

**2018 Mission Study  
Providence Presbyterian Church  
Florence, New Jersey**



***Connect our congregation with our surrounding communities using our gifts and resources, and through faith, scripture, love, and fellowship as we seek to follow the example of Christ.***

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## Our History

The roots of Providence Presbyterian Church go back to 1860 when Rev. John Chester, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Burlington, gathered residents of the farming community of Bustleton for Sunday services under the large oak tree at the junction of the roads between which the church now stands. These services were known as “The Church Under the Trees.” The church’s first building was erected under the oak tree in the fall of 1863. Two years later, the congregation was officially organized as the Providence Presbyterian Church of Bustleton.

The Reverend Louis Rodman Fox was instrumental in putting the small church on solid footing. Serving one year from 1863 and then another five years beginning in 1876 following the Civil War. Prior to his return in 1876, the little church was struggling. Rev. Fox’s return created a new sense of optimism among the small yet faithful congregation. Upon the request of Dr. Edward Hodge, Moderator of the Church, Rev. Fox joined Dr. Hodge in visiting from home to home with a result that at least 26 people became members of the fledgling congregation. He then collected money from his more influential friends and built the beautiful church building we worship in today. It was dedicated debt-free in 1878.



*Church Sanctuary*



*Sanctuary Interior*

Along the way, two other buildings were added to the property. A church manse, originally shared by the Providence and the Jacksonville Presbyterian churches, was built c. 1889 after subscriptions were solicited by a committee of ladies to finance the building.



*Manse*

The growth of the Sunday school program initiated the dream of erecting a Christian Education Building on a portion of the church lot behind the Sanctuary. After much discussion, approval of plans, and a financial campaign, the new building was completed in 1958. In October of 1965, seven years later, a formal mortgage burning ceremony was held celebrating the paying off of the loan. This building houses classrooms in the basement, and a fellowship hall and full kitchen on the main floor. In addition, restrooms and offices for the church and pastor are located on the main floor. An elevator lift provides access to the main level.



*Christian Education Building*



Long known as “the little church in the country,” the congregation has thrived in Bustleton. Many of the farming families that formed the original church are still part of the congregation, connected by family ties and generations of faithful service to Christ. Over the years, the once struggling little church has grown into a church that, today, has over 130 members.

Overall, Providence Presbyterian Church has been served by 31 pastors including Rev. Fox. The most recent, Rev. Ivo Meilands retired in 2017 after almost twenty years of faithful ministry.

## Our Congregation



### What we believe

Our current mission statement reflects what we believe:

*Our mission at the Providence Presbyterian Church of Bustleton, is to worship God and to proclaim the truth of God’s love, mercy, and amazing grace as revealed through the authority of Scripture, the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the continued presence of the Holy Spirit. We do this through prayer, fellowship, and service to our community and beyond.*

“God has blessed our “little church in the country” because we truly are a Christian family of believers who care for one another and our community. In our church, we share one another’s burdens and joys. We laugh, cry, and break bread together. The love of God is evident within our community of faith. People who visit and worship with us for the first time feel God’s welcome, warmth, love, and caring that has formed this body of Christ known as the Providence Presbyterian Church of Bustleton. As soon as one enters the door of our sanctuary, he or she is no longer a stranger, but a beloved friend (quoted from Pastor Ivo Meilands)”.

## Programs

The primary gatherings of our congregation occur at the two traditional worship services every Sunday at 8:30 and 11:00. During the year, attendance averages approximately 70 people all together, with attendance dipping slightly during the summer months. The choir sings at the 11:00 service, with special music on Communion Sundays at 8:30. There is an informal fellowship hour in the Christian Education building between services.

In addition to our weekly worship, special services are traditionally held on Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Sunrise on Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Eve.

Our music program is led by the choir director with assistance from the organist. The choir rehearses on Sunday mornings between services during the school year. Our church is blessed with a number of musicians who provide both vocal and instrumental special music during worship.

Beginning in the fall of 2018, Sunday school is offered during each worship service. We are using the *Deep Blue One Room Sunday School* curriculum. After the Children's Message, the children head to the Christian Education Building for their class. Members of the congregation rotate as teachers on a monthly basis. Adult classes on Sunday mornings and/or during the week are held periodically.

Fellowship is an important part of our congregational identity. Along with our welcoming personality, we consider food and fellowship to be one of our strengths. Our community dinners are well-attended and bring many compliments to the chefs. Breakfasts or lunches on Communion Sundays encourage worshipers to stay awhile to visit over a meal.

Providence Presbyterian Church has a vibrant, engaged congregation and offers a variety of programs for all age groups:

- *Presbyterian Women* meets the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month in the Christian Education building at 12:30 pm. They use the current Horizon's Bible Study.
- *Men's Fellowship Breakfast* meets the last Saturday of the month at 7:00 am at the Liberty Diner.
- *Vacation Bible School* is held the last week of June from 6:00-8:30pm. Grades preschool through 6<sup>th</sup> grade attend. Numerous youth and adult volunteers participate.
- *Programs and Events*: Our church has many programs and events throughout the year. We have noted that many of the same congregation members help to execute some of these ministry events. We would like to work on recruiting help from different members.
  - *Lay-led worship services* are generally held twice per year.
  - *Communion* is served on the first Sunday of every month during both services.
  - *Church yard sale* is typically held the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday in June and is open to the public. Snack bar sales and proceeds from the yard sale support the mission giving of the church.
  - *Church picnic* is held in June All members and friends are invited. Hamburgers and hot dogs are provided; members bring sides and desserts.
  - *Confirmation class* for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders is held as needed. In 2018, four students were confirmed on Pentecost Sunday.

- *Roast Beef Dinner* occurs on the first Saturday of November. This “all hands-on-deck” event provides opportunities for inter-generational service. Members of the community are invited to experience the hospitality and fellowship of our church. Proceeds support the missions of the church.
- *Pasta Fest* is held the first Saturday of March. Congregation members of all ages gather to prepare and serve a delicious meal. Members of the community are invited to experience the hospitality and fellowship of our church. Proceeds support the missions of the church.
- *Egg Hunt* is held the Saturday morning prior to Easter Sunday at 10:00am. Children from the neighboring area join in the search for eggs.
- *Advent Vespers and Potluck* begins the preparation time for Christmas. The event is held at 4:00 p.m. on the first Sunday of Advent.
- *Movie Nights* are held at various times throughout the year. In the summer months, the movies are shown outside (weather permitting). Family-friendly films are shown and snacks are provided.
- *Trenton Thunder* is a local baseball team affiliated with the New York Yankees. For a number of years, we have organized a group to attend a game together to enjoy the fun of a minor league game.

This Fall (2018), we have begun an effort to increase our community outreach by identifying, planning, and hosting events that will be attractive to families in our area one Friday evening per month. A team has met to begin this process. The first event will be a Pumpkin Fest in October.

### **Missions**

Providence Presbyterian Church has a small, tight-knit congregation that has provided support to multiple charities and community-based organizations (CBOs) over the years. As we look ahead to the church we aspire to become, we would like to make a concerted effort to offer hands-on help and support to more local charities, CBOs and partners in need. The vast majority of our congregants reside in an 8-mile radius of the church and we would like to focus our charitable efforts within this community.

Missions that PPC has supported over the years include:

- Assistance to a local homeless man
- Burlington Presbyterian church food pantry
- Princeton Theological Seminary
- Habitat for Humanity
- Elijah’s Promise
- Providence House
- Sister Jean’s Kitchen
- Trenton Area Soup Kitchen
- Urban Promises
- Christian Caring Center
- Azalea House
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Trenton Salvation Army
- Camp Johnsonburg
- Burlington County Animal Alliance
- American Bible Society
- Florence United Methodist Church Food Pantry
- Parish of Saints Francis and Clare Food Pantry
- Presbyterians Pro Life,
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- Seeds of Hope Ministries
- H.O.P.E. Fund
- Hurricane Relief
- Holy Assumption Food Pantry

- The Sisterhood

In addition to the above financial support, members of the congregation deliver breakfast sandwiches from WaWa to the Sisterhood, a social services organization in Burlington that offers food, clothing, counseling, and support services to those in need, who distribute them to the needy. We also pick up produce each week from the “Farmers Against Hunger” truck to bring to local food pantries.

### **Leadership and Staffing**

PPC hired Rev. Diane Curtis as the Interim Pastor in November of 2017 to provide spiritual leadership and to lead the transition in finding our new pastor. Part-time staff of PPC includes: Barbara Hammell, Office Assistant; Alice Garman, Choir Director; Marge Hull, Organist; and Ken Poole, Sexton.

The Session is composed of nine elders. Session committees include: Capital Improvement and Property, Christian Education, Communication, Finance, Membership, Missions, Personnel, and Worship. The Session functions as a unicameral board.

### **Strengths/Assets**

Providence Presbyterian Church is blessed to have the ability to build upon the strengths identified by our members through the mission study process. We are reminded and thankful of how God – for over 150 years – has inspired hundreds of followers in this community to make our church a vital place of faith and worship.

Our study highlighted that our physical property is a cornerstone of our family of faith. Our church structure provides both a visual and historical reminder, that although times have changed, God’s presence continues to reside at the crossroads of our community. Our Christian education building offers space and opportunity for our church family to gather in fellowship and affords the possibility for community outreach.

Our members have emphasized a strong sense of community – first and foremost in being a welcoming, hospitable congregation. Members also cite our strong support of one another as a great strength of our church.

Our study also noted the diverse pool of talent housed in our membership, which proves to be a major asset as needs arise.

Finally, it was noted, that our Pasta-Fest and Roast Beef Dinner functions are a valuable means of joining the congregation together and provide a community meal while raising resources for church mission work.

### **Challenges**

The challenges identified during our mission study may find some solution within our strengths.

The study notes the desire of the congregation for additional faith-growing activities such as an active Sunday School that would have parents in church while their children are in school, the

possibility for small group settings involving bible study and prayer, and regular family fellowship events such as game nights. High mention was also given for better internal communication, so everyone is equally aware of needs, activities, and opportunities within the church.

It is exciting that PPC members want to know more and be more engaged in the life of the congregation.

The study also portrays a congregation with an inward focus that needs to take hold of the words of Christ and say “I’m with Him” and search for opportunities to reach outward in action and service.

The winning word in this year’s Scripps spelling bee was **koinonia**. It is a term used to refer to Christian fellowship or communion. It bears witness to two complementary truths. First koinonia expresses what we share together. But it also refers to what we share outwardly together – not only what we receive together, but what we give together. In essence, taking our communal Sunday worship and growing that into involvement in our greater community using our individual time and shared church resources.

Ideas proffered included engaging with local businesses to make a difference toward a specific need, while allowing the faith of our congregation to grow and prosper. The current Sisterhood ministry serves as a model.

The Sisterhood ministry allowed our congregation to partner with a local business (Wawa) to be a bridge between an available resource (leftover food) and an unmet need (afterschool snacks for needy kids). Further, it allowed for personal involvement to supplant just giving money. There is a duality at the core of the angel’s resurrection message in Matthew 28. The faithful are called not just to “come and see” but to “go” in response. We, as a family in faith, must realize that as we leave our community worship on Sunday, we truly enter the mission field. We must keep our eyes open to God’s opportunities, share them within our church family, and consider and act on the possibilities to serve. Meeting people in need, spending time with them, talking to them, understanding their situation, and making a difference for them--this is the place where true spiritual growth occurs.

Our survey also noted the need to build a better relationship with the bordering towns and other congregations so as to broaden our knowledge of pressing concerns and unmet needs with our “neighborhood” and enhance our call to service and ministry in those areas.

As previously stated, our buildings are valuable resources 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 these resources.

The Christian education building offers the potential of establishing a closer relationship with the surrounding community through suggested activities such as a speaker series, job fairs, after school programs, mentoring, life skills workshops and various class offerings such as art and cooking.



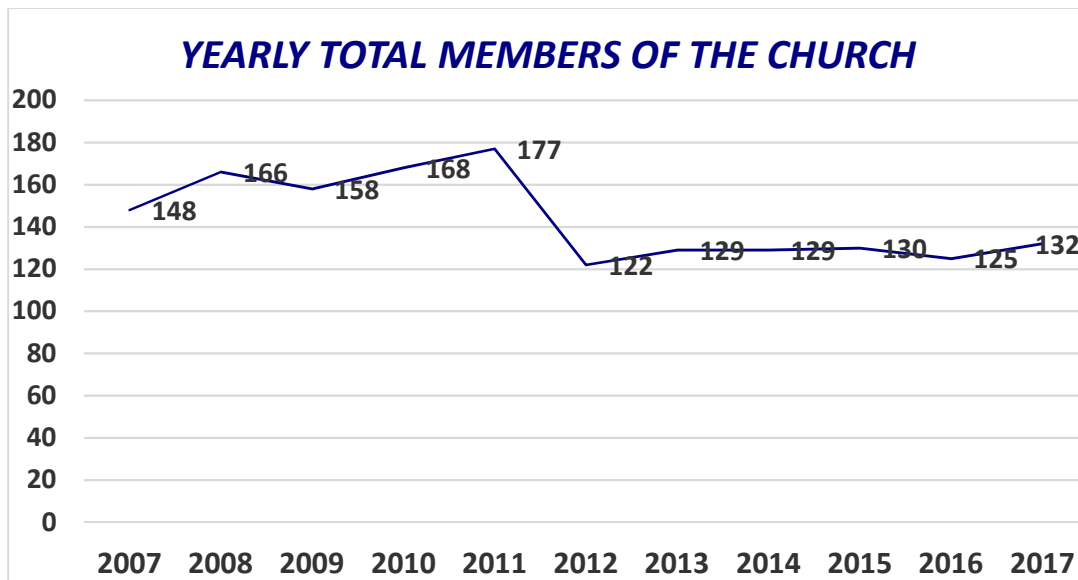
In perspective, whether considering assets or challenges, the congregation must realize that **WE** are the church more than a pastor is the church. Pastors will come and go, but it is our worship, our mission, our challenge to make our church vibrant through strengthening our relationship with God, and allowing that relationship to shepherd us into a needing community.

### **Talents and Skills**

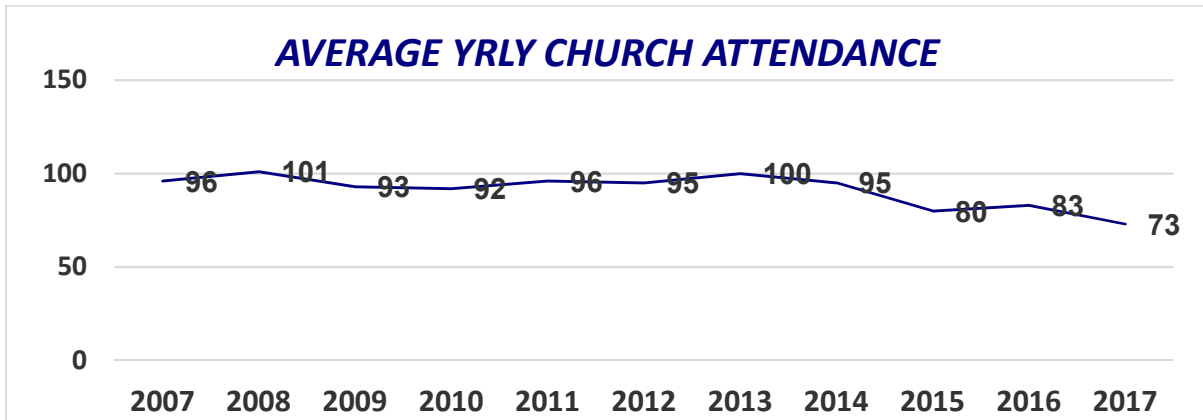
Our church is comprised of people with many different skill sets, gifts, and talents that are utilized in the programs and ministries of the church. In our church we have professionals who are, among others, chefs, landscapers, carpenters, crafters, teachers, farmers, and musicians. Other members of the congregation bring their talents and interests to the ministries of the church. These include organizing, cooking, decorating, computer and social media skills, and gardening. Most importantly most bring a willingness to serve when asked.

### **Membership, Attendance, Composition, and Finances,**

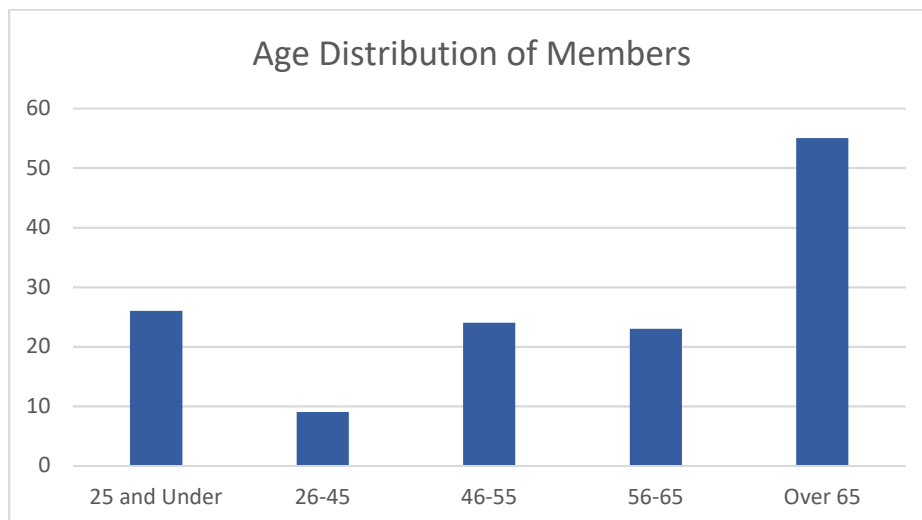
The congregation of Providence Presbyterian Church is fairly stable. Many families have been a part of the church for generations. Others have joined as a result of being invited by neighbors in their housing developments and, in some cases, by being initially attracted to the church building itself. Following a cleaning of the rolls in 2012, membership has remained fairly stable.



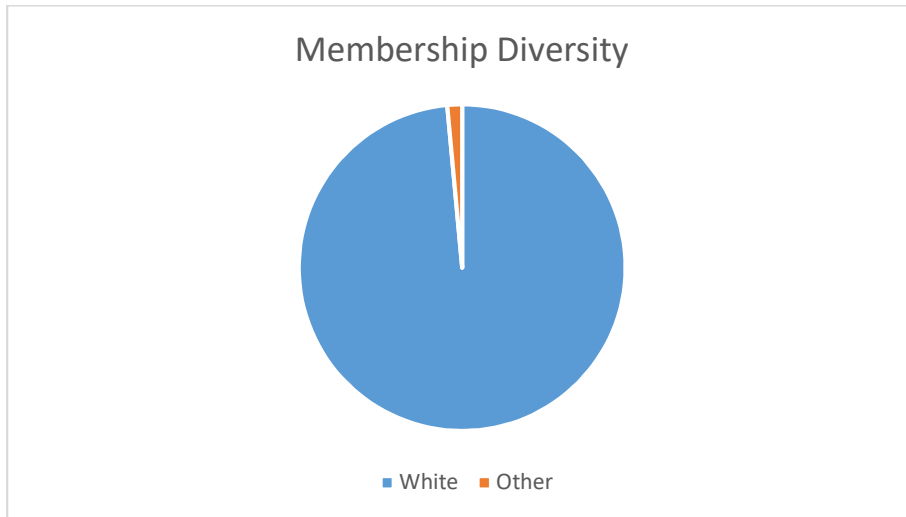
Church attendance has also remained fairly stable. The attendance figures are based on the average number of people who attend on a Sunday morning, regardless of which service they attend.



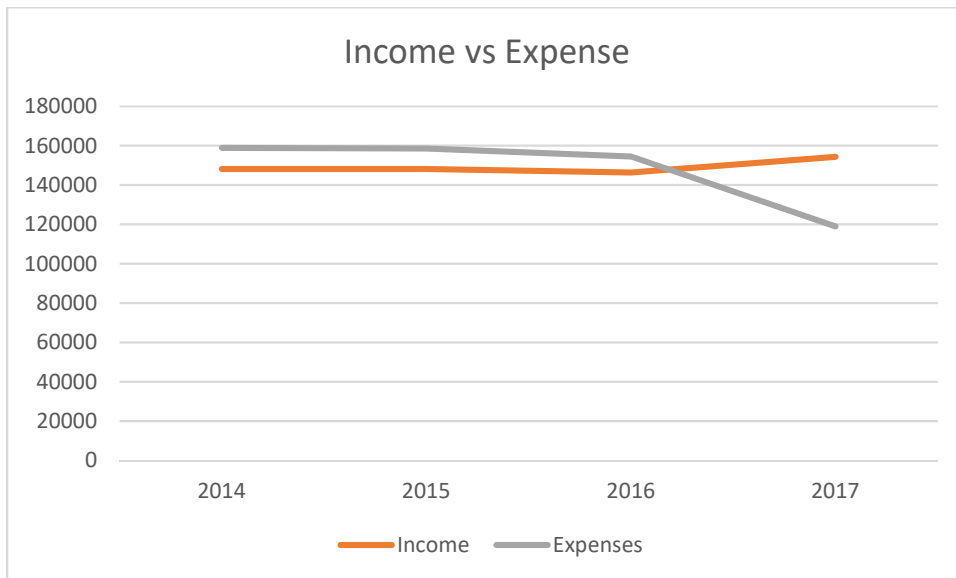
As a church that has had a stable membership and attendance for many years, it is not surprising that our members tend to be older. Many have been members for years and/or have grown up in the church. Youth membership is higher because of the regular confirmation classes. Most of the youth and young adult members are still connected with the church. The high school students attend worship, some more often than others, as well as participate in the Roast Beef Dinner, Pasta Fest, and other large events. The college students are in worship when they are home from school. A number of them participate in the programs and ministries of the church. One is helping create a new website remotely from school. Another is assisting in the creation of a new church brochure. Others have volunteered at Vacation Bible School, Sunday school, and have participated in the music program.



We recognize that we are not a diverse congregation. Although much of the community closest to the church is white, there is a growing diversity that we have not connected with in a meaningful way.



Our church is currently and has been in a stable financial position. We consistently cover our expenses. Most repairs to the buildings and grounds are covered by giving to the Improvement Fund. In 2017, our expenses were significantly reduced as a result of the retirement of our long-time pastor in May. Our interim pastor began serving in November.



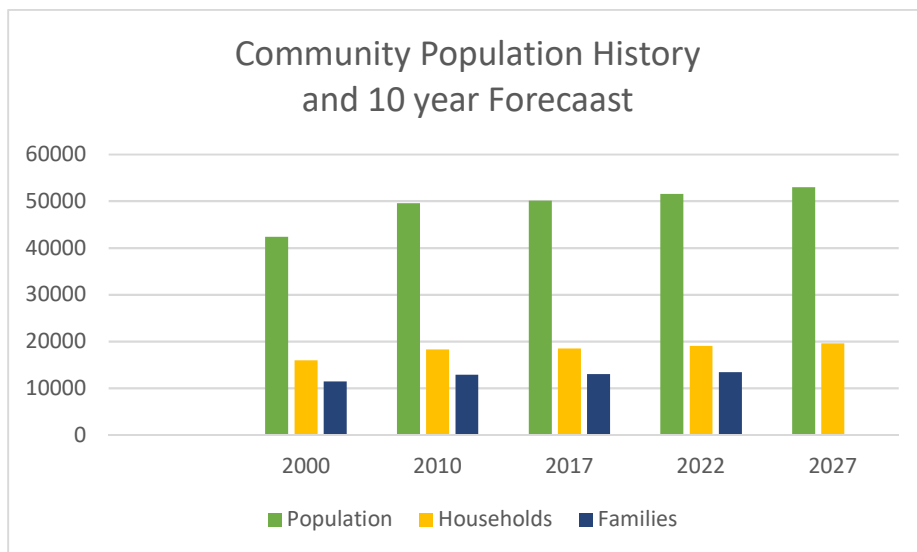
The best description of our church is “stable.” We have not changed much for many years. New members have become part of the congregation, while others have moved or passed away. One of the biggest challenges we have ahead of us is that change has not been part of our church culture. Therefore, connecting with our community will require a concerted effort, much prayer, and a growing understanding of what it means to follow Christ in the world outside the church.

## Our Community

Providence Presbyterian Church of Bustleton is located in Florence Township, NJ and draws the majority of its membership from surrounding communities such as Burlington Township, Florence and Columbus. Drawing demographic information from an 8-mile radius around the church, we utilized MissionInsite.com with the following results:

The population of our surrounding area has grown over the past seventeen years and is projected to continue to grow at a moderate pace. The number of households (2 or more people) and the number of families has grown, and is expected to grow at approximately the same pace as the population. This growth has resulted from new housing developments that were built in the mid-2000’s as well as turnover in neighborhoods where older homeowners are moving out and younger families are moving in. The potential for Providence Presbyterian Church to grow is there if we are able to effectively reach out in the name of Christ.

**Figure 1: Local Population and Household Types by Year**





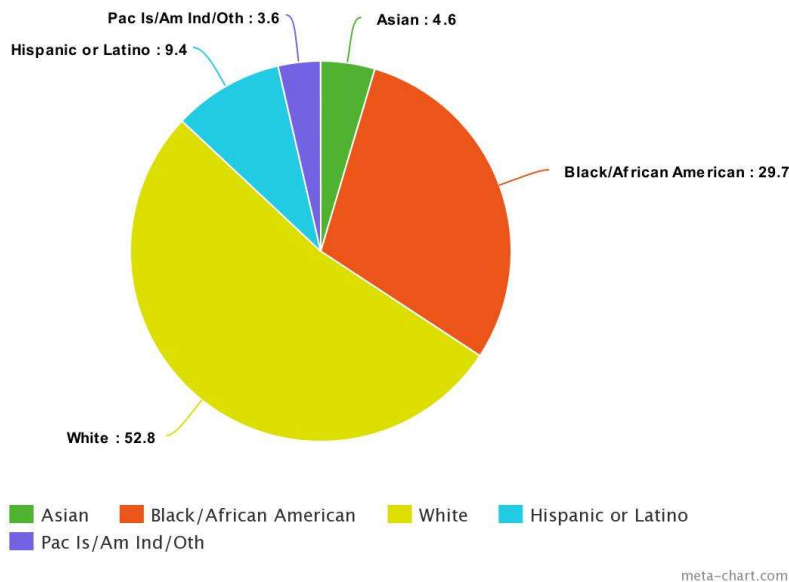
Looking at local age trend data in Figure 3, we see that approximately 22% of the local population is age 17 or under. Projected trends indicate that this number will decrease slightly over the next 10 years. When compared to the demographics of church members, we observe that our membership is over-represented in the older age groups and underrepresented in the age groups between 25 and 54.

**Figure 2: Local Age Groups by Year**

Age group	Population by age group and year			
	2010	2017	2022	2027
0 - 4 years	9,799	9,867	9,457	9,598
5 - 17 years	28,055	25,360	25,534	25,636
18 - 24 years	15,453	17,426	16,813	16,454
25 - 34 years	18,739	18,583	20,658	21,601
35 - 54 years	48,424	41,411	37,889	36,963
55 - 64 years	19,300	22,873	23,864	22,456
65 years and older	21,700	26,486	31,395	36,882
totals	161,470	162,006	165,610	169,590

The racial and ethnic composition of the surrounding community indicates that approximately 50% are white and that there is a significant amount of diversity. Our congregation is not reflective of the community in this regard as over 99% of the membership is white.

**Figure 2: Local Racial and Ethnic Composition**



**Analysis of Demographic Data**

An analysis of the demographic data shows that Providence Presbyterian Church is similar to the community in some respects. The age groups that exist in the community are represented in the church although in a much different proportion. Our membership is skewed toward the older age groups and has disproportionately fewer adults in the middle age groups.

Additional data from MissionInsight suggests that the levels of educational attainment found in the community are comparable to those same demographics in our church. The largest number of people in the surrounding community are high school graduates (32.4%), followed by those with Bachelor’s Degrees (22.1%), and those with some college (19.6%). The education level is most likely reflective of the community’s farming roots. In the church, a significant number of members are from farming families. The community demographics show that almost 70% of workers are engaged in white collar occupations, reflecting the observable shift from farming to other occupations.

In terms of ethnic diversity, the church membership is severely under-represented in all racial and ethnic groups except white. Learning how to communicate with and make connections with those who are different from us is, and will continue to be, a growing edge for us.

## **Mission Study Process**

The Mission Study team is comprised of five congregants and facilitated by Interim Pastor, Diane Curtis. The team first met in April of 2018 to discuss the Mission Study purpose and process and how it relates to defining the future mission of the church and our search for a new pastor. Work continued on an individual basis and kept connected through email and in-person updates during the process.

In order to determine the future direction of the church, the team decided to take stock of the current position of Providence Presbyterian Church in terms of programs, ministries, missions, and our assets. This process involved the entire congregation through an anonymous written survey (44 respondents), subsequent group discussions held at multiple times (39 participants), and a brunch meeting (approximately 50 participants) on a scheduled one worship service Sunday. These discussions were designed to solicit input from congregants regarding the future direction of the church, their level of involvement and engagement, personal impact of the church and community outreach.

Overall, the majority of congregants have been members for more than 10 years; members were attracted to the church due to the welcoming people and stay connected because of the loving nature of the congregation; members value church activities that revolve around food; most respondents felt that there is no need to change anything about our church.

Concurrently to the self-reflection research, the team utilized MissionInsite.com to evaluate the demographics of the community within an 8-mile radius of the church. The team compared the MissionInsite data to the internal analysis and uncovered some areas of concern:

- Lack of diversity
- Aging congregation
- Minimal engagement with the local community
- Need for improved internal and external communication

The Mission Study Team has engaged in prayerful meetings and group discussions to develop and adopt a new mission statement as well as short- and long-term goals that will make Providence Presbyterian Church a vital partner in the local community.

### **Analysis of Congregational Input**

We determined that, as a small community church, we should focus our outreach efforts on our local community. Using our facilities, congregant talents and knowledge, we will be able to engage with local residents in a number of ways. Some suggestions were to partner with community organizations by providing space in the Christian Educational Building to host their meetings/events, and to form groups to offer instruction such as knitting, sewing, and flower arranging. We also have members of the congregation with skills in the world of technology who are willing to offer classes for those who want to learn how to use a computer, smart phone, and/or tablet, learn how to use email and the internet, or to become proficient in social media. Along with these ideas we plan to utilize our gift of fellowship to encompass current local programs and missions already in place as well as introduce new, family-friendly

activities designed to be attractive to the community. We recognize that we need to expand our communication efforts and platforms to publicize these events.

## What We Learned

We have gleaned many important things within the workings of the Mission Study Team. That knowledge can lead to future growth opportunities for our church.

- We are a welcoming community.

Opportunity: We need to welcome new ideas and new involvement from all people within our church. We should encourage those who look to help at established events and fan the passion of members to pursue new ideas.

- We are proud of our planned functions.

Opportunity: We are justifiably proud of VBS and our dinners. Those functions encompass seven days. That leaves 358 possible days to engage with the same enthusiasm and activity to expand and grow our church community and outreach.

- We are a historic congregation.

Opportunity: Our church has stood as a focus of faith for over 150 years. All those many years ago, folks gathered to form a church to praise, honor, worship, and thank a God who guided and centered their lives. In our membership, we continue with them in a journey of faith. That communal journey should lead us to be witnesses of the foundation of faith passed down to us, and to sustain and build upon it.

- We are mission supportive.

Opportunity: There is an extensive list of mission we support financially. We can put aside our wallets and engage our hearts, minds and hands by seeking out existing needs in our community and gathering together to give of our collective time and talent to try to meet them.

- We are a vibrant congregation offering a variety of programs for everyone.

Opportunity: We should reflect on existing programs with consideration toward member needs and time constraints, to make them better or allow for new growth. Our communion Sunday breakfasts/luncheons may pose burdens on members depending on the service they attend. A suggestion might be a Fifth Sunday Fellowship. Fifth Sundays occur four times per year and a single service with a planned breakfast (see Rally Day) or congregational activity after worship on that day would foster fellowship and community among members.

- We have buildings that are valuable resources to our congregation.



Opportunity: Yes, the church is a building, but it is also a family of believers. We can expand our horizons past our church proper to include fellowship gatherings in small group settings at our homes or community spaces.

## **Future Vision**

After prayerful reflection on the congregational input, church and community demographics, our gifts and talents, and our faith history, we believe this mission statement encompasses who God is calling us to become as a church:

*Connect our congregation with our surrounding communities using our gifts and resources and through faith, scripture, love, and fellowship as we seek to follow the example of Christ.*

### **Goals**

Recognizing that a significant portion of our congregation is set in their ways with an expressed desire not to change, we realize that the best option to move forward into this new vision is to begin a parallel process of change. During the congregational input portion of the Mission Study, we heard from a number of people who are interested in pursuing a new direction. Believing that there is a core who want to be involved in change, we are proposing creating another way for us to engage in ministry with our community that will develop alongside the current programs. Our hope is that, as change begins to occur, others will start to shift their perspective from a focus on what is comfortable to what is possible.

In the next year, we plan to pursue the following initiatives:

1. Create a community engagement team that will develop and oversee mission and ministry outreach within our local community as an expression of our commitment to following Christ.
  - Leadership and members of the team will initially be drawn from those who have expressed interest in more involvement in the community
  - Develop a process to facilitate new ideas coming to fruition by creating a permission-giving mentality
  - Create a template for beginning new mission and ministry opportunities that covers the elements needed to allow the best chance of success (i.e. planning, organization, communication, follow-up, review, etc.)
  - Plan and carry out at least two new mission outreaches
  - When possible, provide support for current programs if members running those are interested in broadening the potential impact
2. Initiate a discussion with the Session about a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday as a time to worship together in one service and enjoy fellowship together. The goal would be to bring the congregation together by addressing the separation that occurs as a result of having two worship services.

3. As we look to the future of Providence Presbyterian Church with an emphasis in more local community involvement, the Mission Study Team believes that current partnerships can be enhanced while building new connections to the community. Potential partnerships may include:
  - *Burlington Township School District*: The interim pastor has already begun outreach to the superintendent at Burlington Township School District to determine how we can be a resource and valued partner with the district. Despite the suburban location, the school district is experiencing a growing low-income and homeless population and can use assistance in multiple areas including school supply drives and gift cards for summer activities.
  - *First responders*: There are multiple first responders within an 8-mile radius of the church and there may be ways for the church community to be of service through helping with and/or jointly doing programs and providing support to these first responders.

Our hope is that, by approaching our future as we have proposed, new energy and enthusiasm for will develop throughout the congregation. Worship will be more vibrant, faith will grow, and more people will come to know Christ.