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Hilltop's History

Hilltop Church has been a cornerstone in our community for almost 300 years and has been a beacon of God's light for Mendham since its first gathering in 1738.

The creation of Mendham and Hilltop Church were significantly driven by the efforts of the Byram family. A young divinity school graduate, Eliab Byram held services in a "little log church" (our first gathering place). In 1740, his father, Ebenezer Byram, moved from Massachusetts, became a town founder and donated the land of our current site and built a formal and small structure to worship God. He also built a small farmhouse that, in 1742, became the Black Horse Inn.

Our Current sanctuary was built in 1860 after two previous structures were destroyed in fires in 1835 and 1859. Over the past 277 years, Hilltop has seen our nation's birth and been blessed with the leadership of 27 Pastors. Looking over the past 25 years, Hilltop has enjoyed leadership from just 3 Head Ministers:

1. **Rev. Thomas Edward Robinson 1984-1996** with Rev. Ken Kovacs, Associate Pastor/Interim 1992-1999
2. **Rev. Rupert B. (Bo) Harris 1999-2006** with Rev. Diane Curtis Interim 2006-2009
3. **Rev. Robert B. Heppenstall 2009-2018** with Rev. Alison R. Paden, Associate Pastor 2014-2018 and Head of Staff 2018 to date

The congregation today, numbering about 400 members looks back with gratitude as well as looks ahead for the things that God is already beginning.

Always giving our thanks to God, Hilltop Church has continued its legacy of service to our community as a result of the congregation's ongoing and dedicated outreach to others. Our congregation is very active in the community, willing to help others and have leaders who are focused on connecting the church to an abundance of opportunities to serve. A vibrant piece of this community service lies in offering worship to all with top-notch music in and beyond weekly worship services, as well as vibrant Christian Ed opportunities for children, youth and adults.

In August 2018, after nine years, our most recent installed Head of Staff, the Rev. Robert Heppenstall, left Hilltop and took another call. This departure meant that the Session needed to appoint a Discernment Committee (DC) to oversee a re-evaluation of our congregational vision for the future. The session also recognized that it was a good time to reassess the current and future state of our church since it had been almost 10 years since the last mission study.

While Hilltop Church is truly blessed with notable strengths that have defined its character and purpose within our community through its 280+ years of active ministry, there are some clear growing issues that we want to address going forward to meet the changing needs of the congregation and community in the 21st century context.

We are blessed under the current leadership of Pastor Alison Paden, our Associate Pastor acting as Head of Staff, who was formerly our Associate Pastor from 2014 up until Rev Heppenstall's departure. Allison has risen to the challenge to lead and partner with our Session and Board of Deacons and is the acting head of staff, by action of the congregation. With these wonderful blessings, Hilltop also faces challenges: financial stress due to waning stewardship, lower attendance at worship services, fellowship and mission events, burn-out amongst volunteers, beautiful but aging buildings that require constant upkeep, and unfavorable demographic trends.

General Statistics/Demographics

Our congregation is made up of members who hail from many area towns, Mendham Borough (152), Mendham Township (92), the Chesters (40), Randolph (25) and further afar (69). Members range in age from the very young to 101 years old. Mendham Borough's population is 5,097 with a median age of 48.2 years old and Township's population is 5,869 with a median age of 45.4 years old. The majority of the homes are owner occupied, with the median property value of a single-family home in Mendham Borough at \$655,400 and Mendham Township at \$858,100. The Borough medium household income is \$158,542 and the Township is \$182,022. The area has a suburban/rural mix in character, with the village center in the Borough hosting the mercantile and business focus that includes the church. The public schools in the area are highly rated and communities are identified as very family friendly.

Introduction to and Methodology used in Hilltop Church's Discernment Study:

In order to have a successful search and call a pastor who's the best fit for Hilltop, we needed to fully assess Hilltop's programs, offerings, aspirations and challenges in full, and gather insight into the desired qualities of a new pastor, based on the Presbytery guide to a discernment study.

The DC began to meet regularly in June 2019 to begin preparing the congregation to identify its pastoral needs and areas for future development. Our timeline was to develop a final report by the end of September/October 2019. We presented our report to Session in mid-October.

Presbytery provided a process workbook, "Discovering and Connecting the Pieces of our Church Story: A journey of searching, listening & discernment", with the DC. The project plan outlined by Presbytery required the DC to:

1. Hold retreats
 - a. Prepare an historical timeline
 - b. Compile and analyze demographic data
 - c. Gather and assess financial data
 - d. Provide periodic updates to the congregation
2. Hold focus groups

In order to achieve these goals, the prescribed approach required four events be scheduled that would engage the congregation in specified group activities and open discussion on designated subjects and complement these events with focus group meetings. The designated events/retreats were:

1. The Church Timeline – Identifying important points in the church history, marking important positive and negative events, as well as starting to identify where God is leading Hilltop today.
2. Demographics – Outlining important demographic information about the neighborhood and areas surrounding our church including types of household, income, age and education levels.
3. People/Places/Things – Identifying areas in the community where people regularly spend time and exploring how we could serve the community in those places and spread the Good News of the Gospel.
4. Financial Picture/Mission – A presentation of the current financial picture of the church and trends in spending and giving followed by sharing ideas of God’s continuing mission for Hilltop Church.

While Hilltop’s DC intended to follow the process, given the timing of our Discernment Study (summertime), we identified and implemented a comprehensive communication strategy that would allow us to accomplish the goals of these four steps/retreats, especially for the “People/Places/Things” step. We used every alternative communication avenue possible (e.g., emails, phone calls, individual one on one meetings, pulpit and bulletin announcements, and notices in *The Spire*) to raise awareness of our study and to complement the input from our 18 focus groups. Our goal was to ensure that all church members willing to participate and share their opinions would be heard and recorded on how Hilltop could serve the community and spread the Good News of the Gospel. As major concerns/thoughts arose in discussions, the DC modified the focus questionnaire to ensure key points were always included in all of the conversations, dialogues, and communications we had with the congregation.

To complement the information coming forth from these discussion formats, the DC scheduled 18 focus group meetings to efficiently reach out to the entire congregation. These focus discussions ensured that the entire congregation had the opportunity to express their opinions actively on all questions and critical topics. A fully comprehensive communication and interaction program complemented this approach by giving those not able to attend the focus groups the opportunity to participate and express their thoughts freely.

The focus group discussions were guided by a questionnaire written by the DC based on the Presbytery’s guide. The questionnaire was used to ensure that the same questions were asked of each group to have answers that would build a consistent framework for our work. Prayer opened the meetings, asking each person to reflect on where God is calling us as a faith community. The questionnaire guided discussion on the present state of Hilltop Church: what worked well, what needed improvement, what new programs we should consider.

In addition, we broadly asked members about their perception of Sunday worship attendance, and their understanding of the church budget and congregational giving. We also touched upon the mission of the church and possible pastoral models for the future, though time only allowed these questions for a small subgroup of meetings. The DC then captured and summarized all this information in this report. It is very important to realize that this report reflects only the opinions and wishes of members who participated in the focus discussions/other meetings led by the DC.

The Discernment Study responsibilities did not include creating recommendations about future actions and staff structures at Hilltop Church by the DC. While that ultimate responsibility lies solely with Session, the DC did make a recommendation at the request of Session. Session must determine how that recommendation from the insights generated in this Presbytery process should be used for Hilltop Church's future.

Summary of Focus Group Findings:

The feedback from our group meetings indicates that the congregation strongly desires having a robust, active membership attending services and the offered educational programs. In addition, they feel it very important that we increase volunteer activity to support the programs we offer at Hilltop and potentially increase them. This increase in attending members would increase fellowship activity and allow us to expand the reach that Hilltop has "internally and externally". In addition, because we have a high-quality music program, it is critical that the increase in membership activity would allow us to continue to grow these programs.

Lastly, by having a more active membership, we need to consider introducing a flexibility into our service offerings. Increasing service options (e.g., a contemporary service) would create the platform to meet the diverse needs of our cross-generational congregation far better than we may today. In fact, having different service options would encourage interactions and the enrichment of all growth opportunities and enhance the sense we have of a "church family". It would also allow us to outreach in a more ecumenical sense to our community's sister churches.

These aspirations, however, were given based on the assumption (of our focus group participants) that Hilltop would continue its two-pastor staffing. The reality of our financial situation is such that Hilltop, given its current pledging levels, cannot support this staffing level. While the DC offers a recommendation on optimal staff levels or funding strategies, it is critical that this financial barrier be clearly identified for Session and then shared with the congregation (e.g., the gap in aspiration and funding reality). We felt it critical to share these two "situations" to Session (e.g., (1) congregation's wish to continue existing programs with a two pastor staff with (2) the current financial inability of Hilltop to support this structure) because it reflects the data we have collected from the focus groups and the reality of Hilltop's current financial situation.

Where God is calling Hilltop Church

Our Discernment Team acted as a collector and assembler of data for the congregation regarding Hilltop's past, present and possible future in service to God. The data were generated from the many interactions with members of our congregation and retreats we conducted as laid out in the discernment process. When the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) is elected and prayerfully moves forward in the selection of a new pastor, the Discernment Team hopes that this report outlining Hilltop's strengths and opportunities for growth will be helpful to them as they move to find our new pastor. We have summarized our findings from our interactions and meetings with our members and have laid out this information into the following categories in summary fashion with the detail following:

- I Strengths of Hilltop Church
- II Challenges facing Hilltop Church with view to 2030
- III Aspirational Future State
- IV Suggested qualities in our next Pastor

Strengths of Hilltop Church:

- Warm, welcoming, non-judgmental and inclusive congregation
- Inspiring, comforting and impactful worship and music offered in our Sanctuary
- Children's programs (with a focus on early childhood)
- Historically important and beautiful Church; a landmark in the community
- Pro-active outreach from our pastor and members in the congregation, to serve those in need

Challenges facing Hilltop Church with a view to 2030:

- Educating our congregation as to "what it means to be a Presbyterian, and to live as such"
- Competing priorities and scheduling limit participation in worship services , mission and fellowship activities (e.g., sporting events for youth)
- Property: Manse needs updating/renovation, fellowship building that is not easily accessible and the lack of space for education and Fellowship in the Sanctuary
- Stewardship trends which results in ongoing difficult financial decisions
- Shrinking Leadership and volunteerism
- Strong leadership needed from the Session, with the chairs of the various committees providing not only spiritual, but also strong business/financial and administrative skills for lay decision-making and ensuring Session is well informed on actions and activities within these committees
- Change in demographics as seen in participation levels in many faith organizations (e.g., how can we tap-into the "unchurched")
- Changes in environmental dynamics and opportunities
 - "Nature of the town" in terms of appealing to youth (e.g., young people want vibrancy in their life which is found in urban centers (i.e., Morristown) and we

are unlikely to attract them to Mendham from those urban centers to join our Church or retain them

Aspirational Future State:

- Robust, active attendance of members in worship services and educational programs
- Increased volunteer activity to help support all aspects of Hilltop's life
- Increased fellowship activity, both "inside and outside" of church
- Active participation in our music program to ensure its continued high quality
- Flexibility around options for worship and participation in church life
 - Possibility to increase number of service options (e.g., contemporary)
- Cross-generational connections to encourage interactions and enrichment of growth opportunities
- Financial condition that ensures adequate funding for personnel, programs, building maintenance and mission - and with a cushion for emergency expenditures

Suggested Qualities in our next Pastor:

- Ability to balance "heart and mind" (in terms of sermon content, the ability to balance theological teaching with practical messages for daily life)
- Business and administrative abilities; solid decision-making skills
- Leadership skills that motivate and engage the congregation, including an ability to delegate and empower church members when needed
- Knowledgeable, hopeful and enthusiastic fundraiser/stewardship
- Strong personal pastoral connection
 - Willingness to build connections throughout the congregation and the community

The DC is thankful for the opportunity to serve God and the people of Hilltop Church. We are hopeful that this body of work will adequately inform the PNC as it begins its work to find a new pastor for Hilltop Church.

Full Discernment Study Report



Our Present

Hilltop Church is a landmark for Mendham as well as a cornerstone in the community. The church is well known in the greater community and there is a great sense of history in the building and the church. The church historically has been known for excellence in music. It has a reputation for having a dynamic music program and being a place where sacred music thrives. The members are very active in the community, willing to help others and have leaders who are focused on connecting the church to an abundance of opportunities to serve.

The members of Hilltop Church describe it as a welcoming, non-judgmental, warm, caring and vibrant community. They take pride in celebrating life, uplifting and supporting each other, and the many opportunities afforded each individual to be supported in their unique spiritual journey. There are always opportunities to learn and contribute.

The church is seen as a place where children flourish, and families grow. Members believe Hilltop is a great place to raise their children where they are taught faithful character. When our youngest children were asked what they like most about Hilltop some of their answers included Sunday School, Worship Workshop, the Children's Time during worship with Alison and "everything".

Hilltop Church has a highly educated congregation; there are many dedicated members who lead willingly and well. Members note the wonderful relationships within the congregation and how it is impossible to be anonymous. They appreciate that the church community is low on politics and drama, instead placing their focus on a shared goal to serve God. In recent years, the congregation has benefited from having highly involved pastors.

In focus groups and questionnaires, members mentioned that at Hilltop they are fed spiritually. They see it as a place of comfort in times of struggle and joy. One member simply stated, "When I sit in the pews, I am home," a statement that resonates with many members.

Where God is calling us in 1-3 years

The church, while recognizing its long history, looks to the future and growth opportunities. In focus group discussions with our questionnaire, the following areas were highlighted as areas for the congregation to explore:

Stronger Adult Education contributing to spiritual growth and Fellowship for all: Hilltop has had a very strong adult education program that is rooted in community and congregational needs. We have had very well attended parents' programs as well as spiritual growth programs for all adults that have met many individual needs for Christian growth and fellowship. These programs have been well attended but do need to grow to meet more diverse needs of our congregation (e.g., working women times for fellowship vs. current working hour women's meeting times.)

Currently we have a very strong Women's Bible study, meeting on Thursday mornings and our Men's Bible study group meets on Saturday mornings. These groups are well established and attended with very strong fellowship. However, it is difficult for men with younger families and working women to attend due to scheduling. Our Sunday morning Adult program is more practical for young parents to attend while children are in Sunday school or nursery.

Looking ahead over the next 3 years, our Christian Ed Area of Ministry will seek to more effectively minister to the needs of our members. CE plans to do achieve this goal by looking into the possibilities of expanding offerings for adults to include such things as Christian parenting workshops and expanding Hilltop Bible studies to be more accessible to working women via home study groups and/or offering evening sessions (if interest). A focus on an individual's spiritual growth (women's individual spiritual needs and men's individual spiritual needs) has always been very popular and well attended by the congregation and even by members of our community (non-members). Great bonds are created, fruitful discussions have led to wonderful spiritual growth and wonderful, enduring friendships have been created through participation.

Looking ahead over the next 3 years, our Christian Ed Area of Ministry will seek to minister more effectively to the broader needs of our members (especially those with young children) by offering adult programs (e.g., **Christian parenting workshops** and Bible studies) during evening timeslots, home study groups and/or via digital platforms. The focus of these alternative program formats would allow us to increase the likelihood that working women and men with young children could attend these sessions, allowing them to grow in their faith.

Specific: Conduct quarterly in-house Christian parenting workshops

Measurable: 1 Adult Ed Sunday School per quarter will specifically be

Achievable: Yes (approx. 10 feasible Sundays per quarter to schedule from)

Realistic: Yes, resources exist... Cindy Wang Brandt's book Parenting Forward: How to Raise Children with Justice, Mercy, and Kindness

<https://pres-outlook.org/2019/09/parenting-after-faith-shift-progressive-christians-look-for-new-resources/>

Time-bound- **We will start this 2nd Q 2020**

Increased Christian Fellowship beyond Bible studies: Caring for each other and gathering together has long been a trademark of Hilltop Church. Hilltop's Deacons have a very strong community involvement, supporting and caring for both members and non-members. One example of this is our "Lunch with Friends" program. Once a month, "Lunch with Friends" provides a home cooked meal; everyone in the church and our community is invited.

Overall, as a church, we consistently look for opportunities to meet, and strengthen our sense of fellowship and community. For instance, we have had successful "Round Robin" gatherings that linked members of the congregation into "meeting groups" through geographic proximity. These groups had "Round Robin" dinner meetings to come together as "teams", identifying common goals and interests, making and strengthening friendships. These groups were successful in building a community sense within the congregation.

Currently, the Fellowship area of ministry, in addition to our traditional all church meal gatherings on Rally Day and Palm Sunday, strives to create opportunities for smaller, more intimate social gatherings for adult membership. These gatherings are to allow our adults to share their faith and interests, while getting to know each other better at individual home settings. As an example, this past Fall, the Fellowship Area of ministry teamed with members of our congregation to host an outdoor Pizza Making Party using the members' home and backyard Pizza Oven. It was a well-attended, adult event, with 24 attendees of diverse age and marital status, and much fellowship. It was such a success that we have recently had another couple in our church show interest in hosting a similar event at their home for the Spring.

Additionally, there are outside activities where we seek opportunities. This would include special church sponsored group events to ball games, amusement parks, theaters, concerts etc. As people bond at these gatherings, one would expect it to also lead to increased volunteerism and membership.

Youth involvement (covering young children, middle school and high school students):

Currently, we offer Sunday school programs for K – 8 which occur before church services. Our Sunday School program is based on a custom curriculum for the pre- K through 4th Grade. We aim to stimulate interest in Sunday School by supplementing these custom Bible lessons with special programs, such as focus on Mission Month and Women of the Bible lessons leading into Mother's Day. In addition, Sunday School for 5th grade & up started a new curriculum this fall called Ministry to Youth. The program interactive and full of movement. We have also recently implemented a new Youth Choir for ages 4th - 7th grade to fill the musical gap for this age group. Lastly, our Youth Group meets on Sunday evenings. These meetings allow our 5th graders & up a chance to interact and bond over activities and discussions outside of traditional worship

During services, we have Worship Workshop which is customized to meet the needs of young children from age 4 – 7. Worship Workshop is very popular with our young children and we typically average 4 – 11 children per week, sometimes having more than 15 – 18 children participate. Our goal is to increase our average attendance to ~7 – 12 children consistently each week by year end.

While the primary goal of Worship Workshop is to start a child's journey to building a relationship with God, a secondary goal is to allow the parents to participate in our service without distractions. We believe this second goal is true for parents of 3rd – 7th graders and realized that there was a need for a program for these older children. Worship Warriors was recently established for 3rd to 7th graders and has seen attendance being surprisingly good for this new program (4+ children per week). Our goal is to increase this level of participation to 8 children per week by year end.

Overall, by seeing an increase in attendance for both Worship Workshop and Worship Warriors, we believe that we will witness an increase in our service participation. By bringing young children into a more “child friendly” place to learn about God, we believe the parents will be more likely to attend services without distractions and allow us to meet our historical levels of weekly attendance of 100+.

Summary of our youth program goals:

1. Increase attendance at programs (including addressing scheduling difficulties, childcare, etc.): **Goal** – increase of ~15 – 20% participation within 12 months
2. Increase volunteer opportunities for parents and kids (encouraging and communicating these needs broadly): **Goal** – increase of ~15 – 20% participation in volunteerism
3. Increase level of fundraising efforts to support the church (build on the youth programs: “Souper Sunday” for Super Bowl Sunday efforts): **Goal** – increase of ~15 – 20% participation

Community outreach efforts:

Focus groups and questionnaires also examined the ways in which we can better reach out to the community. The following are a selection of the ideas that were mentioned:

1. Pastor being a pillar in the community/involvement in Camp Johnsonburg Programs, events that bring people into our church
2. Christmas Concert already a tradition, organize 4 anchor events throughout the year
3. Consider contemporary service or including more contemporary elements in worship
4. Collaborate with other churches
5. Personally inviting people to Hilltop and connect with people who have recently moved to the area
6. Advertise events/activities
7. Better online and social media presence
8. Be willing to change

9. Participation in the Labor Day Parade
10. Increase mission activities that are appropriate across a number of generations. By increasing the hands-on offerings accessible to our youngest members, we instill God's teachings to care for all of our brothers and sisters from the earliest age.

Suggested Qualities for Next Pastor:

Lastly, members were asked, "What are the leadership qualities we need in a pastor to take us into 2030?" It is understood that a pastor cannot be all of the listed qualities, and it is important to note that this is a compilation of congregational responses. The following were recurring responses (in no particular order):

1. **Life experience** – the opinions we gathered was that the congregation wanted someone who is in the "middle" of their career. Someone in the beginning would not suit the dynamics of this church. We need someone who is experienced in dealing with difficult situations, has dealt with the age continuum of our congregations, is not naïve, has managed people...etc.
2. **Openness to new ideas** - we want someone who is not regimented nor set in their ways. Hilltop needs someone who is open to a new way of doing things, who is not rigidly focused on how we have done things but how to better do things. We need someone more progressive in idea generation and execution.
3. **Interest/commitment in finding and building the next generation of members:** We need more members who want to be an active part of the church and contribute. That sometimes takes time for them to realize participation (personally and financially) is important but it can grow with the right environment. Mild influence from a minister can make a person want to try something and then discover the richness that it offers them (to serve God).
4. **Collaborating with and influencing strong personalities:** We have strong personalities in our church, as all do. This presence then requires a consensus builder and not a dictator or "I'll do it all" individual. We need a leader who will build teams and consensus.
5. **Ability to engage a continuum of ages, approachable:** Our church is blessed by having a whole range of ages in our congregation. The stable older congregants enjoy the vivacity of our youngsters with their innocence and enthusiasm. We need a leader who is able to connect with both the older and younger members of our congregation in a meaningful way to make them feel valued and valuable. This ability must span the generations – our older generation supports us financially while our younger generations support our efforts and invigorate us with their faith.
6. **Great sermon with a compelling message, inspiring:** New members are drawn to a church by the welcoming of the congregation and by the nature of the sermons given by their minister. Hilltop has had a legacy of excellent preachers who inspire, motivate, comfort and challenge their congregations. Hilltop has clearly indicated that this legacy needs to continue in our church to maintain members and bring new ones in to the congregation

7. **Ability to manage, collaborate, delegate and motivate people to use their talents/knowledge:** Hilltop has indicated that we need a good administrator to manage the business at hand in our church. This individual must also have the ability to connect and engage/persuade members to volunteer, fund events/programs or to fix broken things
8. **Business awareness, strategic, organized**
9. **Spiritual enrichment**
10. **Build alignment on what the church needs to do and build consensus to execute that vision/strategy**
11. **Counseling skills which are steeped in an empathetic philosophy**
12. **Effective fundraising experience**
13. **Ability to build strong connection with the community and other churches in the community**
14. **Create a vision for Hilltop Church and communicate it to the congregation to ensure its realization**

The DC also had two sessions with the youth of the church, comprising of students from 3rd grade to 8th grade, to identify qualities they felt were needed in a future pastor:

Nice; personable; spend time with kids; kind; treats everyone with respect; understanding; works well with others; have stories that tie into the lesson

Our congregation identified 14 qualities that they believe we need in our next pastor. The DC believed these 14 qualities must be clearly communicated for the sake of transparency and to reflect the hopes of our congregation. The Pastoral Nominating Committee (PNC) would be responsible for prioritizing these qualities as they move to identify a pastoral candidate who would best meet what God is calling us to do. At a Session meeting on January 21, 2020, Session was presented with the qualities and, by nature of their role, will guide the PNC regarding these qualities, as they are formed and move forward to identify a new pastor for Hilltop Church.

Session approved the study on October 15, 2019 and has re-affirmed the study on January 21, 2020, including the mission and vision statements included in the study.

Evaluation of Pastoral models for Hilltop Church's future

The Discernment Team identified early in the process that the financial support presently seen in the Pledging Unit giving, Plate and General Income will not currently support the 2018 Pastoral team concept of a Pastor/Head of Staff and an Associate Pastor. Given the congregational dreams and expectations it cannot be expected that one person can fulfill the role of a two-person model, although clearly the membership wants a strong Pastoral staff as was true prior to September 2018. At February 2020 Session meeting, Session concurred.

The Discernment Team communicated to the Focus group meetings that finances were a major factor in the future of a two Pastor model for the church and that current giving did not support

this model going forward. Many comments were made by focus group participants that the size of the membership and needs of the church (also that we should not step away from the many activities presently supported) that the two Pastor model was a desire of many members. The membership feels that the two Pastor model is what is needed and to her credit Pastor Paden has tried to maintain the strong Pastor support, oversight and leadership.

After further review and with input from the Finance Committee, the DC observes the following:

- Non-traditional pastoral models do not necessarily “cost less” and may result in a complicated recruiting process
- While our congregation desires a two-pastor model, this structure is not financially feasible today
- Further, we do not believe that the congregation has the desire, passion or ability to undertake a significant fundraising campaign in the near term

Recommendation: *DC recommends that Session approve a single pastor model*

Our Mission Statement

The purpose of the First Presbyterian Church, Mendham, NJ is:

- *“To acknowledge and proclaim the presence and power of God and to continue the work of Jesus Christ by loving God, God’s world, each other and ourselves.*
- *We are committed to the growth of faith, the spreading of the good news, and the mission of caring for those near and far.*
- *We fulfill these commitments through prayers, study, sharing, teaching and serving.”*

We believe that this three-part statement reflects the current understanding of how God has called and is calling Hilltop Church. While it is an acknowledgment that we know we are undeserving receivers of the great gift of God’s love, it is also a call to action, a call to love, an expression of joy, and a centering principle of our lives as individuals and as a group of believers. It is a statement about how we intend to interact with others, and more. It defines a behavioral goal that requires constant personal devotion and improvement to achieve.

It is clear that our congregation senses that God is calling us into active service in the community. While we acknowledge that we want to spread the good news to our broader community, our community is one grounded in family life with little in terms of “exciting social life offerings”. It is also clear that our greatest strength is in attracting families. Young adults are unlikely to be called to us from more urban settings given where they find themselves in their lives and where we believe sister churches offer them spiritual support. We also recognize that while Hilltop has programs that reach out into the community with our very active support of our local food pantry, soup kitchen and homeless shelter programs as well as our commitment to improving the lives of children and adults in a village in Zimbabwe, our greatest impact will

be with individuals and families in need in our community. Our active outreach programs already provide Christian support and service wherever it is needed.

With the leadership of a new pastor and knowing we are secure in God's love and His guidance, Hilltop Church faces an unknown future knowing that God's will, will be done and that, as God's people, we will witness the continued power and glory of God through us.