part of the Presbyterian Church (USA), a branch of the larger family of churches called the Reformed Churches. Reformed Churches began in the 14th through 16th centuries proclaiming the lordship of God over all of life, giving the Bible back to the congregations, restoring governance and liberty to the people, and emphasizing the care of each Christian for another.

The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville (formerly Maidenhead) was founded by settlers who came down the old Indian trails from Long Island and Connecticut in the late 17th century. In 1698, those who came to Maidenhead were granted land near the corner of Route 206 and Carter Road for a cemetery, school house and church. The land was never used for these purposes, probably because the grantors expected that an Anglican church would be established, while the settlers preferred a Presbyterian one.

A meetinghouse was erected on the site of the present building sometime in the early 1700's. The present structure was built in 1764, originally measuring 45 feet wide and 32 feet deep, about half the present depth. Most likely, the roof line ran parallel to the road and the congregation sat on three sides of a central pulpit and communion table. The building was doubled in size and the orientation changed to the present one in 1833. In 1853, the building was given its present depth of 75 feet, the balcony was enlarged, and the pulpit was carved to match the front arch.

People are the life of the church. Through the centuries, countless hundreds have sung praises to God here, pondered God's Word, cared for one another, and witnessed to God's love in the affairs of life. Some names stand out for particular deeds. Elias Phillips, a major in General Washington's army and later high sheriff of the county, is credited with attacking a Hessian supply train passing through the village, taking prisoners for Washington, and giving the supplies to the residents of Maidenhead. John Hart, signer of the Declaration of Independence, was baptized here on December 31, 1713. In 1810, the seventh minister of the church, Isaac V. Brown, began the Maidenhead Academy to prepare young men for college; this school is now The Lawrenceville School. Nearly a hundred years after the Revolutionary War, Robert Hamill Nassau and his sister Isabella left Lawrenceville to serve as missionaries on the River Ogawe in Gabon, West Africa. They served there from 1861 to 1906, and even today are honored by the government of Gabon for their medical, educational and pastoral work. Accounts of their work attracted Albert Schweitzer, and he continued the mission they had begun in the town of Lambarene.

The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville has been at the heart of its community for over 300 years. Our church continues to grow in ministry and mission. In recent times, members of the church have served God in the affairs of the township and region by working for better housing, schools, recreation for the young, assistance for those in trouble, and more responsive government. The church's participation in the broader affairs of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been carried out by men and women in state and national positions.

The 42 years of Dana Fearon's ministry (1960-2002) saw significant growth and change in the congregation, reflecting great growth and change in Lawrence Township and surrounding areas.

The Self-Study Process

*Take Thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray,
Give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
Teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
Grant us in all our thoughts to honor Thee.*

When Pastor Emeritus Dr. H. Dana Fearon, III retired in November 2002, the congregation began the prescribed Presbyterian process for seeking a replacement. The Session appointed a Transition Team to search for a suitable Interim Pastor, and the Rev. Patricia Daley assumed that position as of April 2003. In May 2003, the Session appointed a Congregational Self-Study Planning Committee (CSSPC) “to carry out a comprehensive and inclusive self-study process, on behalf of the congregation and in partnership with the congregation, between June 2003 and January 2004.”

Before beginning the search for a new pastor, a congregation should have a good sense of what it would like to accomplish under that pastor’s leadership. This in turn requires that the congregation have a clear understanding of the richness and diversity of its membership, of members’ needs and aspirations (both spiritual and otherwise), of important trends in its community and the larger world, of the resources available to support the congregation’s life and work, and of the congregation’s vision for its future. In June 2003, the CSSPC identified the following four goals for its work:

- To lead the congregation through a comprehensive self-study process that is appropriate for this church and this time, informed by the successful self-study experiences of similar congregations;
- To incorporate into the self-study the inputs and insights of as many congregation members and friends as possible;
- To use multiple and diverse methods for gathering information and opinions for the self-study, including but not limited to prior related studies, external reference materials, printed and online surveys, narrative written submissions, focus groups and conversations;
- To analyze the collected information and opinions comprehensively, respectfully and prayerfully, and to organize and compile them into a written final report to be presented to the congregation in January 2004.

The CSSPC also identified four purposes that will be accomplished if its final report is successful:

- It will help all members of the congregation to understand better who we are as a church family, what we perceive that we need, and our vision for the future.
- It will serve as the primary reference document for the preparation of a Church Information Form (CIF) by the Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC) to be elected by the congregation after the self-study is completed.
- It will be a valuable resource for candidates for the position of Pastor who are seeking to understand the congregation and its vision.
- It will serve as a continuing and helpful guide to the congregation and our new Pastor as we work together toward fulfilling our vision in the years to come.

Also in June 2003, the CSSPC developed a “work plan” (included as an appendix) and used it as a guide to complete its work thoroughly and on time. Listed below are the highlights of the work effort.

- **Congregational Survey:** The CSSPC studied several methods of completing a congregational survey and determined that the ReVision Program of the California-based Percept Group would serve our purposes the best. Percept states that their survey "seeks to gain strategic information about the persons who participate at any level in the life of your church." The ReVision report includes an extensive report on our community and compares this information to the results of the survey. Over 275 members and friends of the church completed the survey.
- **Focus Groups:** Between late September and early December, the CSSPC conducted more than twenty “congregational conversations” (focus groups) that engaged over two hundred individuals in discussion of what is important to them about our church and of their vision for its future.
- **The distillation and synthesis** of these findings, with additional information from other church resources, are included in this report.

Information about Our Congregation

A. General Information about Our Congregation

The church staff has compiled some statistical information about our congregation as of October 2003. Highlights follow:

Age (n = 863)

# members	Age range															
	15 & under	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71-75	76-80	81-85	86 & over
100-119																
80-99																
60-79																
40-59																
20-39																
0-20																

Location and participation (n = 863)

Location and participation level	% of members
Local – participating actively	51%
Local – participating somewhat*	23%
Local – non-participating	14%
Out-of-town	12%

* Attend 1 of 3 Sundays +/- or involved in a church program +/- or pledge.

Out-of-town members (n = 100)

Characteristics	% of group
Young adults	63%
Moved less than two years ago	20%
Moved more than two years ago	14%
Elderly	3%

B. Results from the Congregational Survey

Our community in comparison to the United States as a whole

For statistical reference, the CSSPC defined our community as a polygon that includes most of Mercer County – roughly the area within 5 to 7 miles of our church meeting house. To avoid skewing the socioeconomic comparison data, we excluded much of the City of Trenton. The analysis that follows is based upon Percept's assessment of our community's 2000 census data (adjusted for 2003) in relation to the entire U.S. The detailed Percept report is available for review via the church office.

- Population. Our area's population grew by 13.4% between 1990 and 2003, slightly below the U.S. average of 15.3%. For the immediate future, about 1% additional annual growth is expected.

- Diversity. Our community's diversity is rated as "extremely high."

The following groups are represented well above their average for the U.S.:

Lifestyle Groups

- Affluent families (38% here vs. 13% nationwide)
- Young and coming (24% here vs. 14% nationwide)

Race/Ethnicity Groups

- African American (21% here vs. 12% nationwide)
- Asian (9% here vs. 4% nationwide)

The following groups are represented well below their average for the U.S.:

Lifestyle Groups

- Middle American families (19% here vs. 34% nationwide)
- Rural families (1% here vs. 14% nationwide)
- Senior life (3% here vs. 7% nationwide)
- Ethnic and urban (15% here vs. 17% nationwide)

Race/Ethnicity Groups

- Hispanic (7% here vs. 13% nationwide)
- Native American and other (2% here vs. 3% nationwide)

- Generations. The distribution of generations in our area mirrors the U.S. population very closely:

- Age 0 to 20 – 30%
- Age 21 to 39 – 27 %
- Age 40 to 59 – 28%
- Age 60 to 74 – 10%
- Age 75 & up – 6%

- Family structure. Among those 15 and older, the percentage of married people (57%) mirrors the U.S. average. 30% have never been married (vs. 27% nationwide) and 14% are divorced or widowed (vs. 16% nationwide). Of households with children, 72% are headed by a married couple (vs. 69% nationwide). Those headed by single mothers (23%) equals the national average. Those headed by single fathers (5%) are below the national average (7%).

- Education. Ours is a well-educated area. Of those 25 and older, 43% are college graduates (vs. 25% nationwide) and 21% have completed some graduate education (vs. 9% nationwide). Only 15% have not completed high school (vs. 20% nationwide).
- Household concerns. In comparison to the nation as a whole, residents of our area are more likely to be concerned about fulfillment of hopes and dreams, and less concerned about family problems. Other household concerns in our area which are “likely to exceed the national average” include social injustice, racial/ethnic prejudice, time for recreation/leisure, aging patient care, better quality healthcare and personal health.
- Community anxiety level. Factors that generally relate to community problems are at a *very low* level in our area. For example, only 7% of households are below the poverty level (vs. 13% nationwide).
- Faith receptivity. The “faith involvement level” in our area mirrors the national average, with 36% “strongly involved, 30% “somewhat involved” and 34% “not involved.” 78% of households indicate a preference for “historic Christian” religious groups (vs. 77% nationwide).
- Financial support potential. Our area has a high average household income of \$101,608 (vs. \$64,338 nationwide), and 35% of area households report giving more than \$500 to churches (vs. 31% nationwide).
- Church style. The overall church style preference in our area is described as “very traditional,” in terms of worship, music and architecture, in comparison to the U.S. as a whole.
- Church program preference. Program preferences that exceed the national average in our area include cultural programs (music, art, etc.), church-sponsored day school, active retirement programs and family activities.
- Potential resistance to change. Based on the overall demographics of the area, Percept characterizes our area as being “somewhat high” in overall resistance to change, in comparison to the U.S. as a whole.

Our congregation in comparison to the U.S.

The following conclusions were gleaned from the 278 replies we received to the congregational survey administered on and about September 14, 2003, and from general information about the congregation.

- Membership. We had 873 members as of September, 2003. This has been quite stable for several years.
- Diversity. We are somewhat low in both race/ethnicity diversity and lifestyle diversity compared to national averages. We are well in excess of the U.S. average representation of the Anglo race/ethnicity group (95% vs. 68% nationwide). All other race/ethnicity groups are under-represented in our congregation, vs. their proportions in the U.S. population. Considering age and income groups, “mature and affluent” represents 59% of our congregation (vs. 17% nationwide), and “young and affluent” represents 22% (vs. 16% nationwide).
- Generation. It is not surprising that, in comparison to the overall U.S. population, the 0 to 20 age group was under-represented among those who filled out our survey (22% vs. 30% nationwide). The 60 to 74 age range was heavily represented (18% vs. 10% nationwide). Other age groups were represented in proportion to their presence in the overall population: 21 to 39: 28%, 40 to 59: 26% and 75 & up: 6%.
- Family structure. Those who completed our survey were far more likely to be married than the U.S. population as a whole (75% vs. 57%) and far less likely to be single and never married (10% vs. 27%). Households with children were more likely to be headed by married couples (75% vs. 69%) and less likely to be headed by single mothers (19% vs. 23% nationwide).
- Education. 74% of our survey respondents are college graduates, vs. 25% for the nation as a whole. 34% have completed some post-graduate work, as compared with 9% nationwide.
- Primary concerns. In comparison to the U.S., our respondents were much more likely to emphasize spiritual or personal concerns (29% vs. 15%) and somewhat more concerned about community problems (19% vs. 16%). They were far less likely to be primarily concerned about basic necessities (13% vs. 24%) and somewhat less concerned about fulfilling their hopes and dreams (26% vs. 30%).
- Community anxiety level. Generally speaking, our congregation is significantly below average in the characteristics known to contribute to community problems (e.g. poverty level and high school dropouts).
- Faith receptivity. Not surprisingly, our congregational respondents are far above the U.S. average in self-rated faith involvement, with 94% indicating “somewhat involved” or “strongly involved,” vs. 65% nationwide.
- Financial support potential. Our respondents indicated an average household income of \$93,600 (vs. \$64,338 nationwide). 83% of respondents indicated that their household contributes at least \$500 to churches each year.
- Church style. Those who responded to our survey indicated an overwhelming preference for traditional church architecture (68% vs. 7% who prefer contemporary); the national averages are much closer, with 27% preferring traditional and 16% contemporary. 43% of the Lawrenceville respondents prefer

traditional music while 18% prefer contemporary; the national figures are 25% traditional and 20% contemporary. 37% of our respondents prefer the style of worship to be traditional, while 28% prefer contemporary; the national averages are 20% traditional and 26% contemporary. In summary, our preferences are very traditional, but there are many among us who prefer more contemporary styles of worship and music.

- Church program preference. Our preferences that exceed the national average include cultural programs (art, music, etc.), spiritual retreats, adult theological discussion groups, youth social programs and community services for food and clothing.
- Potential resistance to change. Based on our congregation's demographics, the Percept analysts conclude that our potential resistance to change is *somewhat low*.

Ratings of health and wholeness (congregation vs. community)

Combining available data from the community and the congregation, Percept draws several general conclusions about how our congregation is similar to or different from our community in respect to areas of concern related to health and wholeness. (This is done for the purpose of identifying possible areas of mission or service to the community.) In comparison to our congregation, people in our community are MORE distressed about:

- Job/career/financial matters/finding time for recreation and leisure
- Personal health, including health insurance, substance abuse, quality health care
- Neighborhood safety

but similarly or less distressed about:

- Life's basics: food, housing, employment, education, etc.
- Children, schools, etc.
- Personal and family relationships

Our congregation in comparison to our community

In summary, here is how the survey reveals the comparison between our congregation and the surrounding community (defined on page 9). The indicators at the top are those in which we are most divergent from our community. Those at the bottom are those in which we are most similar to it.

High divergence

Diversity

Our community is extremely diverse. Our congregation is “somewhat low” in diversity.

Moderate divergence

Faith receptivity

Our community is typical of the U.S. in this respect. Our congregation is “extremely high.”

Potential resistance to change

Our community is “somewhat high.” Our congregation is “somewhat low.”

Low divergence

Projected population change

Our community is growing at 1% per year. Our congregational membership has been relatively stable.

Generation

Those who completed our survey are somewhat older on average than our community, with somewhat higher representation of the 60 to 74 age range in particular.

Family structure

Our community is somewhat traditional in this respect, and our congregation is very traditional.

Primary concerns

Within the community, concerns about hopes and dreams are primary.

Within the congregation, spiritual/personal concerns are primary.

Church style preference

Both congregation and community are very traditional, with the community slightly less traditional than the congregation.

Convergence

Educational level

Both congregation and community are extremely high in relation to national averages.

Community anxiety level

Neither congregation nor community indicate a prevalence of factors normally associated with community problems.

Financial support potential

Both congregation and community are extremely high in relation to national averages.

Church program preference

Both congregation and community perceive needs for similar programs, including those with recreational and cultural dimensions.

Our congregation’s ratings of life’s satisfactions

Survey respondents indicated great satisfaction with various aspects of their personal and spiritual lives (using a very dissatisfied-to-very satisfied scale). As not every respondent rated each satisfaction area, the percentage of respondents who rated each area is indicated in parentheses below. Areas are listed in order of their overall rating; i.e., those at the top of the list were those in which the survey respondents indicated the greatest degree of current satisfaction, while those at the bottom were rated lower.

+90 or higher on a scale of -100 (very dissatisfied) to +100 (very satisfied)

1. Relationship with my children (85% of respondents rated this item)
2. My family life (96%)
3. General satisfaction with the church (98%)
4. Marriage relationship with my spouse (76%)
5. My education (96%)

+80 to 89 on a scale of -100 (very dissatisfied) to +100 (very satisfied)

6. My children’s educational environment (70% responded)
7. Relationship with my extended family (91%)
8. Quality of life in my community (95%)

+70 to 79 on a scale of -100 (very dissatisfied) to +100 (very satisfied)

9. My job/career (73% responded)
10. My health (95%)
11. Relationship with God (97%)
12. Personal relationships with people in church (96%)

+60 to 69 on a scale of -100 (very dissatisfied) to +100 (very satisfied)

13. My personal financial situation (93% responded)
14. Relationship with stepchildren (11%)
15. Personal spiritual growth (96%)

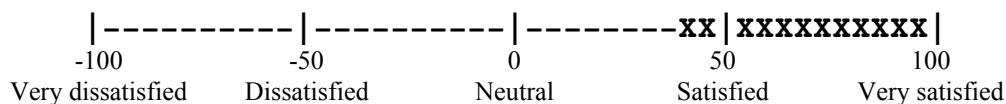
+50 to 59 on a scale of -100 (very dissatisfied) to +100 (very satisfied)

16. Spiritual development of my family (91% responded)
17. My actual ministry involvement in church (89%)
18. Sharing my faith with others (91%)
19. If divorced, relationship with former spouse (14%)

+40 to 49 on a scale of -100 (very dissatisfied) to +100 (very satisfied)

20. Personal Bible study and prayer (90% responded)

It should be emphasized that those who responded to our survey were much more satisfied than dissatisfied on each of these aspects of their lives (item averages indicated by **X**s below):



Our Congregation's Core Values

In January 2003, the Session conducted an exercise to identify the core values of the congregation. The list that emerged was characterized as a “starting point for further discussion,” and is presented in no particular order.

- The church speaks a message of God's love and we respond.
- We worship God in truth; we seek to bring our true selves to worship.
- We have an open door policy, not a narrow gate. We welcome everyone.
- We seek community through our faith journey.
- We share with others.
- We have a social conscience.
- We value sermons that are relevant to everyday life.
- We value learning.
- We learn through worship, education, mission, fellowship, etc.
- We value our traditions but are willing to change.
- We are very much of this world and we seek to gain perspective on the issues of the world.

One of our focus groups brainstormed about what binds us together as a congregation and reached a similar conclusion:

- We see our congregation as one that is diverse, not only in age but also in theology (beyond a common confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior), in social philosophy and in worship style preference (as indicated in the September 2003 congregational survey). We asked – what holds such a congregation together? We came up with these shared commitments that bind people who may express their common faith very differently:
 - To young people
 - To doing good things
 - To caring about people
 - To living faithfully
 - To living in community
 - To tradition
 - To the Lawrenceville area
 - To our historic buildings

Our Congregation's Strengths and Challenges

Perspectives from a Church Officers' Retreat

In a September 2002 Church Officers' Retreat, participants prayerfully considered the church's strengths and challenges. The lists that emerged were very helpful to the Session, the Transition Team and the CSSPC. The order in which categories are listed below generally reflects the number of times they were mentioned by the participating Church Officers; specific examples cited are listed under each category.

Areas in the life and work of the church in which we express or reflect our core values well:

- Mission outreach. General, Haiti, homeless meals, Habitat for Humanity, nursing home ministry, special offerings, community involvement.
- Christian education. Adult, youth, children, Logos, general.
- Congregational life – general. Inclusiveness, welcoming of visitors and new members, Christ-centeredness, dedication, truthfulness, integrity, lack of dogma, adaptability, Christian expression, evangelism by example.
- Worship. General, music, meaningfulness, relevance to life, truthful to scripture, theologically sound, thought provoking, focus on God's love and our calling, dignified-orderly-deliberate-consistent, spiritual/intellectual balance, based on tradition yet open to new expressions.
- Fellowship. General, fellowship groups, care for each other, coffee hours, lunches, special events, home communion.
- Social concerns. Peacemaking, advocacy, discussion of relevant issues, expression of social conscience.
- Buildings and grounds. Stewardship and care, beautiful sanctuary, cemetery.
- Community outreach. Sharing of buildings with community groups.
- Denominational and interfaith interactions. General, Temple Micah, COLT, interfaith services.
- Diversity/balance. Openness to racial/cultural/ethnic diversity; good balance by age and gender.
- Stewardship. Regular giving, responding to special needs, giving time/talent as well as money.

Notable quotations from this exercise:

- We are a church with an open door; welcoming people who seek to explore and deepen and understand their faith in God.
- We are a people who step up to the plate when there is a need – helping in mission, financially, and with church programs.
- For the most part, we are a congregation not set in stone; we adapt to changes in society and in families.
- We are a people who care about the church here in Lawrenceville – its ministry and mission – and want to keep it viable for generations to come.
- We are for the most part a church that is open to diversity of race, culture and ethnic background.
- We have a strong worship service based on tradition, while open to new expressions.

Areas in the life and work of the church which are a particular challenge for us:

- Christian education. Children – general, support in the home, attracting and keeping teachers, long-term commitment, studying and learning together about our faith, integration across the ages, teaching the gospel to those unfamiliar with the Bible, irregular child attendance, conflict with worship, keeping teens spiritually engaged.
- Congregational life. Number of members involved as though church is a priority, attracting and retaining young adults, making visitors and new members feel welcome and cared about.
- Stewardship. General, amount people give, number who pledge, smallness of endowment, need for new approaches.
- Diversity. Racial, ethnic, social, general; how to appeal to other cultures (e.g., Hispanic) without losing our identity.
- Worship. (Lack of) lay involvement; attracting and keeping choir members; some desire variations in times, modes, music, etc.; need more small group ministry and more visible activities for the elderly.
- Communication. Let members know who are the leaders and volunteers; more publicity via newspapers, internet, television, increase visibility of church and its activities.
- Fellowship. Broader, more inclusive interactions are needed; more small groups.
- Buildings and grounds. Parking is a problem and rules need to be clarified; multiple activities compete for space and time. Suggestion: special parking in lot for first-time visitors.
- Evangelism. General; telling others what we believe and whom we worship.
- Spirituality. Need more involvement in prayer groups, more sharing of concerns and joys, more long-term commitment despite busy schedules.
- The pastoral transition. Need to maintain a strong, involved community with good communication; need a positive outlook and trust in what a new pastor will bring.
- Mission. Need to engage/involve more members in the local and larger church's mission.
- Community outreach. Need to be more relevant to the community; need more collaboration with other congregations of various faiths.

Notable quotations from this exercise:

- It is difficult for families to say “no” to the demands of the culture.
- We need to help families who wish to live a more simple life do that.
- We need to do better at providing tools and connecting people who have similar desires in how to live life in a Christian way.
- Areas of greatest difficulty:
 - Stewardship of all that we have.
 - Telling others what we believe and whom we worship.
 - Studying and learning together about our Christian faith.

Our Congregation's Strengths and Challenges (continued)

Perspectives from the Congregational Survey

The September 2003 Congregational Survey provided another insight into the congregation's assessment of the strengths and challenges of our church's programs and activities. Survey respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of twenty church program areas on a very negative to very positive scale. As not every respondent rated each program area, the percentage who rated each area is indicated in parentheses beside each program area. All program areas received a net positive rating. Program areas are listed below in order of their composite rating; i.e., those at the top of the list were rated the highest by those who replied to the survey, and those at the bottom were rated the lowest.

[Scale: From -100 (very dissatisfied) to +100 (very satisfied).]

+90 to 100:

1. Sunday morning worship (98% of respondents rated this item)
2. Openness of church facilities to the community (88% of respondents rated this item)

+80 to 89:

3. Pastoral care by staff (78% of respondents rated this item)
4. Hands-on mission opportunities (79% of respondents rated this item)
5. Junior High education/fellowship (45% of respondents rated this item)
6. Senior High education/fellowship (42% of respondents rated this item)
7. Special worship services (87% of respondents rated this item)

+70 to 79:

8. Music/choir program: Adult (81% of respondents rated this item)
9. Logos (40% of respondents rated this item)
10. Pastoral care by congregation (71% of respondents rated this item)
11. Fellowship (87% of respondents rated this item)
12. Confirmation – 8th grade (42% of respondents rated this item)

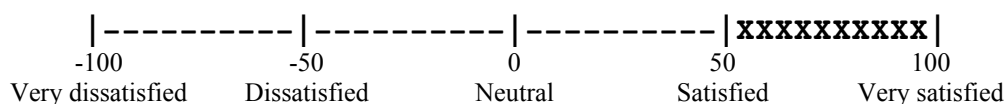
+60 to 69:

13. Mission giving (85% of respondents rated this item)
14. Children's Sunday School (53% of respondents rated this item)
15. Nursery care (35% of respondents rated this item)
16. Adult education (60% of respondents rated this item)

+50 to 59:

17. Spiritual growth and enrichment (74% of respondents rated this item)
18. Retreats (53% of respondents rated this item)
19. Music/choir program: Children (69% of respondents rated this item)
20. Stewardship (82% of respondents rated this item)

Once again, it should be emphasized that those who responded to our survey were much more satisfied than dissatisfied on each of these aspects of their lives (item averages indicated by **x**s below):



The net result of the above assessments of strengths and challenges is:

1. Congregational members and leaders think that our church has far more strengths than weaknesses and that many aspects of church activity reflect our core values well.
2. Those same congregational members and leaders have identified many ways in which we are challenged to do better. These include some challenges within areas that are generally regarded as strengths.

Our Congregation's Concerns as We Look to the Future

In the series of “congregational conversations” (or focus groups) during the fall of 2003, members of the congregation were asked to articulate aspects of church life or activity that they felt were particularly important to preserve and/or strengthen as we move forward. The input collected from about two hundred participants mostly fell into six general categories. General themes emerged, with a myriad of particular ideas and suggestions. In the summaries that follow, the CSSPC has tried to identify the general themes within each category, and to follow each with a fairly broad (and at times divergent) compendium of participant inputs from the three-month “conversation” process.

The comments and suggestions from participants in the congregational conversations are summarized below. An extensive listing of participants' comments and suggestions is presented in Appendix 6.

Worship and Music

Members value highly the role of the Sunday morning worship service and occasional special services as a focal point for our congregation's shared faith and life. Members particularly value intelligent, biblically-based preaching that helps them apply our faith to everyday life and to the challenges facing our society and our world. The role of quality music in support of our worship experience was also frequently cited. Many expressed appreciation for the variety of musical styles that we experience over time; some expressed a preference for traditional hymns and anthems over newer ones, while some others expressed exactly the opposite preference.

While affirming our traditions, many members express preference for greater variation in worship and musical styles – more “lively” or “enthusiastic” worship and music, within the bounds of our reformed theology. Even among those expressing a desire for change, there was a general acknowledgement that change should evolve rather than be imposed suddenly.

Congregational Life

Members generally affirmed the congregation's commitment to welcoming visitors and new members and to preserving and building on the diversity we have achieved. For many members, the fellowship program has been a valued source of friendship and support in good and difficult times.

While generally pleased with many aspects of congregational life, many members recognize a need to strengthen the ways in which we help younger adults and families get involved and stay involved in the life of our church. Many also sense that we can do a more intentional job of getting new members engaged in congregational life. Many others identify the fellowship group

program, which works so well for some, as needing to be de-mystified and made more available to those not currently participating.

Programs for young people

Members are particularly enthusiastic about preserving the quality achieved in recent years in our congregation's youth programs and in seeing them become even stronger in the future. Nearly all participants in the congregational conversations affirmed a strong commitment to nurturing children and young people through both educational programs and church-based social, recreational and service opportunities.

Members recognize that the small size of each age-group cohort presents a particular challenge for our youth programs. It is not uncommon for an individual young person to feel less comfortable with his/her congregational peers than with friends made via school or community interactions. Members expressed a desire that we recognize these dynamics and deliver programs that connect with and are relevant to the widest possible variety of young people.

There were also many suggestions that children and youth might be more involved in worship services.

Mission Outreach

Members are strongly supportive of our church's record of outreach to others, both through active hands-on opportunities and through sharing our resources financially. There is a broad consensus that both aspects of mission activity are essential to our life as a congregation and should not be diminished as we move forward.

Members generally see great value in hands-on mission opportunities and would like to see the number and variety of such opportunities increase over time. There is also a sense that giving to others is too vulnerable within our budgeting process, and should not always be the first part of the budget to be cut in difficult times.

Adult/Lifelong Education

Participants frequently emphasized the importance of church-based educational programs for adults. Bible study and current events/public issues were often mentioned. Some expressed a need to explore more fully the meaning of Christian living and to understand better our identity as Presbyterians. Members would like to see more intergenerational learning, programs for young families, and opportunities for home study.

Other program areas

Participants offered additional observations and suggestions that do not fit into the other categories listed.

Facilities

Members and officers are proud of our historic facilities, particularly the meeting house that dates from 1764. Our preservation of these facilities, and our sharing them with Temple Micah and various community groups, are seen as integral components of our congregation's "mission on Main Street."

Many members cite the lack of convenient parking as an intractable problem that discourages visitors and new members from active involvement; some have offered specific suggestions for improvement. Others suggest that it is time to look seriously at non-invasive means to air condition the meeting house.

Finance and Stewardship

Many members feel that we must do a better job of generating needed financial support. Some suggest that this could be through special events as well as annual and capital campaigns.

Our Congregation's Vision for the Future: Preserve and Strengthen

At this stage in its life, our congregation's vision for the future is more a sense of direction than a blueprint. Members want to preserve many aspects of our church that they value, but members also hope to strengthen our church in many specific ways. Members' concerns about preserving and strengthening fit generally into these categories:

- **Worship and Music.** Members want to preserve our faithfulness to the Reformed tradition and our inclusiveness of members with sincerely different interpretations of what that means. They want to preserve the truthfulness and simplicity of our worship experience and the important role of quality music within it. Members have many ideas about how to make our worship and music speak even more meaningfully to more members and potential members.
- **Congregational Life.** Members want to preserve the inclusive, welcoming and caring aspects of our congregation and the opportunities for good fellowship and good service that our congregational life provides. Members have many ideas as to how those benefits can be extended even more meaningfully to current and new members.
- **Programs for young people.** Members want to preserve the high priority we place on the education and development of young people. Members recognize that these are great challenges, and have many ideas as to how to do them well.
- **Mission Outreach.** Members want to preserve our emphasis on helping others in our community, nation and world. Members want to continue and increase opportunities for hands-on service and welcome more members and friends into these efforts. Members hope to be able to increase the proportion of our budget that is devoted to giving beyond our congregation.
- **Adult/Lifelong Education.** Members want to build upon our congregation's robust programs that help us keep learning throughout our lives about our faith and its practical applications. Many members have ideas as to how we can do this.
- **Other program areas.** Members see a need to provide opportunities to affirm and explain what we believe and to reach out to the unchurched in our community. Members suggest that we seek more ecumenical opportunities and that we meet more with people from other churches in the surrounding area. Members also hope that we will continue to be a "teaching church" for Princeton Theological Seminary students.

- Facilities. Members are proud of having preserved our historic facilities and recognize a continuing obligation to do so as we seek to use them efficiently for their intended purposes.
- Finance and Stewardship. Members want to preserve our congregation's record of giving the financial resources necessary to accomplish its mission. Members have some ideas as to how we might do even better in the coming years.

We recognize that change can be good, and we are ready for change where change is called for. At the same time, we recognize that not all change is good and that the process and timing of change in any organization can be critical to its being successfully received. We value too much about our congregation to be eager for sudden change, or to seek change for its own sake. We are eager for new leadership to help us sift through our many ideas and to sort out our priorities, so that we may move forward intentionally as a vital Christian community.

Having reflected on the entire set of input from the self-study, the CSSPC offers the following additional observations about our future:

- As the congregation ages, we see a need for the church to continue to attract younger members and to blend older and younger into a meaningful intergenerational community.
- We see a need for our congregation to continue to be sensitive to the unprecedented pressures of life in our modern culture with its often-consuming demands of work and school and its myriad of alternatives for leisure time activity and entertainment.
- A challenge that will face our congregation in the coming years is how to address the different needs of different members; i.e., to what extent should our church try to blend a diverse set of individuals and families into a single community, vs. trying to meet diverse needs separately. The CSSPC believes that our church should continue to try approaches to each, assuming that not every individual member or family will respond to a given approach.
- Many members expressed a desire for more ethnic and racial diversity within the congregation. While we celebrate the diversity that is present in our congregation, we also recognize that the church at large continues to be among the most segregated institutions in our society. We need, over time, to prayerfully reflect on the extent to which our church would seem welcoming to persons whose cultural backgrounds are different from our own.
- Technology has the potential to impact our life together as a church community. If done right, e-mail and the web and other future technologies can help members and potential members understand our church better and feel better connected. While recognizing that specific technologies may not be embraced by or available to all in our congregation, we should continue to explore how technology can be used to enhance and expand church programs and communications.
- Two practical challenges to the expansion of our church family are our shortage of parking and the lack of air conditioning in the meetinghouse. If solutions are truly needed to advance the church's mission, we need to summon the faith to solve them.

What Kind of Leader Our Congregation Needs

We chose to include in our congregational survey a section that asked respondents to rate the professional characteristics and style of ministry they would desire in a pastor. These results showed a range of opinion, as might be expected. They are presented below.

Professional characteristics

It is noteworthy that each of the nine “key roles” suggested was rated by a majority of respondents as either “essential” or “very essential.” Those rated overall as most essential are listed at the top.

Key roles	Very Unessential	Unessential	Neutral/ Neither	Essential	Very Essential
Minister of the Word/teacher of the congregation	1.1%	1.5%	10.9%	39.0%	47.6%
Spiritual guide and example	0.8%	0.8%	15.3%	34.4%	48.9%
Church administrator for a varied and effective program	0.4%	3.8%	16.3%	51.3%	28.1%
One who relates the Gospel to the social context	0.7%	2.2%	24.7%	44.2%	28.1%
Counselor/healer, helping people through crises	0.8%	3.0%	21.9%	48.3%	26.0%
Celebrant/liturgist in worship	1.1%	4.2%	25.7%	42.1%	26.8%
Enabler/facilitator via small groups of people with needs/interests	1.2%	4.2%	27.4%	46.3%	20.8%
Witness/evangelist, sharing the Gospel in and outside the church	4.9%	12.0%	32.0%	33.8%	17.3%
Community chaplain, active on committees and task groups	1.2%	10.1%	35.8%	39.7%	13.2%

Style of ministry

Respondents were asked to choose between six pairs of different (although not necessarily mutually exclusive) styles of ministry. The results are listed in no particular order. Boldfacing indicates the composite congregational preference between the given alternatives.

Direction 1	Strongly Prefer 1	Prefer 1	Equal preference	Prefer 2	Strongly Prefer 2	Direction 2
Expertise in Biblical matters	16.0%	22.6%	30.0%	22.6%	8.9%	High degree of spirituality
Tends to be provoking and challenging	14.8%	25.3%	22.6%	26.5%	13.2%	Tends to be assuring and comforting
Preaching emphasizes the Bible	12.3%	14.2%	27.3%	30.4%	15.8%	Emphasizes contemporary issues
Welcomes and implements new ideas	18.1%	31.9%	25.0%	16.9%	8.1%	Deep commitment to tradition
Strong and decisive re policy & program	6.4%	15.9%	31.1%	36.4%	10.2%	Encourages others to make decisions
Has formal style	3.8%	15.2%	29.7%	36.1%	15.2%	Has relaxed style

Participants in the congregational conversations added texture and feeling to these statistics. There is broad acceptance that the next pastor might be either a man or a woman. There is a strong preference that the next pastor be both a passionate theologian and a vital human being, deeply knowledgeable about scripture and its practical application to life. There is a strong preference that the next pastor be able to relate to the full range of individuals in the congregation, specifically including both youth and adults; i.e., that youth ministry not be totally compartmentalized and delegated to an associate pastor.

There is a strong preference that the next pastor be progressive, able to lead the congregation forward – but also that she/he be flexible and responsive to the perspectives and preferences of members. There is particular concern that the individual be able to work well with and through a staff and with a large number of volunteers.

An extensive listing of participants' comments and suggestions is presented in Appendix 7.