

A Congregational Vision for Mission Study
North Presbyterian Church

300 North Forest Road
Williamsville, NY 14221



Prepared by the Vision for Mission Committee

Submitted to the Session at North Presbyterian Church

May 20, 2006

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		<u>Page</u>
Section 1	<u>Introduction</u>	4
Section 2	<u>Biblical and Historical Calling: What do we believe?</u>	8
Section 3	<u>Examining Our Identity: Who are we?</u>	13
Section 4	<u>Reflecting on Our Context for Ministry: Where are we?</u>	27
Section 5	<u>Reviewing Our Programs: What do we do?</u>	32
Section 6	<u>Exploring our Processes: How do we do what we do, and how effective are we in carrying out our various ministries?</u>	41
Section 7	<u>Summary and Conclusions</u>	52

EXHIBITS

TO ACCOMPANY THE VISION FOR MISSION REPORT

- **Exhibit A:** Letter from the Vision for Mission Committee to Rev. Perlman, Presbytery of Western New York (dated August 19, 2005)
- **Exhibit B:** Letter from Mr. Grimm to the Vision for Mission Committee (dated September 14, 2005)
- **Exhibit C:** Sample Commissioning Letter from the VFM Committee to Committees and the Deacons at North Presbyterian Church
- **Exhibit D:** “Biblical/Historical Calling” Survey Instrument
- **Exhibit E:** Survey Results from the Biblical/Historical Calling Instrument
- **Exhibit F:** U.S. Congregational Life Survey Instrument (Research Services Office, Presbyterian Church USA)
- **Exhibit G:** Survey Responses to the U.S. Congregational Life Survey Instrument
- **Exhibit H:** The PCUSA’s “Neighborhood Demographic Reports”
- **Exhibit I:** “Strengths Report” from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey
- **Exhibit J:** “Building Connections” Report
- **Exhibit K:** Priority Tasks for and Characteristics of the Next Pastor
- **Exhibit L:** Floor Plan of North Presbyterian Church
- **Exhibit M:** Issues, Concerns, Priorities, Challenges and Growth Opportunities

Section 1. Introduction

a. Background

On July 11, 2005, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Evans submitted a letter to the Session of North Presbyterian Church (NPC) announcing his acceptance of a call to be Executive Presbyter of a presbytery in Alabama. When a Presbyterian pastor leaves a church, the local Presbytery requires that the congregation conduct a Vision for Mission (VFM) study prior to the establishment of a Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC). The PNC, once formed, is then charged with identifying and recommending to the Session and the Presbytery a new pastor. The Presbytery further requires that the study be conducted in accordance with guidelines set forth in the document entitled “A Congregational Vision for Mission.”

The NPC Session acknowledges these requirements and submits this Vision for Mission (VFM) report to the Presbytery of Western New York (WNY) for its review. NPC also understands that the establishment of its PNC is contingent upon the approval of this document by the Presbytery of WNY.

b. Objectives of the NPC Vision for Mission Study

NPC has conducted its VFM study to meet several objectives beyond compliance with the Presbytery of WNY requirements. They include the following.

- 1) We want to determine what we believe about ourselves, our church, and our God. We want to find out how to best serve God, the community, and our church in the future.
- 2) We want to review and document the history of our church and community and the demographic attributes of our local area.
- 3) We want to review our current programs and their effectiveness.
- 4) We want to explore the processes by which we conduct our several ministries.
- 5) We want to address the issues, needs, and concerns that seem important to us.
- 6) We want to involve the congregation as a whole in the search for a new pastor so that together, with God’s assurance, we can continue NPC’s faith journey into the future.
- 7) We want to complete a comprehensive document that will inform prospective pastors of who we are, what we believe, what we need, and what we see as important for the future of NPC.

c. Chronology of Events

A brief chronology of events and activities, beginning with the announced departure of the Rev. Dr. Thomas Evans and continuing to the submission of this draft report to the Session at North Presbyterian Church (NPC) and the Presbytery of Western New York’s Committee on Ministry (COM), is presented below as background for this report.

- July 11, 2005: The Rev. Dr. Thomas Evans announced to the Session his intention to depart as Pastor at NPC to take a position with the presbytery in Birmingham, Alabama. His last Sunday at NPC was on August 7, 2005.
- Late July: The Rev. David Smith, pastor of Amherst Presbyterian Church, was appointed by the Presbytery of Western New York as the liaison between the Presbytery and NPC, and as the interim moderator of the NPC Session.
- August 1, 2005: Date, 2005: The NPC Session formed the Vision for Mission (VFM) Committee. Its members are Bill Clark, Martha Hanna, and Jim McConnell.
- August 19, 2005-October 5, 2006. The NPC Session and the VFM Committee began a dialogue with the COM regarding the nature of the Mission Study that is required. On August

19, 2005, the VFM Committee requested (see **Exhibit A**) that the COM provide the NPC Session with an “exit” interview, and that NPC be permitted to prepare a so-called “speeded-up” Mission Study, rather than the traditional report, which typically requires a long-term process. On September 15, 2005, a letter was received from Mr. Allan Grimm (dated September 14, 2005) in which it was stated that the COM currently has no program for speeding up the mission-study process, and that NPC is expected to complete a “Congregational Vision for Mission” study (see **Exhibit B**). On September 21, 2005, Mr. Grimm called Jim McConnell and indicated that if NPC would send the COM a copy of its 1999 Mission Plan plus the materials that had been prepared as part of NPC’s “Next Fifty Years,” the COM would evaluate the two documents as possible substitutions for a more traditional Mission Study. These materials were delivered to the Presbytery Office on September 24, 2005. On October 3, 2005, the Rev. Dr. Lance Brown, representing the COM, conducted an “exit” interview with the NPC Session, and indicated that the materials that had been submitted on September 24 were out of date and did not conform to the organizational structure required by the COM. On October 5, 2005, Mr. Grimm called Jim McConnell and indicated that NPC was expected to conduct a Vision for Mission study that conformed to the four-page document titled “A Congregational Vision for Mission.”

- October 1, 2005: The Rev. Carolyn Grohman was called by the NPC Session as Interim Pastor at NPC.
- October 5, 2005: The VFM Committee, in consultation with Pastor Grohman, began the process of preparing a Congregational Vision for Mission report for NPC, the Session, and the COM.
- October 14, 2005: The VFM committee made formal contact with the Research Office of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) in Louisville, KY regarding accessing their survey-research services. The Committee also downloaded a variety of on-line data from the PCUSA’s website that are relevant for the VFM study.
- October 15, 2005: The VFM Committee prepared and distributed copies of a survey titled “Biblical/Historical Calling.” The survey was designed to provide current information needed to complete Section 2 of the VFM report, which asks the question: “What do we believe?” The initial targeted audience was NPC elders, deacons, and committee members. A total of 53 responses were received.
- October 16, 2005: The VFM Committee sent formal commissioning letters to the chairs of NPC’s eleven standing committees and the Deacons requesting that they assist the VFM Committee by addressing six questions that are specific to their committees (see **Exhibit C**). The questions are: Who are you? What are your current tasks? How effective are you in performing your tasks? What processes are used to carry out your tasks? What are your short- and long-term goals? And, what are your major issues and concerns? These reports, which were requested by December 18, 2005, were very helpful to the VFM Committee, and are incorporated at various places in the VFM study.
- October 20, 2005: The VFM Committee sent a letter to the Rev. David Smith that outlined the process that the Committee intended to follow in preparing the VFM report.
- November 7, 2005: The VFM Committee submitted its first interim report to the Session and received permission to send a letter to the congregation providing the members with an overview of the process required in calling a new pastor; to enter into a contract with the Research Office of the PCUSA and utilize (with appropriate modifications and additions) that Office’s survey instrument (the U.S. Congregational Life Survey); and to administer the survey to the NPC congregation in early December, 2005.
- November 20, 2005: The VFM Committee placed an announcement in the Sunday bulletin alerting the congregation that they were invited to participate in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, which would be administered after both Sunday morning services on December 4,

2005. This announcement was placed in the Sunday morning bulletins for every Sunday from November 20 through December 11, 2005.

- November 29, 2005: A revised letter, which was titled “An overview of the journey ahead of us,” was mailed to the congregation to inform them of the process that was necessary to undertake in order to call a new Pastor.
- December 4, 11, 18, 2005: The PCUSA’S U.S. Congregational Life Survey was administered to the congregation after both Sunday morning worship services on the three Sundays. The survey instrument consisted of two parts: the regular set of 56 questions that formed the basic framework of the instrument and an additional four sets of questions that were modified and adapted to NPC.
- December 19, 2005: The VFM Committee mailed the 196 completed surveys to the PCUSA’S Research Office for analysis. Only the primary set of 56 questions was sent to Louisville. The additional four sets of questions were tabulated and analyzed by the VFM Committee. The cost of administering the primary set of survey responses was \$575, which is the fee charged by the PCUSA Research Office. The cost of analyzing the additional survey data was \$60. Total cost of surveying the NPC congregation: \$635.
- Early January, 2006: The VFM Committee began the process of analyzing the various reports from the eleven standing committees and the Deacons.
- January 17, 2006. The survey results from the U.S. Congregational Life Survey were received from the PCUSA’S Research office.
- January 23, 2006: The VFM Committee submitted to the Session a document titled “Items that need the Session’s actions, or, at least, discussion.” The items related to seven sub-sections that are required in the Vision for Mission final report.
- January 30, 2006: The VFM Committee e-mailed to the Session the following two documents: 1) a five-page summary of the survey results from the four sets of questions related to the attributes most desired in a new pastor; and 2) an overview of the proposed contents for Section 4 of the VFM final report (“Reflecting on our context for ministry: Where are we?”).
- February 6, 2006: The VFM Committee submitted an interim report to the Session that included two sample pages from the PCUSA survey. One reported on NPC’S strength in the area of spirituality, and the other related to building identity connections at NPC.
- February 9, 2006: All of the survey results from the PCUSA Congregational Life Survey were e-mailed to the Session.
- March 6, 2006: The VFM Committee submitted to the Session the initial draft copy of “A Congregational Vision for Mission” report.
- Date, _____ 2006: The NPC Session approved the Vision for Mission report.

d. Acknowledgements

A project of this scope could not have been accomplished without the wholehearted support of many others. The VFM Committee is most grateful for the active support and valuable contributions of the following:

- The Rev. Carolyn Grohman who, since she arrived at NPC, has worked continuously and closely with the VFM Committee and the Session throughout the entire process of preparing this report. She has performed the duties of an Interim Pastor in a professional manner that can only be described as stellar, extremely helpful to the Session and the VFM Committee, and enormously beneficial to the entire NPC congregation.
- The Rev. David Smith, Pastor of Amherst Presbyterian Church, who early in the process served as the interim moderator of the NPC Session, was the liaison between the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry and the NPC Session, and provided initial guidance and encouragement to the VFM Committee.

- The members of Session, all of whom have supported the effort, listened graciously to appeals and status reports at Session meetings, and provided important responses to surveys and questions.
- The chairs and members of committees and the Board of Deacons who have provided responses to our appeal for input to the VFM study and document.
- The elders, deacons, and others who responded to the Biblical/Historical Calling survey.
- The congregants who patiently completed the PCUSA's US Congregational Life Survey instrument and who did not become too overly frustrated with using those terrible pens provided by the PCUSA.
- Executive Assistant Linda Donner, who has provided information and cheerfully made many copies of surveys and has transcribed and made copies of the VFM document for distribution to NPC members, the Presbytery, and prospective pastors.
- And, to the many individuals in the congregation who have been asked to provide background information and to look over and comment on various sections of this report. Special thanks are extended to Margaret Haas (for her contributions to the history of NPC) and to Mary Ann Mache, Mary Mohlke, JoAnne Alderfer, and the individuals selected by the Session to review and comment on the initial draft of this document.

Section 2. Our Biblical/Historical Calling: What do we believe?

a. Procedure and Survey Instrument

The North Presbyterian Church Vision for Mission Committee prepared a Biblical and Historical Survey instrument to be completed by Elders, Deacons, and others, in groups or individually (see **Exhibit D**). The survey consisted of three parts.

- Part 1 asked each member to indicate why God has called the church together. There were 13 choices.
- Part 2 asked each member to indicate what he or she sees as demands of our church’s calling. There were 12 choices.
- Part 3 asked each member to indicate what he or she perceives to be images of the church from the Bible. There were ten choices.

In each part, members were asked to indicate those reasons that they believe are important by ranking them, with “1” being the most important. They were not asked to rank all of them.

They were asked to place an “X” if they believed that a choice should not be considered. Also, they were informed that they could add other reasons that they believe are important, and that they should rank these choices as well.

Over 200 surveys were distributed. The focus of the survey was on Elders, Deacons, and committee members. Accordingly, the surveys were passed out at Session, Deacons, and committee meetings. However, other members were invited to participate in the survey. A total of 53 members responded. **Table 1** indicates the distribution of responders by age group and gender. Note that 35 of the responders were Elders, Deacons, or both. Also note the even distribution of responses according to gender.

Responses to the survey were weighted according to the ranking indicated by the responders. The weighting factors assigned were:

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Points</u>
1	10
2	8
3	6
4	4
5	2
6 +	1
“X”	-5 (Negative response)

Table 1. Responses to Biblical/Historical Calling Survey

MALE MEMBERS				
AGE	ELDER/DEACON	COMMITTEE	MEMBER	TOTAL
0-18	0	0	4	4
19-25	0	0	3	3

26-50	2	2	1	5
51-70	8	0	1	9
71+	5	0	0	5
TOTAL	15	2	9	26
FEMALE MEMBERS				
AGE	ELDER/DEACON	COMMITTEE	MEMBER	TOTAL
0-18	1	0	3	4
19-25	0	0	0	0
26-50	1	3	0	4
51-70	10	0	1	11
71+	8	0	0	8
TOTAL	20	3	4	27
ALL RESPONDERS				
AGE	ELDER/DEACON	COMMITTEE	MEMBER	TOTAL
0-18	1	0	7	8
19-25	0	0	3	3
26-50	3	5	1	9
51-70	18	0	2	20
71+	13	0	0	13
TOTAL	35	5	13	53

b. Results of the Survey on the “Biblical/Historical Calling”

The survey results are tabulated in detail in **Exhibit E**. The reader is encouraged to study these results directly. The careful reader will, thereby, glean the essence of the members’ responses. Also, the reader is directed to Section 3-c. of this report wherein several of these responses are compared to related responses from the PCUSA’s Congregational Life Survey.

A few observations for each part of the Biblical/Historical Calling survey are presented below.

Survey Part 1: Why has God called our church together?

From a review of the results of **Part 1** of the survey the following are observed:

- It is clear that the responders believe that the most important reasons that God has called the church together are to love, serve, honor, and glorify God. This response prevailed for men, women, young and old.

- The next leading response, “to assure God’s children that, by Christ’s death and resurrection, their sins are forgiven and they will have eternal life with God”, placed third overall, with women, and for those under 51. For men and those over 50, this response was sixth.
- The calling “to provide Christian education and fellowship to children and youth” was fourth, only slightly behind the above response. Ironically, this response was third among those over 51 but only ninth among those under 50.
- Providing nurture and support for the members of our church and serving those in need in the community prevailed over serving those in need throughout the world.
- Evangelism, “to help God lead others to believe in Him and His Son, Jesus”, was the ninth calling, below the responses associated with mission.
- Three responses were much lower in points than the others, “to provide a haven for solitude, prayer and meditation”, “to maintain a loving, caring community for Amherst and vicinity”, and “to provide a convenient sanctuary for baptisms, marriages, funerals and memorial services”

Survey Part 2: What do you see as demands of our Church’s calling?

From a review of the results of **Part 2** of the survey the following are observed:

- It is clear that the responders believe that the two most important demands of our church’s calling are to “increase our emphasis on ministry and education of our children and youth”, and “modify our building so that disabled persons have access to all three floors”. These responses prevailed for men, women, young and old.
- The next two choices selected as important were mission oriented. The responders believe that we at North Church “must devote more energy and money to mission projects”, and “must provide more responsive pastoral care for our elderly and disabled members and other members in time of need or grief”.
- The responders preferred provision of “more adult discipleship opportunities other than Bible study” to “a more structured adult Bible study”.
- Not surprisingly, provision of “a contemporary worship service that will appeal to today’s young people” placed third among responders under age 51 but eleventh among responders over age 50.
- The two least selected choices were those related to stewardship, placing “more emphasis on stewardship campaigns” and explaining “to our members how they may help the church by their endowments and bequests”.

Survey Part 3: Images of the church from the bible.

From a review of the results of Part 3 of the survey the following are observed:

- Three images of the church predominated the responses, “The People of God”, “One Body in Christ”, and “Believers and Faithful”. These responses prevailed for men, women, young and old.

- The next two images selected, “Slaves and Servants” and “The Saints and Sanctified”, received far fewer points than the above but significantly more than the other images. This was true for male and female responders.
- Responders reacted negatively to the images “Kingdom and Temple” and “The New Exodus”.

Written Responses

For parts 1 and 2 of the Biblical/Historical Calling survey, responders were invited to provide their own choices and to rank them with their selections from among the choices provided by the survey. These are provided below.

Part 1. God has called the church together:

<u>RANK</u>	<u>RESPONSE</u>
1	To provide support groups and prayer groups.
6	To develop, promote and share the talents of members and non-members
6	To provide the time and place for fun
6	To provide adult Christian education.
6	To promote and provide opportunities for fellowship in the body of believers that cut across gender, generations, etc.

Part 2. What do you see as demands of our Church’s calling?

<u>RANK</u>	<u>RESPONSE</u>
1	We need to develop and express a warm and welcoming demeanor toward <u>all</u> attending our services. New membership and giving will follow.
1	We must provide Christianity to the community and the world.
1	We need to help people.
2	We must provide a contemporary worship service that will appeal to today’s young people and families as well as a truly traditional service for those who wish to worship in a manner that is familiar to them.
2	We must educate the parents in our congregation about their responsibilities regarding the behavior of their children during worship so that our members will know that their rights to a quiet, meaningful worship experience will be upheld.
2	We must provide three worship services; (1) a traditional service for adults and extremely well behaved children, (2) a family service, and (3) a contemporary service on Saturday evenings, perhaps. Each service would have the same sermon and bible verses.
2	We must have better sound access for those with hearing impairment.
3	Place more emphasis on spiritual development as it relates to stewardship
3	We must provide a more regular adult Bible study with certified leadership!
4	We should connect effectively with other churches to collaborate and enhance our efforts.
4	We must provide a mixture of traditional and contemporary worship service that appeals to all members of the congregation.
4	Strengthen the bond between members.
6	We must be honest within our own church and not just make things appear what they are not to make us look good at the expense of hurting our own members.
6	We must continue to improve our ministry and education for and to youth.

- 6 We need to have a more traditional service with more familiar hymns and the old Gloria Patri and Doxology.
- 6 We need to bring the American and Presbyterian flags back into the sanctuary.
- 6 We must make members more aware of the pastoral care opportunities available at NPC.
- 6 We must have a formal system to use the talents of new members.
- 6 To minister, teach and act upon the fact that God can heal us from injury, disease, psychological and emotional illness, etc.
- 6 We must reinstate Tuesday Night Together.
- 6 We must reactivate Stephen Ministry.
- 6 We must provide one regularly held adult Bible study program along with several other classes.
- 6 To develop strategies, other than the stewardship campaign, for the funding of NPC programs.

Section 3. Examining Our Identity: Who are we?

a. Brief History of North Presbyterian Church

Note: The following history was derived, largely, from two sources available in the North Presbyterian Church office.

1. *Graves, Rebecca McDougall, The North Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, New York, 1847-1922*
2. *Haas, Margaret Barbara, Remember Celebrate Serve, North Presbyterian Church, 1847-1987*

The Reverend Thaddeus Osgood arrived in the village of Buffalo in late February 1812. As a representative of the Massachusetts Missionary Society for Propagating the Gospel, he conducted religious services for the early settlers who were, for several years, without an ordained clergyman. In the absence of a consecrated building, his services, including baptisms, were held in Joseph Landon's waterfront tavern which served as a community center and a hostelry. Under Mr. Osgood, ten persons organized the First Presbyterian Church, the first church in Buffalo. Comfort Landon, the tavern keeper's wife, was among them. Mr. Landon was denied membership. At that time the Presbytery of Geneva prohibited anyone who sold alcoholic beverages from receiving communion.

The first church was erected on the Lake Erie waterfront. During the War of 1812, the village of Buffalo was burned, forcing the settlers to flee to Williamsville. The new church was almost destroyed by fire. The building was restored in 1815 and was received by the Presbytery of Geneva on February 14, 1816.

Buffalo grew rapidly in the early 19th century, especially after the completion of the Erie Canal from Albany in 1825. In 1832 Buffalo was elevated from village to city status and First Presbyterian church grew. Two additional churches stemmed from First Presbyterian. They were Pearl Street Presbyterian Church, subsequently Central, in 1835 and Lafayette Presbyterian Church in 1845. Both churches serve the Buffalo area today.

By 1846 these three churches were overflowing on Sunday mornings and it was perceived that another church was needed. On March 25, 1847, twenty men and twenty-three women, all members of First Presbyterian Church, agreed to "enter upon this new enterprise." The site chosen for the new church was on Main Street between Tupper and Chippewa, near the current location of Studio Arena Theatre. The name "North" was chosen because, at that time, the location seemed quite far to the North. North Presbyterian Church was dedicated to the Glory of Almighty God on December 29, 1847.

When North Church celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1897, Buffalo was a thriving city of 170,000, fifteen railroads and 1137 manufacturers. Large residential areas were established further to the north, to the east and west of Delaware Avenue. By 1900 the Session and members realized that the church could no longer survive downtown and voted to move north, toward the center of the residential section. The fifty-seven-year-old church was sold in January, 1904. The last service was held on April 17 of the same year. The following Sunday, worship took place at the Twentieth Century Club on Delaware Avenue. After May 7, 1905, services were held at Temple Beth Zion, also on Delaware Avenue.

Ground was broken for construction of the new North Presbyterian Church at the corner of Utica Street and Delaware Avenue. It was dedicated on January 6, 1907. Traditions, worship, and program

continued as it had before. At one point in time, North Church had the largest membership of all the Presbyterian churches in Buffalo.

By the mid-1930s a number of changes in the community brought about a significant decline in membership. There were seven Presbyterian churches within one mile and the Delaware Avenue Baptist Church was directly across the street. The 1930s depression had a catastrophic effect on the membership. Many formerly self-sufficient and wealthy members faced bankruptcy or poverty and were forced to severely reduce or eliminate their tithes and offerings. World War II also brought about many social and economic changes. With gasoline rationing, many suburban dwellers attended nearby churches, some within walking distance.

The Reverend Martin Keeler became pastor in 1950. During the early years of his pastorate, seemingly insurmountable problems plagued the church and its dwindling membership. There were fewer than thirty children in Sunday School and it was becoming impossible to support, adequately, the pastor and to maintain the property, then in need of repair.

A small group met on Sunday, October 12, 1952 in the home of Warren and Alice Swager, newcomers to Williamsville, a village in Amherst, New York. The Swagers had great concern over the lack of a Presbyterian church to serve Williamsville and the surrounding communities. The group showed tremendous interest and willingness to devote time and energy to the establishment of a Presbyterian church in Williamsville. As Secretary, pro-tem, of the group, Mr. Swager wrote a letter to the Session of North Church wherein he stressed the urgent need for a Presbyterian Church in Amherst.

On October 16, 1952, the Rev. Keeler announced that the church at Delaware and Utica had been sold. The front door closed on December 31, 1952. For the second time, since its founding in 1847, the North Church congregation was without a permanent home.

On January 1, 1953 the congregation met for worship in the cafeteria of Park School on Harlem Road in Snyder. The Park School congregation grew, attracting new members from the Town of Amherst. On May 24th of that year the congregation approved the purchase of the Kuhn farm at North Forest and Union Roads in Williamsville. Ground was broken for the building on December 5, 1954, and construction began. This church building, the third, was dedicated on December 8, 1955.

In addition to an overview of the history of the physical locations of NPC, other aspects of the NPC congregations over the years provide additional answers to the question of “Who are we?” Some of the significant events in the life of NPC *since the early 1950s* include the following:

- Seventeen pastors, interim pastors, assistant, and associated pastors have been affiliated with NPC (see **Table 2**). Two of these pastoral callings (the Revs. Keeler and McFarlane) each extended over a 20-year period.
- NPC has been open to experimenting with new forms of worship and ministry. For example, in the 1980s, NPC called the Crowells, who were husband and wife; and in the 1990s, NPC called two ministers (the Revs. McClester and Wood) to minister within the framework of a co-pastor model.
- During the mid- to late-1990s, NPC experienced a relatively difficult period of conflict over a number of issues ranging, for example, from trying to deal with the issue of homosexuality, to difficulties related to implementing the co-pastor model, to concerns over whether or not the American flag should be placed in the church sanctuary. For a period of time thereafter, the congregation benefited from the consulting services of the Alban Institute, which led to a series of congregational group discussions, the formation of the Pastor Relations Committee, and a dedicated effort to bring back into the congregation those members who had departed.

- In the late 1990s, the congregation was served by several interim pastors, and, in 2000, the Rev. Thomas Evans was called as Pastor.
- It should also be noted that over the past 11 budget years (1995 through 2005), the congregation's average annual active membership has stabilized at around 660 individuals, and its average annual budgeted expenses are around \$447,000 (see **Table 3**).

Table 2. North Presbyterian Church Pastors

Charles Rich	1847-1849
Joshua Cook	1849-1849
Albert T. Chester, D.D.	1849-1860
Henry Smith, D.D.	1862-1865
Wolcott Calkins, D.D.	1866-1880
William S. Hubbell, D.D.	1881-1896
Edwin H. Dickinson, D.D.	1897-1916
Charles H. Stewart, D.D.	1918-1937
William A. Park	1938-1940
Robert M. Minto	1941-1944
Bruce Swift, D.D.	1944-1947
Neil Crawford	1947-1947
Bruce Swift, D.D.	1947-1950
Martin Keeler	1950-1970
John W. Hornfeldt, Jr.	1963-1966
Val Watkins, Visiting Pastor	1969-1970
Thomas Umholtz, Associate Pastor	1967-1974
David J. McFarlane	1972-1991
Thomas H. Yorty, Assistant Pastor	1977-1982
Robert A. Crowell, Co-Assistant Pastor	1984-1987
Cynthia Warner Crowell, Co-Assistant Pastor	1984-1987
Dr. Alison Halsey, Interim Pastor	1991-1993
John McClester, Co-Pastor	1993-1995
Alicia Conklin Wood, Co-Pastor	1993-1996
Ellison "Al" Elmer, Interim Associate Pastor	1996-1998
John David Burton, Interim Pastor	1997-1999
Sharon Harris-Ewing, Assistant to the pastor	1999-2000
Bronwen Woodson Boswell, Interim Associate Pastor	1999-2001
Dr. Thomas E. Evans	2000-2005
Elizabeth Walker, Associate Pastor	2001-2005
Carolyn Grohman, Interim Pastor	2005-

Table 3. Membership and Financial Data

<u>Year</u> <u>Ending</u>	<u>Active</u> <u>Members</u>	<u>Budgeted</u> <u>Expenses</u>
1955	284	\$ 14,000*
1985	920	209,000
1986	702	215,000
1987	709	251,000
1988	746	395,000
1989	763	325,000
1990	778	293,000
1991	792	327,000
1992	829	334,000
1993	845	340,000
1994	721	424,000
1995	640	392,000
1996	657	400,000
1997	662	559,000
1998	653	504,000
1999	649	457,000
2000	648	403,000
2001	667	426,000
2002	682	432,000
2003	671	435,000
2004	662	445,000
2005	662	470,000

* Receipts

During the month of October, 2005, NPC celebrated with joy its fifty years in its third location. Among the things celebrated included the following past accomplishments:

- completion of the Keeler Chapel named in honor of Rev. Keeler
- completion of the fellowship hall, named Westminster Hall
- welcoming of community groups including the Boy Scouts
- many mission activities, including Habitat for Humanity and Friends of Night People
- superb maintenance of our property by talented and dedicated members
- achievements of our youth and the many youth-oriented missions
- joy of our vocal choirs, bell choirs, soloists, and dance group
- humble satisfaction of pastoral caring for seniors and others
- many fellowship activities of the church, including picnics and evening programs
- satisfaction for many problems solved and tasks well done.
- a congregation willing to experiment with new forms of worship and ministry.

b. Procedures Used to Discern our Present Identity

The procedures employed to assess NPC's present identity are elaborated on in Section 1 of this report (see "Introduction" for more details). In summary, the following activities were undertaken by the VFM Committee to obtain a sense as to who and what NPC is:

- The VFM commissioned the members of 10 standing NPC committees and the Deacons to respond to six questions considered important to helping NPC identify who it is. (See **Exhibit C** for a sample of this commissioning letter.) The questions are: Who are you? What are your current tasks? How effective are you in performing your tasks? How do you communicate with each other? What goals have been and have not been achieved over the past five years? And, what are your present short- and long-term goals and concerns? Each of the above groups provided the VFM Committee with a report, which contained valuable insights and suggestions. Several of these groups also conducted their own surveys of the congregation.
- The VFM Committee designed and administered to members of the Session, Deacons, and standing committees a “Biblical/Historical Calling” Survey (see **Exhibit D**).
- The VFM Committee entered into a contract with the Research Office of the Presbyterian Church USA (Louisville, KY) to utilize that agency’s US Congregational Life Survey (see **Exhibit F** for a copy of the survey instrument) and its analysis of the survey responses. Subsequently, the Committee administered the following surveys to the congregation on three separate Sunday mornings in December, 2005: (1) the PCUSA’s Congregational Life Survey instrument of 56 questions; and (2), four sets of modified questions designed to identify specific characteristics and ministry styles that the congregation preferred in the next pastor.
- The Committee paid the Research Office of the PCUSA for an elaborate statistical analysis of the Congregational Life Survey responses, and the Committee subsequently examined and interpreted the results in comparison to some 2000 other congregations in the U.S., to congregations of similar size as NPC, and to other Presbyterian churches.
- The Committee also conducted its own statistical analysis of the four sets of modified, pastor-related questions. These are included in **Exhibit F**. Subsequently, the Committee examined and interpreted the results.
- Beginning in December, 2005, the Committee prepared monthly updates to the NPC Session of its activities and selected findings. A variety of questions were posed, and the Session was invited to respond with comments and suggestions
- At various stages in the process of completing the final report, the Committee relied on numerous individuals within the congregation for information and advice. Moreover, after the first draft was completed, the Session asked several individuals within the congregation, who were not on committees, to review the draft report and provide comments and suggestions.

c. Theological Views of Members of the Congregation

Several ways to characterize these views are reported below.

(1) Responses to several questions in the US Congregational Life Survey provide insight as to the theological views of NPC members. See **Exhibit G**. The responses are:

- Question 8. Responses to “Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible?”
 - 6% The Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word
 - 40% The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural context
 - 42% The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the Church’s teachings
 - 7% The Bible is not the word of God, but is a valuable book
 - 1% The Bible is an ancient book with little value today
 - 2% Don’t know
- Question 9. Responses to “All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth.”
 - 15% Strongly agree

40% Agree
23% Neutral or unsure
16% Disagree
5% Strongly disagree

- Question 46. Responses to “Do you identify with any of the following approaches to faith?”

8% Catholic
9% Evangelical
13% Reformed
3% Charismatic
2% Pentecostal
2% Fundamentalist
20% Traditionalist
14% Moderate
14% Liberal
2% New Age
38% I do not identify with such descriptions

- Summary

Eighty-eight percent of the 196 respondents to the US Congregational Life Survey view the Bible as the word of God. Fifty-five percent agree that all religions are equally good ways to helping a person find ultimate truth. The responses to Question 46 can be aggregated, roughly, as follows: The sum is over 100 percent because respondents could indicate up to two options.

Approaches to faith

- Conservative approaches, 16% (Evangelical, Charismatic, Pentecostal, Fundamentalist)
- Liberal approaches, 16% (Liberal, New Age)
- Moderate or “middle-of-the-road” responses, 47% (Reformed, Traditionalist, Moderate)
- Other, 46% (Catholic, “I do not identify with such descriptions.”)

It is reasonable to conclude that about 20 percent of the congregation is theologically conservative and believe that a person finds ultimate truth through Christian faith and about 80 percent are moderate to liberal and believe that there are many ways to find ultimate truth, or are not sure.

Also, we conclude that NPC members exhibit significant diversity in their theological beliefs. This is consistent with the phrase in our mission statement that challenges us to “come together as a faith community... recognizing and respecting our diversity.”

(2) Other significant NPC related views of members

The results of the Biblical/Historical Calling, which was developed by the VFM Committee, are addressed in Section 2. Those findings, which reflect the responses provided by 53 elders, deacons, and others, are compared below to related responses from the Congregational Life Survey.

Part 1 of *Our Biblical and Historical Calling* survey asks, “Why has God called our church together? The VFM committee compared several of these responses with related responses from the Congregational *Life Survey* and from the separate surveys *Priorities for the tasks of the next pastor* and *Characteristics of a pastor related to styles of ministry*.

- It is clear from *Our Biblical and Historical Calling* survey that the responders believe that the most important reasons that God has called the church together are to love, serve, honor, and glorify God. This response prevailed for men, women, young and old.

Related responses from Congregational Life Survey:

94% of the 196 members who completed the survey reported that they attend NPC worship services at least “two or three times a month”; 76% “usually every week”.

In response to Question 22, “Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three options.)”, the three options that topped the list of 14 were:

- 48% Sermons, preaching, or homilies
- 44% Traditional style of worship or music
- 38% Sharing in ... the Lord’s Supper

Related responses from Priorities for the tasks of the next pastor:

The two tasks with the highest priorities (out of 16) for the next pastor were

- 1) #7 Preaching the Word of God with urgency and conviction
- 2) #6 Planning/leading worship sensitive to the needs of the worshipping community

Related response from Characteristics of a pastor related to styles of ministry:

The highest characteristic listed (out of 14) was #11 “A strong preacher”.

- The calling “to assure God’s children that, by Christ’s death and resurrection, their sins are forgiven and they will have eternal life with God”, was third.

Related responses from Congregational Life Survey:

In response to Question 8, “Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible?”: 88% indicated their belief that the Bible is the word of God.

In response to Question 11, “Have you ever experienced ... a moment of decisive faith commitment or conversion?”, 93% of the respondents acknowledged that they came to faith in one-way or another. Only 6% indicated that they were “not sure” or that the question was “not applicable”.

- The calling “to provide Christian education and fellowship to children and youth” was fourth, only slightly behind the above response. Ironically, this response was third among those over 51 but only ninth among those under 50.

Related response from Congregational Life Survey:

In response to Question 22, “Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three options.)”, 28% included the option “Ministry for children or youth”, placing it fifth out of 14 options from which to select.

- Providing nurture and support for the members of our church and serving those in need in the community prevailed over serving those in need throughout the world.

Related response from Congregational Life Survey:

39% of the 196 members who completed the survey reported that they regularly take part “in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities of this congregation.” 51% indicated that they “are not regularly involved ... in any activities ... that reach out to the wider community”.

- Evangelism, “to help God lead others to believe in Him and His Son, Jesus”, was the ninth calling, below the responses associated with mission.

Related responses from Congregational Life Survey:

Only 11% of the 196 members who completed the survey reported that they regularly take part “in evangelism or outreach activities.”

In response to Question 14 about “readiness to talk to others about your faith”, 62% indicated that they “mostly feel at ease talking about my faith and do so if it comes up.” Only 7% reported that they “feel at ease talking about my faith and seek opportunities to do so.”

In response to Question 22, “Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value?”, only 4% included “Reaching those who do not attend church” as one of their three options.

In response to Question 55, “What do you believe are the main roles that our pastor should carry out at North Church?”, only 2% included “Converting others to the faith” as one of their three options. However, 50% listed “Teaching people about the faith.”

- Three responses were much lower in points than the others, “to provide a haven for solitude, prayer and meditation”, “to maintain a loving, caring community for Amherst and vicinity”, and “to provide a convenient sanctuary for baptisms, marriages, funerals and memorial services”

Related response from Congregational Life Survey:

59% of the 196 members who completed the survey reported that they “spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone)”. This response and the low point total for the church’s calling “to provide a haven for solitude, prayer and meditation” indicates a prevalence of private devotional activities by congregants.

Part 2 of *Our Biblical and Historical Calling* survey asks, “What do you see as demands of our church’s calling? The VFM committee compared several of these responses with related responses from the Congregational Life Survey and from the separate surveys Priorities for the tasks of the next pastor, How satisfied are you with the following (activities) at NPC?, and Would you be interested in learning more about any of the following areas?.”

- It is clear that the responders believe that the two most important demands of our church’s calling are to “increase our emphasis on ministry and education of our children and youth”, and “modify our building so that disabled persons have access to all three floors”. These responses prevailed for men, women, young and old.

Related responses from the question How satisfied are you with the following (activities) at NPC?:

The lowest level of satisfaction out of 20 selections presented was for, “Accommodations for the mobility impaired”.

Satisfaction with “Children’s ministry” ranked 8th out of 20.
Satisfaction with “Vacation Bible School” ranked 2nd out of 20.

- The next two choices selected as important were mission oriented. The responders believe that we at North Church “must devote more energy and money to mission projects”, and “must provide more responsive pastoral care for our elderly and disabled members and other members in time of need or grief”.

Related responses from Priorities for the tasks of the next pastor:

The congregants ranked the following tasks for the next pastor as priorities 6 and 7 (out of 16 choices):

- #9 Visiting the sick and bereaved
- #10 Being a caring and enabling counselor

The congregants prioritized the following mission related tasks for the next pastor as follows:

- 8th #14 Leadership of visioning and planning of congregational mission
- 15th #11 Supporting the world mission of the church.

Related responses from Would you be interested in learning more about any of the following areas?

Congregants ranked the following areas of interest as 3rd, 4th and 5th among 24 choices. The number in parentheses indicate the number of people out of 196 who identified the area as one about which they would like to receive more information.

- 3rd Death and dying (36)
- 4th Christian friendship (34)
- 5th Care of the elderly (33)

Related responses from the question How satisfied are you with the following (activities) at NPC?:

Satisfaction with “Mission and outreach activities” ranked 7th out of 20.
Satisfaction with “Pastor’s visitation” ranked 18th out of 20.
Satisfaction with “Elder’s visitation” ranked 19th out of 20.

- The responders preferred provision of “more adult discipleship opportunities other than Bible study” to “a more structured adult Bible study”.

Related responses from Congregational Life Survey:

In response to Question 22, “Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three options.)”, the results related to adult discipleship and Bible study were:

7th (14%) Social activities or meeting new people

10th (10%) Bible study or prayer groups, other discussion groups

11th (8%) Adult church-school or Sabbath-school class

- Not surprisingly, the provision of “a contemporary worship service that will appeal to today’s young people” placed third among responders under age 51 but eleventh among responders over age 50.

Related responses from Congregational Life Survey:

In response to Question 22, “Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three options.)”, the results for the style of worship options were:

2nd (44%) Traditional style of worship or music

8th (13%) Contemporary style of worship or music

- The two least selected choices were those related to stewardship, placing “more emphasis on stewardship campaigns” and explaining “to our members how they may help the church by their endowments and bequests”.

Related response from Priorities for the tasks of the next pastor:

The congregants ranked the following task for the next pastor as priority 12 (out of 16 choices): #2 Stewardship development.

(3) Views expressed by NPC Committees and Deacons.

Each NPC standing committee and the Board of Deacons was asked to respond to several questions posed by the VFM committee. (Copies of these reports are available in the NPC office.) Several of those views are presented below.

- Adult Discipleship. “Limited accessible space is a concern.” Accessibility – We are short of first floor space.” “We have not discerned the needs of people 20 to 50 years old.” “We have not conveyed the need for people to be part of a study group and it hasn’t been a priority for leaders of the church.”
- Kids’ Ministry Team. “Handicapped accessibility – broad reaching, including fully accessible classrooms and a fully accessible sanctuary and choir rehearsal space.” “A truly welcoming congregation.” “Growth in community outreach and needs...”
- Membership/Fellowship. “... more ways for congregation members to get together more often” “... more effective ways to include and welcome new people” “Need to become more visible and well-known in the community ...”
- Stewardship. “Little or no communication with college students” “handicapped accessibility ... on with it” “No program for young adults” “Transportation organized for those who no longer drive.”
- Property. “Our committee is concerned about a major building, remodeling program during an interim period.”
- The Board of Deacons. “The lapse of the Stephen Ministry program is disturbing to the Deacons, ...”

d. Congregational Rituals

The following represents a compilation of some of the important rituals performed at NPC:

- NPC has two Sunday morning services: an early 8:30-9:15 service in the small chapel, and a later service from 10:45-11:45 in the sanctuary, with an hour in between set aside for adult and children's Christian education.
- The Lord's Supper on the first Sunday of every month and at other key times.
- Frequent baptisms, after which the pastor walks around the sanctuary with the baby so that people can get a close-up view.
- New Members Classes and reception of new members about twice a year.
- Using mentors to support and integrate new members into the congregation.
- Recently, a 50-Year anniversary celebration (1955-2005).
- Annual summer youth work projects to various national and international locations.
- Annual summer Habitat for Humanity Work Week.
- Annual Summer Vacation Bible School.
- Annual Youth Sunday, when the youth conduct the worship service in the sanctuary.
- Frequent recognition, during the worship service, of services performed by members of the congregation, such as teaching Sunday School classes.
- Soul Feasts at Christmas time and during Lent.
- Passing the peace during Sunday morning worship services.
- Presentation of Bibles to Third Grade students.
- Graduation party for new confirmands.
- Joining with Temple Beth Am at Thanksgiving time to prepare Turkey baskets for the hungry.
- Monthly preparation of food and the serving of that food at Friends of Night People's soup kitchen in the city of Buffalo.
- Special offerings at Christmas time and other times.
- Choir and bell practice on Thursday evenings.
- Joint worship services with other Presbyterian churches on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday
- Interfaith ecumenical service at Thanksgiving

e. Church Demographics

The following demographic data for NPC members were obtained from the 196 responses to the Congregational Life Survey:

- Ages of worshipers:

3% 15-24 years	42% 45-64 years
11% 25-44 years	44% 65 years and above
- Gender of worshipers:

63% Female	37% Male
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- Employment status:

50% Employed full time, part time, or self-employed		
1% Unemployed	38% Retired	5% Other
10% Full-time homemaker	5% Student	
- Marital status:

7% Never married	64% In first marriage
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9% Remarried after divorce 0% Separated
 4% Remarried after death of spouse 5% Divorced
 0% Living in a committed relationship 11% Widowed

- Race or origin:

0% Asian/Pacific Islander 1% Black/African American
 1% Hispanic/Latino/Spanish 98% White/Caucasian
 0% Indian (American) or Alaska native 1% Other

- Birthplace:

95% USA 4% another English-speaking country 2% other

- First language:

99% English 1% other

- Size of family unit currently living at home:

17% “live alone” 42% “A couple without children”
 2% “one adult with child/children” 34% “Two or more adults with child/children”
 5% “Some adults living in the same household”

- Participation at NPC of the children who live at home:

82% “Participate here” 13% “Do not participate”
 5% “Participate elsewhere”

- Number of children per family unit, living at home or elsewhere:

9% None 43% Two
 6% One 42% Three or more

- Regular financial giving to NPC:

11% 10% or more of net income 3% A small amount when attending
 41% About 5% to 9% of net income 2% “I do not contribute financially here”
 43% Less than 5% of net income

- Total household income before taxes:

2% Less than \$10,000 30% \$50,000 to \$75,000
 10% \$10,000 to \$25,000 11% \$75,000 to \$100,000
 20% \$25,000 to \$50,000 27% \$100,000 or more

- Highest educational level completed:

0% No formal schooling 3% Trade certificate
 0% Primary school through 8th grade 9% Associate degree
 1% Some high school 30% Bachelors degree
 16% Completed high school 41% Master’s, Doctorate, +

Demographic and financial data for NPC members were obtained from several annual reports submitted by NPC to the Presbytery of Western New York. A summary of these is in **Table 4**.

Table 4: NPC Demographic and Financial Data for Selected Years

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005
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Average Attendance at Sunday Worship		350	350	320	208
Active Membership	920	778	640	648	662
Female Members		400	385	342	378
Male Members		378	255	306	284
Asian Members	1	2	5	5	5
Black Members	3	3	3	3	6
Hispanic Members	0	0	0	0	2
Age 25 and under			145	119	149
Ages 26-35			157	59	64
Ages 36-55			90	199	204
Ages 56-64			120	71	82
Age 65 and over			118	180	163
Christian Education Enrollment	211	302	235	189	298
Age 0 to 12 th Grade	171	212	182	119	166
Young Adults (Under 25)		0	0	0	2
Adults (25 and older)	11	50	20	30	75
Receipts (Total)		\$286,674	\$395,264	\$517,212	\$542,784
Contributions and Bequests		\$253,992	\$331,287	\$432,015	\$448,684
Expenditures (Total)		\$293,288	\$392,333	\$480,298	\$479,349
Mission		\$55,233	\$47,000	\$98,763	\$102,335
Staff Expense					

f. Physical Facilities

The North Presbyterian Church property includes a two-story brick church building (30, 948 square feet) and a wood frame manse, which is available to house a staff member and his or her family.

The church building has three levels (see the floor plan in **Exhibit L**). The main level (16,755 square feet) includes the sanctuary, Keeler Chapel, narthex, Dickinson Parlor, the NPC library/classroom (S252), Westminster Hall, a kitchen, six offices, two classrooms, closets, storage areas, restrooms, and a resource center/library that serves the Presbytery of Western New York (S261). The lower level (8,978 square feet) is located in the two wings of the structure. Included here are 12 classrooms, the boiler room, storage areas, and restrooms. The upper level (5,215 square feet) includes the choir loft, organ pipes, and a large choir room.

A Sunday worship service is conducted in the sanctuary every Sunday and on church holidays. An earlier worship service is held in Keeler Chapel every Sunday, September through May. The chapel is often used for meetings and Christian education offerings.

Committees and adult discipleship classes meet in classrooms, the NPC library/classroom, partitioned spaces in Westminster Hall, the Resource Center/library, Dickinson Parlor, and the chapel.

There is no elevator in the church building. This limits the access of persons in wheelchairs to the main level only, depriving them of access to the choir area on the upper level and 80 percent of NPC's classrooms, including all of those located in the lower level.

The grounds surrounding the church include ample parking and a lawn. A Memorial Garden lies between the two wings of the church.

The building, grounds, and the manse are in very good condition. The NPC Property Committee oversees maintenance, and many of the members of the Committee meet every Monday evening, roll up their sleeves, and perform needed tasks, such as painting and repairs.

The manse, which is located about 60 yards from the church building, has been extensively modernized and refurbished during the past few years. It is of adequate size for a family of four, and is presently occupied by NPC's Interim Pastor.

Section 4: Reflecting on Our Context for Ministry: Where are we?

a. Community History and NPC Involvement

How has the ministry of NPC been influenced by past/present events and conditions within the community? Over the years, NPC has been actively and enthusiastically involved in the local community, where “community” refers to the broad region of Western New York, the metropolitan area of Buffalo, the city of Buffalo, and the surrounding Town of Amherst. The following represent only a small sample of the many ways in which NPC has been influenced by and responded to “local” events and conditions.

- In the early 1970s, the Deacons of NPC allocated local Mission funds to the African-American Cultural Center in the city of Buffalo to pave their parking lot so that various sports activities and other Center-sponsored neighborhood events could be carried out.
- In the mid-1970s, NPC responded to the need for senior housing in the Town of Amherst by the transfer of land in the back of its church property to the Presbyterian Homes of Western New York for the construction of 78 separate units of senior housing. Since the homes were first occupied in October 1978, many of the people residing there have been, or currently are, active members of our congregation.
- Western New York is a major way-station for refugees fleeing other countries in their efforts to gain asylum in Canada. In the summer of 2003, VIVE (the Western New York organization that provides temporary housing, food, transportation, and legal assistance for refugees until they can gain entry into Canada) was overcrowded with refugees and unable to accommodate all of them at its WNY location. Consequently, NPC, which had been long-active in providing assistance to VIVE, created temporary living spaces in its basement to house, feed, and otherwise care for families from Latin America throughout those summer months.
- The shortage of proper housing in the city of Buffalo for low-income people has involved many NPC members since the mid-1980s with Habitat for Humanity-Buffalo construction projects. In the summer of 1992, NPC united with Westminster Presbyterian Church in the city to raise all of the funds (some \$35,000) and completely build with their own volunteer workforce, under the auspices of Habitat for Humanity-Buffalo, a new home at 352 Watson Street. The objectives of this effort included combining faith with action, involving everyone in the congregation, enhancing our sense of community within NPC, and reaching out to the Buffalo community. In addition, each summer NPC sets aside a Habitat for Humanity Work Week where members of the congregation work on a housing project in the city. Moreover, several individuals in the congregation are regular Habitat volunteers during the week days throughout the year, and one NPC couple spends several months each year supervising Habitat volunteers in other parts of the U.S.
- In 2005, NPC served as a meeting place for organizational meetings of Habitat’s Women Build Project. Several NPC women played key leadership roles in that project and others were involved in the construction of the new house.
- The Town of Amherst is generally a middle class community, and young people (as well as adults) frequently do not have an awareness of those less economically well-off. In an effort to help those less fortunate, NPC sponsors a summer youth project that regularly sends youth and adult advisors out in mission to the local community, as well as to other states (e.g., in West Virginia and Florida) and international communities (e.g., in Honduras).
- Another need throughout the WNY region is to fund and support food kitchens for the less fortunate. For more than 20 years, NPC has provided both financial and work-force support for Friends of Night People, Inc., which is located in the city of Buffalo. Friend of the Night People, a not-for-profit soup kitchen, has been in existence since 1967. Over the past two decades, NPC has allocated a significant portion of its Mission budget to support the annual

operating expenses of Friends, and, equally important, on the fourth Tuesday of every month, approximately 12 to 15 NPC members are involved in cooking the food in our church kitchen and serving the meal to some 200 or more individuals who daily depend upon Friends.

- Around 1976, the Presbytery of WNY needed to create and house a Resource Center within the Presbytery of Western New York at a location that would be relatively central (geographically) to other churches in the Presbytery. North Church created appropriate space for that Center, a member of the NPC congregation became the Director of that Center in 1983, and NPC continues to provide space for the Center.

As noted above, these are just a few of the many outreach missions to the “local” community that are undertaken on a regular basis by NPC members. Other outreach ministries include financial and other support to TRY (a ministry to homeless teenage girls in the city of Buffalo), Journey’s End (a ministry to international refugees being resettled in the Buffalo area), Cornerstone Manor (a ministry to women and children who are in need of special assistance), Kevin Guest House (a respite ministry to individuals or families who are in the Buffalo area to receive special medical care), and the University Presbyterian Church’s Food Pantry (a ministry to another local food kitchen).

b. Community Demographics

NPC is located in Williamsville, New York, which is part of the Town of Amherst and the region generally known as Western New York. The Town, in turn, is a suburb of the city of Buffalo and is part of the larger Buffalo-Niagara Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of some of the general characteristics of the community and region of which NPC is a part. Additional information about the region can be found in the newly revised “Regional Knowledge Network” website, www.rkn.buffalo.edu.

(1) The Buffalo-Niagara MSA consists of the counties of Erie and Niagara. The overall population of this region is approximately 1.1 million. During the 1980s, employment grew substantially. However, population growth decreased in the 1990s, as net job growth in the MSA from 1990-2000 was only 1,800 jobs. See “Economic Conditions” under “Town of Amherst Bicentennial Comprehensive Plan: Inventory and Analysis Report” at www.amherst.ny.us, retrieved 2/23/06. Over the past 30 years, employment in the services sector has generally increased relative to jobs in manufacturing—a trend that is mirrored across New York State and the nation as a whole. While occupational projections for the region show strong percentage growth in many high-paying technology-based industries, many of these industries are presently very small and the number of jobs created is likely to be modest. In general, the region has suffered a de-skilling of the local labor force, which has resulted, in part, because of the mismatch between growing high-tech companies and skilled labor. Part of this difficulty results from the fact that many technology-oriented graduating students from the many local colleges and universities within the area tend to leave in pursuit of good jobs elsewhere. It is also of note that at the present time, both the city of Buffalo and Erie County are under state-mandated control boards that have been put in place to help manage the annual budget planning and spending policies of elected officials. Finally, the metropolitan region has been ranked among the top ten most residentially segregated areas in the nation.

(2) *The Town of Amherst*. Detailed information about the Town may be obtained from its official website: www.amherst.ny.us. (retrieved 2/23/06). Based upon the **2000** U.S. Census, the Town has the following population and household characteristics:

- Total population: 116,510
- Annual percent change in population 1990-2000: 0.42%
- Expected annual percent change in population 2005-2010: 0.41%

- Number of households: 45,076
- Number of families: 29,885
- Percent of households with children under 18 at home: 29.7%
- Percent of households with married couples living together: 55.6%
- Percent of households with female householder: 8.3%
- Percent of households with individuals 65 and older: 30.2 %
- Percent of households with someone living alone who is 65 or older: 13.4%
- Population 18 years and over = 77.8 %
- Population 65 years and over = 17.7 %
- Median age: 39.6 years
- Race: White = 89.3%; Asian = 5.2%; African-American = 3.9%; other = 1.6%.
- Average family size: 3.01 individuals
- Owner-occupied housing units = 74 %
- Household median income: \$ 55,427
- Median family income: \$ 68,961
- Percent below the poverty line: 6.4% of the population, 4.2 % of the families, and 5.4% of those 65 and older

In terms of job growth, it is estimated that the Town added about 5,300 new jobs during the 1990s, with a total of some 75, 600 jobs in the Town in 2000. This employment base is expected to increase by another 28,000 over the next 20 years, which is an average of 1,400 new jobs per year.

Also of note is the fact that over the past six years, the Town of Amherst has been ranked as either the safest of the more than 300 large cities in the U.S., or among the top three safest urban areas in terms of violent crime rates (see for example: <http://www.amherst.ny.us/police/safestcity.htm> and www.infoplease.com/ipa Retrieved 2/21/06).

(3) Nearby *neighborhoods of NPC*

NPC and its adjoining manse are located within an attractive, residential neighborhood of low density, single-dwelling housing units. As a result, the church is not situated within easy walking distance for the vast majority of its members—some of whom currently drive as many as five or more miles to attend. Moreover, this same general housing density exists within a three- to five-mile radius around the church, which means that, given the lack of public transportation, the potential for membership growth at NPC will continue to depend upon attracting individuals who have access to private transportation.

A more detailed vista of the demographics of the local area surrounding NPC can be obtained by examining the PCUSA’s “Neighborhood Demographic Reports,” which are available at the organization’s Research Services website (see www.pcusa.org/research/demographics.htm). A downloaded copy of this information (retrieved October 15, 2005) for an area of approximately four miles radius around NPC is included in this report as **Exhibit E**. Several general observations about this local area are noteworthy from this PCUSA report.

- Population change between 2002 and 2007 is projected to decline slightly within this local area.
- The number of households with children is around 38 percent.
- In comparison to the country as a whole, a larger percent of the total adult population is 55 years older (35.4% within the local area compared to 27.3 % for the U.S.)
- Also, in comparison to the nation as a whole, the education levels of adults within the local area who have Bachelor’s degrees or higher are significantly greater (49% versus 24.4%).
- Moreover, the average household income within the local area is some 37% above the U.S. average (\$75,363 compared to \$54,814).

- Finally, compared to the nation as a whole, the local area has a much higher percentage of “White, non-Spanish” population (92% compared to 70.4% nationally).

A final comment relates to the often-times ignored issue of competition for church membership, which has important implications for the potential growth of NPC. First, several other Presbyterian churches are located within the “local” area identified above (Amherst, Clarence, Cleveland Drive, Maryvale Drive, and New Hope). Second, within this same area are located many other Protestant and Catholic churches, including two Protestant “mega-churches.” And, finally, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of people living within the entire Western New York region who identify themselves as Christian also align themselves with the Catholic church. Therefore, efforts to “grow” the membership of NPC must take these local and regional demographic characteristics into account.

c. Issues, Needs, and Concerns

In reflecting upon NPC’s context for ministry (i.e., Where are we?), the following question is posed: What are some of the urgent needs or unfavorable conditions within the local/regional community that NPC might (or could) address through new and/or expanded outreach ministries? Many possibilities exist, and a few of them are set forth here.

- The need exists within the local Town of Amherst community for more child day-care facilities, after-school counseling, and education programming for youth. NPC could hire additional staff and develop an appropriate outreach program utilizing its excellent physical spaces. Supplemental financial resources to implement this opportunity could be derived from the Town’s Youth budget and from inviting other religious organizations within the local community to provide financial assistance. NPC’s major contribution would be to provide its existing classrooms and other building facilities.
- The Town of Amherst, and indeed the entire WNY region, is recognized nationally as an area with highly segregated neighborhoods. NPC could launch an advertising campaign via radio and news outlets that indicates that NPC welcomes diversity in its church membership. In addition, NPC could sponsor annual workshops within the Town of Amherst and the Presbytery of Western New York on the need for and benefits of increased diversity within our neighborhoods, churches, and schools.
- Many residents within the surrounding community, and especially many of the elderly population, do not drive, do not live within walking distance of NPC’s physical building, and do not have access to public transportation. Hence, these individuals need transportation assistance in order to attend church services and other NPC activities. NPC could acquire (through direct purchase or donation) a van to transport individuals to and from the church.
- Most of the NPC congregation agrees (as is evident from the responses to the December, 2005 Congregational Life survey) that the church building does not adequately address the needs of physically challenged individuals. For example, many of the church’s spaces are not wheelchair accessible. Recent architectural estimates indicate that some \$600,000 is needed to make the physical plant accessible. Efforts are underway at present to assess this proposal and to determine how best to fund it. NPC could move forward with this venture as soon as possible.
- Many Presbyterian churches, including NPC, within the Presbytery of Western New York are having difficulty maintaining their programming commitments because of financial difficulties. One way to try and address this issue is to examine various avenues for carrying out shared programming and church ministries. To what extent, for example, would it be possible for two or three of the Presbyterian (or maybe even other Protestant) churches within the immediate neighborhood to work together using shared staff, financial resources, and physical spaces. Is this an idea that could be brought to the Williamsville Clergy Group, which meets on a regular

basis? Alternatively, could/should the Session of NPC appoint a task force to approach one or two other Protestant churches nearby to explore ways to develop a cooperative ministry to ourselves and to the broader community?

- Some concern exists that NPC must begin to make a more concerted effort to increase its membership and its annual income. One possibility is to increase the visibility and awareness of NPC by specializing in a particular outreach activity that would have wide appeal to local citizens. One suggestion has been to focus upon music-related events as an outreach to the local and regional communities. To undertake this venture, the Session could identify someone in the congregation or in the wider community who would be willing to develop music-related programming using NPC's physical facility for the performances. This could significantly increase the visibility and outreach mission of NPC, and it could have the added advantage of increasing the feeling of "togetherness" among the citizens of the local area.
- As a final example, the Presbytery of WNY is expected to be soon relocating its administrative offices and will need appropriate space at a location that is relatively central to the entire Presbytery. The NPC Session has appointed a committee to begin exploring the possibility that NPC could allocate some of its existing space, add on to one of our wings, or set aside space immediately south of the church to accommodate the space needs of the Presbytery.

Section 5: Reviewing our Programs: What do we do?

a. Overview of Program Activities at NPC

Programming activities at NPC are carried out by the pastor, an administrative staff, standing committees, the Deacons, numerous volunteers, and the Session. An overview of the administrative staff at NPC, along with the categories of program activities and associated committees are set forth below.

- The administrative staff consists of the following ministry-support positions:
 - Interim Pastor/Head of Staff
 - Administrative Assistant
 - Director of Christian Education
 - Director of Pastoral Care
 - Director of Music & organist
 - Director of Music, Children & Youth
 - Confirmation Ministries Leader
 - Director of Sacred Dance
 - Youth Director
 - Bookkeeper
 - Parish Nurse
 - Sexton

- Administration: Administration and Personnel Committee
- Building and Property: Property Committee
- Worship: Worship Committee
- Children and youth education
 - * Kids' Ministry Team: (through grade 3)
 - * Youth Ministry Team (grades 4 through 12)
- Confirmation: Confirmation Ministries Leader
- Adult Education: Adult Discipleship Committee
- Membership: Membership Committee (recruits and welcomes new members, and keeps accurate membership roles)
- Member care: Fellowship Committee (integrates members into the life of the congregation through social activities and other special events)
- Leadership: Nominating Committee
- Stewardship: Stewardship Committee
- Finance: Finance Committee
- Mission: Mission/Community Committee
- Board of Deacons (Ministers to the welfare of the members of the congregation, and includes a Pastoral Care Team, a Communion-to-the-Furthest-Pew team, the Parish Nurse, and a Memorial Receptions administrator)
- Session: The NPC Session
- Other program-related support
 - * Clerk of Session
 - * Millennium Oversight Committee
 - * Photographer/Historian
 - * Memorial garden administrator
 - * Many volunteers from the congregation who regularly provide invaluable assistance in the church office

b. Program Effectiveness: How do our programs help us be who we say we are?

As noted earlier in Sections 1-c and 2-a, the VFM Committee commissioned 11 NPC committees and the Deacons to examine their program operations (see **Exhibit C** for a sample letter). Each group was asked to prepare a report for the VFM Committee that addressed the following questions: Who are you? What are your current tasks? How effective are you in carrying out these tasks? What procedures/processes are used to accomplish the tasks? What recent goals have and have not been achieved, and what goals have you set for the coming five years? And, what are the major issues and concerns that pertain to NPC?

[VFM Committee note: The reports prepared by the standing committees and the Deacons are on file in the NPC office, and can be provided upon request. The many comments and suggestions provided by these committees and the Deacons have been invaluable to the VFM Committee in preparing this report.]

Based upon the information provided in these reports regarding the effectiveness of programming, the following conclusions are noteworthy:

- Administration/Personnel Committee
 - * The report states that the performance of the Committee is “effective.” Agenda items are effectively discussed, and communication among committee members and with the congregation is “open.”
- Adult Discipleship Committee
 - * Effectiveness is described in the report as “average...The momentum from the initial offerings made possible by the change in schedule has decreased. The committee struggles to find new topics of interest and leaders willing to facilitate... We have tried to balance internal leadership with judicious use of outside speakers. People who participate in the education are enthused by the topics.”
- Board of Deacons
 - * The report indicates that the Board’s programs are generally well received. For example, people who are visited in their homes with communion “enjoy the added blessing of a visit;” donations are often received after memorial receptions; people who have experienced the private and personal nature of the Parish Nurse “have found this program to be praiseworthy;” and the prayer chain is effective “because we have faith, [and] we know that this is a treasured gift.”

[VFM Committee note: Inspection of **Table 5** below reveals that the congregation’s level of satisfaction with visitations by Elders and Pastors is ranked among the lowest of 20 different NPC activities, as recorded by responses to the December 2005 Congregational Life survey.]

- Finance Committee
 - * The report states that the Committee “is effective in carrying out its duties, but always struggles to find auditors with time and financial experience to conduct the Annual Audit...The Finance Committee needs to better communicate with the newly formed Stewardship Committee, perhaps with a joint committee member. A standing Audit Committee would ease the difficulty in finding auditors on an ad hoc basis and improve the effectiveness of the task.
- Kids’ Ministry Team

- * The report indicates that having “such a good responsibilities outline and planning calendar” and “a fantastic committee who is committed to the nurturing of children and youth in every aspect of church life” are a great help in carrying out the tasks of this team.
- Membership/Fellowship
 - * The report notes that: “Given the small number of people on this committee, the committee has been remarkably effective in both bringing new members into the congregation and sponsoring special events each year...the committee is striving this year to build upon past successes, focus[ing] on articulating a clear vision and purpose for the future, and (perhaps) reorganizing its structure to fulfill that vision.”
- Mission Committee
 - * The report says that the Committee is “very effective in dispersing Mission Committee benevolence funds in a timely manner;” that it stays “within the four foci determined by the committee—health, housing, hunger, and refugees;” that the committee has “great organization...and a willingness to take on a variety of tasks;” and that the work of the committee tends “to burn people out with overwork.”
- Property Committee
 - * The Committee indicates that “they have very effectively provided the congregation and staff [with] a safe, functional, and comfortable place to worship, fellowship, learn, teach, and work. We could probably be more effective if the congregation was more aware of who we are and what we do.”
- Stewardship Committee
 - * Two reports were received by the VFM Committee. One report came from the “Year-round Stewardship Committee, and the report states that: “Since the committee is not yet constituted this [i.e., an assessment of effectiveness] cannot be done.” A second report, which was received from the Stewardship-Finance Campaign Committee, notes that the most recent finance campaign “has been done very well, but the drive finishes short of the requested goal. The recommended changes are now in progress to form a larger committee to promote year-round stewardship in aspects additional to the finance drive.”
- Worship Committee
 - * The report states that the committee “works well as a unit and with staff. Several members are unable to attend meetings regularly because of other commitments, but still make significant contributions to the work of the Worship Committee...The committee, led by Marlene [Harrington], has worked hard to blend contemporary and traditional elements of worship.”
- Youth Committee
 - * This committee did not provide a report to the VFM Committee

[VFM Committee note: In commenting on these reports, it is not evident from some of the reports how effectiveness was actually defined and/or measured. In part, this may reflect the fact that, although the committees were asked to assess the effectiveness of their programs, they were not specifically requested to indicate how such assessments were made. In the future, therefore, it would seem prudent that committees be asked to make more use of the “Congregational Mission Studies Notebook,” which was made available to committees, and which sets forth a variety of mechanisms and procedures that committees can utilize to assess their effectiveness within congregations. These include such things as sample interviews, targeted surveys, and small group meetings.]

In addition to these reports from committees, the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, which was administered to the NPC congregation in December, 2005, also provides some information regarding the perceived effectiveness of various NPC programs. One of the questions asks the congregation to indicate, using a scale from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied), their level of satisfaction with a

number of programs, conditions, and activities at NPC. The responses to this question are set forth in **Table 5**. [For an explanation of the column headings used in **Table 5**, see the footnotes for **Exhibit K**.] The responses to this question suggest that the congregation is favorably satisfied with Vacation Bible School, the church’s newsletter as a means of communication, the music program, and worship, but less so with programs designed to accommodate the mobility impaired, provide visitations to members of the congregation, and integrate new members into the congregation.

A major benefit to NPC of participating in the PCUSA’s Congregational Life Survey is receiving a series of analyses that are based upon the responses of the congregation to the questions that were in that survey instrument (see **Exhibit G** for the raw scores to the 56 questions in the survey). Using the raw scores from sets of different questions, the Research Office of the PCUSA prepared two different reports that can be used by NPC to assess the effectiveness of its programs. The first report is titled “Your Congregation’s Strengths Report” (see **Exhibit I**), which consists of 10 different portraits of NPC in comparison to the average for all congregations with 100-350 in worship and the average for Presbyterian churches. [Note that the comparisons are based upon responses of 294,061 worshippers in 2,306 congregations that participated in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey in the spring of 2001.] A careful examination of these ten areas of congregational strengths reveals the following observations, which have important implications for past, present, and future programming.

Table 5: How satisfied are you with the following at North Presbyterian Church?

The choices and “weightings” are:	<u>Choices</u>	<u>Weighting</u>
	Very satisfied	5
	Satisfied	4
	Not certain	3
	Dissatisfied	2
	Very Dissatisfied	1
	Not applicable	0

	<u>Sum</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
1. Worship.....	748	4.09	0.7210
2. Christian education program	663	3.97	0.6890
3. Vacation Bible School	650	4.22	0.7940
4. Youth groups	587	3.86	0.7190
5. Presbyterian Women	513	3.61	0.7610
6. Women’s circles.....	475	3.63	0.8350
7. Music program	723	4.11	0.8170
8. Deacon’s ministry	605	3.71	0.7180
9. Children’s ministry	611	3.89	0.6751
10. Accommodations for the mobility impaired	466	2.99	1.0530
11. Church newsletter	763	4.19	0.6661
12. Ease of parking.....	790	4.37	0.5960
13. Adult education	651	3.76	0.8120
14. Integration of new members.....	585	3.38	0.9670
15. Community involvement.....	641	3.66	0.8200
16. Physical facilities of the church	661	3.63	1.0100
17. Prayer life	628	3.57	0.8250

18. Pastor's visitation	518	3.18	0.8600
19. Elders' visitation	474	3.12	0.6990
20. Missions and outreach activities	688	3.91	0.7400

Initial interpretations:

- (1) The five “activities” of North Church that receive the highest levels of satisfaction are (in descending order):
 - #12: Ease of parking (4.37)
 - #3: Vacation Bible school (4.22)
 - #11: Church newsletter (4.19)
 - #7: Music program (4.11)
 - #1: Worship (4.08)

- (2) The five areas with the lowest levels of satisfaction are (in ascending order):
 - #10: Accommodations for the mobility impaired (2.99)
 - #19: Elders' visitation (3.12)
 - #18: Pastor's visitation (3.18)
 - #14: Integration of new members (3.38)
 - #17: Prayer life (3.57).

- (3) With the exception of “ease of parking,” most of these activities have relatively high standard deviations, indicating considerable variation in satisfaction among the respondents.
 - Strength 1: Growing spirituality. NPC has an overall score on this strength area that puts it in the 5th percentile. This is a very weak area, the implication being that 95 percent of all U.S. congregations surveyed in 2001 scored higher than NPC on growing spiritually.
 - Strength 2: Meaningful worship. Again, NPC's relative score and therefore strength in this area is very low—in the 5th percentile.
 - Strength 3: Participation in the congregation: This strength is a bit stronger, with NPC's score in the 38th percentile.
 - Strength 4: Having a sense of belonging. This is one of the weakest areas, with NPC scoring in the 7th percentile.
 - Strength 5: Caring for young people. This is a very strong area for NPC, as the congregation scores in the 75th percentile.
 - Strength 6: Focusing on the community. Of all of the ten strength areas, NPC scores the highest on this factor—in the 94th percentile!!! This means that only 6 percent of all congregations scored higher than NPC.
 - Strength 7: Sharing faith. Of all of the strength areas, NPC scores the lowest in this area—in the 4th percentile!!
 - Strength 8: Welcoming new worshipers. NPC scores in the 38th percentile on this factor.
 - Strength 9: Empowering leadership. NPC scores only in the 8th percentile.
 - Strength 10: Looking to the future. Scoring in the 11th percentile suggests that the respondents did not consider that they had a clear vision or direction for the future. The relatively low score on this factor may reflect the fact that the survey was conducted during an interim period when, perhaps naturally, the congregation might not be expected to have a sense of what lies ahead in terms of calling a new pastor and moving forward.

The second report prepared for NPC by the PCUSA Research Office identifies four building blocks of congregations. Again, using specific questions from the Congregational Life Survey, the Research Office identified sets of questions that characterized a congregation's vitality and strength in four specific areas (see **Exhibit J**). Some of the conclusions from this report are set forth below.

- Building spiritual connections. This building block spotlights worship and faith development. Only 35 percent of NPC folks reported that they experienced much growth in their faith over the past year, and only 34 percent spend time every day in private devotional activities.
- Building inside connections. This building block describes worshipers' activities within the congregation. Over 65 percent of NPC people indicated that they are involved in various small group activities throughout the year and/or hold leadership roles in the congregation. Moreover, 86 percent believe that they have a strong sense of belonging to NPC. At the same time, only slightly more than half of the respondents believe that a good match exists between the congregation and the minister.
- Building outside connections. These data reveal how congregations and worshipers reach out to and serve those in the community. While only about a quarter of the respondents indicate that they would invite a new person to attend NPC and only a bit more than 10 percent indicate that they regularly reach out to the wider community through evangelism, 65 percent of the respondents indicate that they take part in services to the broader community and/or engage in advocacy activities. Also noteworthy is the fact that 94 percent of the respondents indicated that they travel 20 minutes or less to attend NPC services.
- Building identity connections. This shows who worshipers are and how they see their congregation's future. The results suggest that women respondents outnumbered men (63 percent were women). In addition, the age profile of NPC respondents indicates that the average age of worshipers in NPC is 61, which is older than the national average of 51. Moreover, people in the age range of 65 and above comprise the largest age group of respondents at NPC, in contrast to those aged 45-64 in the U.S. congregations surveyed in 2001. In terms of educational background, 71 percent of NPC respondents hold at least a college degree, which compares to 23 percent of people across the U.S. and to 41 percent of worshipers in the PCUSA's 2001 survey. Moreover, the results indicate that almost 60 percent of NPC respondents believe that the congregation is open to change, which is very similar to the other congregations in the 2001 survey, and that about the same percent believe that a clear vision or direction exists for the future of NPC.

A very revealing component of the "Building identity connections" factor consists of the following values that NPC respondents placed on a variety of programs. The question to which people were asked to respond is: Which of the following aspects of NPC do you personally most value? The following represent the percent of respondents who identified the program as most valued:

- * 48 % sermons, preaching, or homilies
- * 44 % traditional worship or music
- * 38 % holy communion
- * 32 % wider community care
- * 27 % ministry for youth
- * 21 % care for one another
- * 14 % social activities
- * 13 % contemporary worship or music
- * 11 % openness to diversity
- * 10 % Bible study
- * 8 % adult education
- * 7 % prayer ministry
- * 4 % reaching the un-churched
- * 4 % congregation's school/pre-school

[VFM Committee note: These values are very important, not only in assessing existing program effectiveness, but in planning future programming. See Section 5-c below. For

example, only 8 percent of the respondents identify adult education as valued. This attitude represents a major challenge for the Adult Discipleship Committee, which has the responsibility of developing and promoting adult programming!!]

c. Possible Changes in Existing Programs and/or Perceived Need for New Programs

The VFM Committee also asked the standing committees and the Deacons to identify changes in existing programs and make suggestions for new programs that they believe are needed at NPC. Below are some of these suggestions and recommendations, which are not listed in any particular order or sense of urgency. Direct quotes are used to convey the comments as accurately and precisely as possible.

- “The Finance Committee needs to better communicate with the newly formed Stewardship Committee, perhaps with a joint committee member. A standing Audit Committee would ease the difficulty in finding auditors on an ad hoc basis.”
- A committee indicates that NPC should continue “to explore the feasibility/acceptability of contemporary and blended worship...NPC has a reputation in Presbytery of being on the ‘cutting edge’ of creative worship, [and] we would like to fully use the gifts of our congregation in music, dance, drama, focusing on participation of laypersons and youth. We would also like to continue to explore use of technology (AV equipment) and flexible seating options in new or existing worship space.”
- “In this interim time, we need to explore a variety of staffing patterns for NPC and not assume that a head of staff is what is needed. Perhaps we do not need a ‘Head of Staff,’ but rather a pastor, a business manager, a volunteer coordinator, and a pastoral care professional. It is easy to do the same old [thing], but hard to vision change and institute it.”
- “... it is imperative that North Church implement this program (i.e., the Year-round Stewardship Committee)... We currently have great difficulty raising enough pledges to support our existing program. I strongly believe that God is calling us to expand this program....”
- [The following comes from a letter sent to the VFM Committee from a member of the congregation.] “I think it will be important for our church leaders to consider how they envision maintaining the vibrant worship, mission, youth, and fellowship programs for which NPC is known under a declining population situation that negatively impacts membership and operating budgets. My own view is that North Church will need to undertake strategic actions not unlike the decisions made by our church leaders who moved from Buffalo to Williamsville 50 years ago. While moving to another location is not an option today, there are other strategic alternatives that could be considered... Consolidating programs with those of other area Presbyterian Churches to combine budget resources for the most impact... undertaking joint mission projects with other churches... hiring one person to take over all of the administrative affairs for a number of churches... [and] merging with other area Presbyterian Churches.”
- “Our committee is concerned about a major building, remodeling program during an interim period. We support the educational, outreach and mission goals of the Congregation and Session.”
- “Committees need to have more communication and contact with each other ... [The] Stewardship committee [should] be made up of a member from each of the church committees, including budget... little or no communication with college students... handicapped accessibility—on with it... no program for young adults... transportation [should be] organized for those who no longer drive... couples’ club... a hope that parents of Sunday school children could be interested in the other activities of the whole church.”
- “The lapse of the Stephen Ministry program is disturbing to the Deacons, but the staffing requirements are beyond our collective ability to make an effective attempt at restarting it.”

- “We have not discerned the needs of people 20 to 50 years old. We have not conveyed the need for people to be part of a study group and it hasn’t been [a] priority for leaders of the church...an elevator to additional classrooms in the basement would help...many in the congregation see no need to grow in faith or discipleship...filling committee membership slots at NPC should be more formal and not a primary responsibility of each committee...[in a former church] the nominating committee had the responsibility for filling committee memberships as well as the Session and Deacons. People [should be] committed to serve on committees for a standard rotating 3-year terms...[issues, concerns, and goals] We are short of first-floor space for the education hour...hospitality—inviting people to be part of education and other activities...communication—...groups are putting advertising where ever they can, often on top of someone else’s items...what are we saying by the way our entrances look? What would a visitor say? ... The church is in a situation different from 40 years ago and most people don’t know that and still try to plan for them.”
- Our committee’s key issues are “staff retention [and] staff compensation.”
- Another committee indicates that major issues are: “handicapped accessibility—broad-reaching, including fully accessible classrooms and a fully accessible sanctuary and choir-rehearsal space, a truly welcoming congregation, and growth in community outreach and services to the community needs (seniors, youth).”
- A committee report indicates that NPC needs to find “more ways for congregation members to get together more often...for more effective ways to include and welcome new people...[and] to become more visible and well-known in the community—whether through publicity, sponsoring community forums or meetings, increasing the outreach of music programs like the bell choir—or other means.”
- Another group indicates that a need exists “to study issues local, national, and international that need support either through funds, volunteer, or advocacy. We need to promote advocacy. We need to educate ourselves and [the] congregation about legislative issues—write letters to Congress, UN, and other organizations. We need to become more involved in local issues...[we] need to examine our role as a first-ring suburb in a changing community. This could change the focus of our mission.”

It should also be noted that one of the questions in the U.S. Congregational Life Survey that was administered in December, 2005 asked NPC members to identify those programmatic areas in which they would like to have more information. The top 10 areas for which people indicated their desire for more learning, and presumably programming (listed in descending order according to the number of individuals who identified the area), are: life transitions (43 people), retirement (41), death and dying (36), Christian friendship (34), care of the elderly (33), depression (33), health issues (32), grieving and loss (30), children’s education (24), and parenting (23).

In planning for future programs at NPC, it would seem to be very important to examine the results of the two reports that were discussed above in Section 5-b. Both reports identify both strengths and weaknesses of past and present programs at NPC, and they provide a basis for enhancing existing programs and/or creating new activities.

[VFM Committee note: It is clear that these comments and suggestions about NPC programs related specifically to the various categories of church programming: worship, education, membership, fellowship, mission, and ministry-support. It is also important, in our view, to express concern about the lack of appropriate and accessible classroom and other meeting spaces at NPC to accommodate the variety of activities that take place concurrently; the quantity of leadership available for program development, and the extent to which different people are regularly and effectively brought into and trained for leadership positions at NPC; the ways in which programs are advertised and promoted

within the congregation and to the general public outside of the church; the lack of diversity in the kinds of program activities provided for specific age groups; and the lack of interest among NPC adults of all ages in attending and participating in educational programming.]

Section 6: Exploring our Processes: How do we do what we do, and how effective are we in carrying out our various ministries?

a. Patterns of Communication

The guidelines for preparing this sub-section of the VFM report suggest that the following questions should be addressed in an effort to assess the nature and effectiveness of patterns of communication within NPC:

- How well informed is the congregation about the decisions and activities in the church?
- Does the Session communicate frequently and effectively with the congregation?
- How well do the various committees communicate with each other?
- How effective is the church's newsletter and the use of e-mail to inform members about decisions and activities?
- Are members of the congregation free to express their views and opinions to the staff and committees?
- If someone wanted to find out what is happening in NPC, what would that person do first? What would they read? Who would they contact? How would they know what to do?
- How can communication patterns at NPC be improved?

At the outset, the VFM Committee acknowledges that, while some relevant information is available for several of these questions, we do not yet have very solid, survey-based data for the others. The initial response to this set of questions is twofold: first, it seems fair to say that, in general, NPC does a good job of communicating within specific committees, as is revealed below. However, it is also evident that NPC does not yet have sufficient data to conclude that it does an excellent job in all aspects of communication, as defined by the questions above. Second, we would recommend to the Session, therefore, that after receiving and approving this report, a task force be commissioned to examine these very important questions in a more comprehensive and thorough way than has been carried out thus far.

At the same time, some general conclusions about patterns of communication at NPC can be obtained from the committee reports that were commissioned by the VFM Committee and from the Congregational Life Survey responses. From the reports by committees and the Deacon we get the following information about their communication processes:

- Most of the committees report that their primary mechanism for communicating with their own members is via e-mails.
- Some of the committees (e.g., the Adult Discipleship Committee) use monthly announcements in the NPC newsletter, weekly notices in Sunday morning bulletins, and posters around the church to publicize their activities to the congregation.
- Other committees (e.g., Finance Committee) periodically inform the congregation through the church's monthly newsletter and Sunday bulletins.
- Some committees (e.g., the Stewardship Committee and the Mission Committee) occasionally rely upon direct, verbal announcements during the Sunday morning worship services and/or invite to the sanctuary outside speakers to help inform the congregation of their concerns and activities.
- Some groups (e.g., the Administration and Personnel Committee and the Session) periodically report on their activities via special announcements or reports in both Sunday morning bulletins and the monthly newsletters.
- Virtually all of the various committees make monthly reports of their deliberations and activities to the Session. And, a representative from the Deacons attends all of the regular meetings of the Session in order to facilitate communication between the two groups.

Unfortunately, none of the questions in the Congregational Life Survey directly address the issue of communication. However, three of the questions that are in the survey may be interpreted as implying a level of communication within the congregation. Specifically, question 18 (see **Exhibit G**) asks respondents which of five choices best describes their involvement in NPC. Only 16 percent of the respondents indicate that they have not been given the opportunity to get involved in decision-making. Similarly, question 19 asks if people have a strong sense of belonging to the NPC congregation. Sixty-three percent indicate that they do have a strong sense of belonging that is about the same as the past year or that is growing. Finally, question #27 asks to what extent NPC leaders have encouraged the respondents to find and use their gifts and skills within NPC. Only 10 percent indicate that this has not occurred. Again, these three questions do not explicitly focus upon patterns of communication, but they do marginally relate to connections that are forged among members of the congregation, and they arguably imply the existence of effective communication patterns. A similar perspective can be obtained by examining the PCUSA's report on "Building inside connections" within NPC (see **Exhibit J**).

b. Conflict Management

The VFM report is expected to address the issue of conflict within the NPC congregation. This begs the question of what is meant by conflict? The guidelines from the Presbytery suggest that conflict relates to important issues affecting the congregation or its activities and missions, about which no one wants to talk for fear of upsetting another person or group; opposing groups or factions in the congregation that work against each other (e.g., cliques); individuals or groups who blame others within the congregation; the existence of anger, hostility, and name-calling; and some people who are so upset that they are leaving or threatening to leave the congregation.

The VFM Committee suggests the use of the following three questions in an effort to address this important issue: (1) Does conflict exist within NPC today, and, if so, what are the perceived areas of conflict? (2) What have been the major areas of conflict within NPC over the past decade or so, and how have these conflicts been handled? And (3), what are some ways that NPC can continue to address the issues of conflict and attempt to manage them in an effective, wholesome, and respectful manner?

(1) Does conflict exist within NPC today, and, if so, what are the perceived areas of conflict? When the respondents to the U.S. Congregational Life survey were asked whether or not any conflict has existed at NPC over the past two years, 73 percent responded yes in one form or another (i.e., 5 % said that major conflict has existed, 14 % indicated that major conflict has existed with leaders or people leaving, and 54 % said some minor conflict has existed (see the responses to question #26 in **Exhibit G**).

When members of a group of some 30 NPC parishioners recently participated in a series on "peace, unity, and purity," which was organized and lead by Interim Pastor Carolyn Grohman during the months of January and February, 2006,¹ they were asked to identify some areas of conflict and/or concerns that they believed currently existed within NPC. These concerns are identified in **Table 6**. It seems evident from the survey question that a relatively large percentage of the NPC respondents believe that issues of conflict exist within NPC, and it is apparent from the list of items in **Table 6** that these issues represent a very broad range of topics.

¹ Interim Pastor Grohman utilized the text and videos that were prepared by the PCUSA's Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church. The task force report is titled: Peace Unity Purity: A Season of Discernment (2005), pp. 1-50.

(2) What have been the major areas of conflict within NPC over the past decade or so, and how have these conflicts been handled? At the outset, it should be noted that the VFM Committee did not specifically ask NPC folks to identify the areas of conflict that have existed over the past decade or so. Instead, based upon our own personal observations and discussions with a few others, several areas of concern seem noteworthy. At the same time, however, the Committee wishes to emphasize and acknowledge that NPC folks have very different definitions of “conflicts” and varying memories and perceptions of these issues. As a result, the areas of conflict identified below may be viewed differently by others. The Committee is simply trying, as objectively as possible, to identify the general nature of these major concerns without commenting on the details.

- The co-pastor model of ministry that was followed by NPC in the mid-1990s became an issue for some, in part, because the two pastors had difficulty working together, making shared decisions, and effectively implementing the cooperative model. Although many in the congregation were unaware of these difficulties, some members were aware and formed loyalties to one or the other of the two pastors. Eventually, one of the co-pastors abruptly resigned. The whole process created tensions not only among the two pastors, but also among certain members of the congregation.
- In addition, one of the co-pastors personally felt very strongly about the issue of homosexuality, and in a Sunday-morning sermon invited the congregation to be open to the issue and to engage in discussions about homosexuality. Some parishioners were concerned about where such discussions might lead, while others felt that engaging in such discussions was important.

As a result of the above two events, several individuals and couples left the church. While all of the reasons for these departures are not known, it is clear from follow-up conversations that some left over the issue of homosexuality, while others left simply because of the turmoil that was present. NPC responded, in part, by contracting with a consultant from the Alban Institute who worked with NPC on ways to address the conflicts. For example, several teams of NPC members were formed and met with many of those who had left the church (and who were willing to be visited) in an effort to invite them back into the congregation. Some of those who had left the church returned and some did not return. On the matter of homosexuality, very little was done formally, either then or since, to address the issue at the congregational level.

- A third issue, which has arisen within the past few years, concerns the matter of changing the hours of the congregation’s two worship services to accommodate an hour in between the two worship services for the Christian education of children, youth, and adults. Some were concerned that this change would involve a considerably longer period of time for children to be in church, while some wished to have the worship times remain as they had been for many years.

Before the decision (by the Session) to change the hours of worship was made, information was distributed and conversations occurred about the importance of setting aside a separate time not only for Christian education of children and youth, but for adult education as well. In addition, a specific plan on how the process would operate and would be implemented was made known to the congregation well in advance of carrying out the change. Unhappiness with the time change continues to exist among some of the parishioners, while others have been pleased with the change.

Table 6. Some issues and concerns of North Church folks about NPC

North Church members who attended Carolyn’s Sunday morning Adult Discipleship series on “Peace Unity Purity: A Season of Discernment” were asked on Jan 29, 2006 to share with another person a concern they had about issues or matters specific to NPC. The emphasis of the exercise was on how individuals can hone their listening skills when talking with another person. A week later (Feb. 5), individuals were asked to write down the issues or concerns that were discussed when they paired off the previous Sunday. Below are those issues/concerns as they were written down.

- Accessibility
 - Sexual orientation
 - Style of leadership: co-pastors
 - Financial status: affluence vs. level of giving
 - Need to greatly develop spiritual “depth” of congregation, which leads to more faithful living and giving
 - Willingness to move forward, respond to God’s call for us in mission
 - Church and money: difference between income and demand for programs
 - Church as a friendly place—we are not friendly
 - Spirituality of members (e.g., adding Bible studies, teaching how to be comfortable with praying and leading prayer)
 - Growth and role of Vacation Bible School as an outreach to our children and youth and the community’s children and youth
 - Abortion, political statements, and church’s role in the society
 - Homosexuality in the church
 - People needing help who do not ask for help
 - Education hour: good or bad
 - People who don’t want us to acknowledge that conflict exists in our congregation.
 - Pros and cons of abortion
 - Separation of church and state
 - Reduced attendance at Sunday school...a program to hold our senior highs in the church after communicants class
 - Finding pastoral leadership--creative, effective, faithful--in whatever configuration.
 - Lack of opportunities for social interactions outside of formal church programs
 - Unwillingness or inability to talk about money and money in stewardship
 - Inability to visit with members of the congregation either at stewardship time or any other time
-

(3) What are some ways that NPC as a congregation can continue to address the issues of conflict and attempt to manage them in an effective, wholesome, and respectful manner?

In recognition of the fact that NPC, like most contemporary Presbyterian congregations (and perhaps most churches across the nation), consists of individuals with a variety of backgrounds and religious experiences and a wide range of views and values, it is important for the congregation to discover ways in which “the church can live more faithfully in the face of deep disagreements.”²

² Presbyterian Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church, op. cit., p. 1.

To begin a dialogue about how a “season of discernment” regarding potential areas of disagreement can occur at NPC, Interim Pastor Grohman purposely set in motion a number of events and activities designed to engage the Session, church committees, and the congregation in dialogue about “peace, unity, and purity.”

As noted previously, the Rev. Grohman created for NPC a multi-week series, beginning in January, 2006 and continuing through most of February, on peace, unity, and purity. The series was conducted as part of NPC’s Adult Discipleship program. Using the Theological Task Force’s booklet and accompanying videos, the Rev. Grohman led the some 30-35 NPC parishioners in a variety of discussions about conflict, interactions with others, developing effective listening skills, and conflict management within church settings. One of the important outcomes of that series was the creation of a covenant, which was generated by the NPC members who attended the series, and which was designed to describe how individuals, committees, and the congregation as a whole at NPC should interact within an environment where the existence of potential conflicts is very likely. This covenant, which was subsequently distributed to all of the committees and to the congregation as a whole, is set forth in **Table 7**.

Moreover, the Rev. Grohman, working with the Adult Discipleship Committee and others, created a five-week, ten-meeting Adult Discipleship Lenten series, which extended from March 5, 2006 through April 4, 2006. The title of the series was “Becoming a healthier congregation,” and the topics discussed were: What is systems thinking, the anxious congregation and the responsible congregation, healthy congregations accept diversity, leadership in healthy congregations, healthy congregations respond to anxiety, healthy congregations act flexibly and creatively, health congregations manage conflict, and healthy congregations respond to change and plan for a healthier future.

Table 7. A Covenant for this group

In order to carry out the Mission Statement of North Church, we covenant together to:

1. Be respectful of one another and our differing views.
2. Learn to listen with a spirit of openness and vulnerability.
3. Listen carefully to each other in order to understand, not refute.
4. State what we think we heard and ask for clarification.
5. Listen and discuss, approaching the truth with humility.
6. Encourage everyone to participate.
7. Be non-judgmental.
8. Seek to be empathetic to the feelings and beliefs of others.
9. Support each other as we risk sharing our deepest beliefs, so as to build trust.
10. Show Christian love and caring for one another and not be overbearing.
11. Forgive ourselves and others.
12. Be in prayer for members of this group and for the process.
13. Indicate where we agree as well as where we disagree.
14. Accept that conflict can be healthy and can lead to growth.
15. Maintain a sense of humor and be able to laugh at ourselves.

In summary, it seems fair to say that NPC has begun a process, under the Rev. Grohman’s leadership, that is designed to enable NPC members (as individuals, members of committees, and the congregation as a whole) to adopt a covenant of mutual respect for different views and opinions, to recognize those areas of Christian faith in which NPC members can find mutual agreement, and to learn how we can

interrelate carefully and respectfully with others at all times, including and especially at times when we have disagreements. By utilizing forums, such as the Adult Discipleship hour, along with special workshops and invited speakers, the hope is that NPC can continue in this process of discernment so that NPC will be a “healthy congregation.”

c. Leadership Selection and Decision-making Activities

The guidelines for this part of the VFM report suggest that the following questions be addressed:

- How are leaders in the church chosen? Is the leadership-selection process open and inclusive?
- How satisfied is the congregation with the way leaders are selected?
- Is the nominating committee effective in the process it utilizes to identify prospective leaders?
- How is power (i.e., the ability to affect leadership outcomes) distributed across the congregation and utilized by those already in leadership positions?

Two primary processes are utilized at NPC to identify leaders. In obtaining members for the Deacons and the Session, the Nominating Committee selects and nominates candidates to the congregation, which, in turn, elects individuals to these two church bodies. The Nominating Committee, which itself is elected by the congregation at the Annual Meeting, solicits names of potential candidates from the congregation, considers a variety of different attributes of possible candidates (e.g., gender, age, length of time in the congregation, previous experience, and so on), and then invites prospective office holders to accept their nomination. Of note is the fact that members of both the Deacons and the Session have specific terms of office, so that, at least in theory, a pattern of rotating leaders and bringing new people into leadership positions can be realized.

A less-structured, and, in many ways less successful, process is used by the various committees to identify and secure new members. Essentially, committees are individually responsible for securing their own members. In many instances, this process has been and continues to be a major challenge for generating new members and integrating new individuals into the church’s committee structure.

Responses to several of the questions in the U.S. Congregational Life survey are instructive in examining the leadership-selection process at NPC. For example:

- When respondents were asked if they have had or currently have one or more leadership roles in the congregation, 67 percent indicate that they have. At the same time, when asked if they often participate in important decision making within the congregation, only 23 percent respond favorably (“Strength 3” in **Appendix I**).
- On the very important question of empowering leadership (see “Strength 9” in **Appendix I**), NPC has an overall score that puts it in only the 8th percentile, which means that 92 percent of all congregations scored higher. Specific to this particular strength (or weakness, as the case appears to be), are the following statistics: only 25 percent of NPC respondents “feel the congregation’s leaders encourage them to find and use their gifts to a great extent;” and only 31 percent “feel that the minister...takes into account the ideas of worshipers to a great extent.”

One of the suggestions coming out of the NPC committee reports is that the Nominating Committee should be charged with helping committees obtain new members. While this may not be appealing to the Nominating Committee, it seems clear from several of the committee reports that something needs to be done: current committee members are “getting burned out,” it is increasingly difficult to find individuals in the congregation willing to serve on committees, and many are concerned that new people are not being brought into the leadership structure of the congregation. Moreover, the suggestion is made that committee members should be asked to serve for a specific time period (e.g., two to three years), with a structure in place that permits a regular, well defined pattern of rotation (as is the case for members of the Deacons and the Session). Perhaps if individuals realized that volunteering

for a committee assignment was not a “life sentence,” but had a specific time horizon associated with it, they would be more willing to accept the appointment.

In terms of how power is distributed across the congregation, it is always encouraging to see the number of people in the congregation who stand up when a situation arises when all of the elders and deacons are asked to rise in their pews or come forward to the pulpit. This would seem to suggest that many people have been asked to serve in leadership positions over the years. At the same time, however, not everyone in the congregation stands up on such occasions, suggesting that the potential exists for integrating other individuals into leadership positions.

d. Short-term and Long-term Planning

Does the congregation believe that we are currently moving in new directions, that we are ready to try something new, and that a sense of excitement exists regarding our future? To what extent and in what specific ways does NPC engage in both short- and long-term planning?

Several of the questions from the Congregational Life Survey are useful in addressing the question about congregational beliefs and planning. One such set of questions is titled: “Strength 10: Looking to the Future” (see **Exhibit I**). The overall score of NPC on the “Looking to the Future” factor is a not very impressive 11th percentile. In other words, 89 percent of all the congregations in the 2001 national survey scored higher than NPC on this factor. The specific questions that go together to make up this factor and the resulting percentages are as follows:

- Only 15 percent of NPC members believe that the congregation has a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission and are strongly committed to it. The percentages for all U.S. congregations and for all Presbyterian churches are 40 % and 30 %, respectively.
- Ten percent of NPC respondents have a sense of excitement about their congregation’s future (comparable figures are 35% for all churches and 19% for Presbyterian churches).
- Only 16 percent of NPC people feel that the congregation is currently moving in new directions (comparable figures are 36% for all churches and 28% for Presbyterian congregations).
- On the more favorable side, 59 percent of NPC people believe that the congregation is always ready to try something new. This figure compares to 55% of all churches and 50 % of other Presbyterian congregations.

In terms of the extent to which both short- and long-term planning take place at NPC and how such planning is carried out, it seems clear to say that the major responsibility for planning at NPC resides with the Session. Although all of the various committees and the Deacons are regularly involved in planning, ultimately the Session has the major responsibility to oversee the directions in which NPC moves into the future. It is probably also fair to say that most planning at NPC is done on an annual basis, with the major concern focused upon the upcoming year. Obvious exceptions exist, and it is clear that the NPC Session and congregation have engaged at various times in longer-term planning. Three examples of such longer-term planning are set forth below.

- The Millennium Fund Drive. In 1997, NPC launched a three-year, fund-raising campaign titled “The Journey to the Millennium.” The goal was to raise \$600K by the year 2000 for three specific mission areas: mission outreach, church programs, and building projects. Over \$472K was raised from within the congregation, and the expenditure of these monies on a wide variety of projects and activities has continued into 2006.
- Making NPC an “accessible” building. Over the past two years, the Session has been exploring what needs to be done to the physical structure of NPC to make the building more accessible to the physically challenged. Architectural plans have been commissioned and

constructions costs have been estimated at around \$600K. At present, the Session is examining these plans and costs, and is exploring various avenues by which funding can be generated in an effort to carry out the plans.

- The “Next Fifty Years” Plan. In 2005, NPC celebrated 50 years of being located at 300 North Forest Road in Williamsville, NY. In honor of that celebration and in an effort to envision what the next 50 years might look like for NPC, the Session engaged in a planning effort designed to generate both short- and long-term ideas for moving forward. During the Spring of 2005, a series of questionnaires were filled out by NPC members and numerous listening sessions were held by the Session to engage the congregation in thinking about what the next fifty years of NPC ministry and service might look like. Many wonderful ideas and thoughtful concerns were garnered, and the results were integrated into three categories: ideas related to new forms of worship and changes to the sanctuary, including the possibility of constructing a new sanctuary; ideas on expanding NPC’s community service for children, youth, seniors, and intergenerational groups; and specific ways in which NPC could improve upon and enhance its physical accessibility, communications, and hospitality. At present, these plans are awaiting further deliberation by the Session.

e. The Ways that NPC Interacts with the Presbytery of WNY

Several questions help to convey the existing relationships between the Presbytery of Western New York (WNY) and NPC. These are addressed below.

(1) What are the various ways in which NPC is connected to the Presbytery of WNY? Some of these connections are as follows:

- In its present interim status, NPC has an interim pastor, the Rev. Carolyn Grohman. The interim covenant is a three-way relationship among the interim pastor, the NPC Session, and the Presbytery. In this relationship, the interim pastor is required to attend monthly meetings of the interim pastors of the Presbytery, which is facilitated by a member of the Presbytery’s Committee on Ministry.
- NPC houses the Resource Center for the Presbytery.
- Because of the relatively large size of the NPC congregation, NPC has two elder commissioners, along with its pastors, who can attend and represent NPC at Presbytery meetings.
- The Session at NPC receives regular monthly reports from our elder representatives of the ongoing activities of the Presbytery.
- NPC provides financial support to the Presbytery’s operations.
- The Presbytery provided NPC with a member of the Committee on Ministry to serve as the interim moderator of NPC’s Session upon the departure of NPC’s pastor.
- Many of NPC’s parishioners serve on permanent committees of the Presbytery.
- Two NPC members are on the staff of Presbytery: One NPC member is on the staff of the Presbytery and another as a Commissioned Lay Pastor.
- Presbytery’s executive directors are frequently invited to preach at NPC.
- NPC hosts the annual Presbytery Day, which is a leadership conference for the entire Western New York Presbytery.
- Three or four Presbytery committees regularly hold their meetings at NPC.
- In January, 2006, NPC initiated an exploratory conversation with the Presbytery concerning the possibility relocating Presbytery’s offices to NPC.

(2) To what extent can NPC be involved in the decision-making processes of the Presbytery?

- NPC is involved in decision-making through its elder commissioners and pastors who attend Presbytery meetings.
- NPC is also involved in decision-making through the various members of the NPC congregation who serve on Presbytery committees, attend Presbytery meetings, and/or are on the staff of the Presbytery.

(3) How satisfied is NPC with its relationship with the Presbytery, and what should be the nature of this relationship?

- In July of 2004, the Presbytery of WNY initiated a major process of determining its mission priorities for the future. A “Missions Priorities” team was created by the Presbytery, and it launched a series of visits with the congregations of all of the churches in the Presbytery through the summer of 2005. From those interviews, a document was created titled “Mission Priorities for 2006-2010.” The NPC Session participated in that visitation and listening process, which was designed to assess the various activities of the Presbytery and, in particular, to make suggestions on ways in which the relationships between individual churches and the Presbytery could be improved.
- The NPC Session was asked to indicate how Presbytery should prioritize its various ministries. Using a scale of 1 (lowest priority) to 10 (highest priority), the NPC Session identified the following as the highest priorities: provide workshops and resources for Christian Education, faith development, worship, and mission; maintain and support Duffield Camp and Conference Center; facilitate networks among congregations for ministry and mission; assist churches in youth program development and provide Presbytery-wide youth programming; and assist congregations in long-range planning, redevelopment, and growth strategies. In addition, when the NPC Session was asked how the Presbytery could specifically assist in moving NPC into the future, the top three recommendations were knowledge management, marketing, and group purchasing.

f. Staffing Patterns

The questions that are to be addressed in this sub-section are as follows:

- (1). What are current staffing patterns at NPC? The current staff at NPC is described in Section 5-a of this report.
- (2). How are staffing patterns determined and evaluated? How are new staffing needs and problems with existing staffing patterns identified? The initial responsibility for evaluating the staff rests with the Administration and Personnel Committee, although the ultimate responsibility, of course, resides with the Session. The Administration and Personnel Committee reports, for example, that performance evaluations are conducted annually, and that compensation issues are also considered annually to make certain that individuals are fairly compensated in comparison with other Presbyterian congregations of similar size within the Presbytery of WNY. Moreover, salary reviews for clergy and support staff alike are set to reflect their value to the congregation and its mission, within budgetary constraints. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Session to discern the short- and long-term mission and ministries of NPC and then, subsequently, to determine appropriate staffing needs and patterns.
- (3). In terms of the existing staffing pattern, what needs are not being met? What additional staff needs to be hired? In this important interim period, the Session is currently in the process of assessing existing staffing arrangements and exploring alternative staffing patterns. One of the issues currently being considered by the Session is whether a different staffing arrangement should be adopted that would not involve a full-time Pastor and Associate Pastor, but that would consist of a Pastor, a business

manager, a volunteer (or paid part-time) coordinator of church activities, and a pastoral-care professional. Another issue currently being explored by the Session is the extent to which current activities and ministries carried out by NPC staff could be shared with other churches within the area so that staff time and expenses could be spread across several local churches.

(4). With respect to calling our next Pastor, what tasks should be prioritized and what specific styles and kinds of ministry are desired/expected?

Those NPC members who participated in the Congregational Life Survey in December, 2005, were asked to indicate their preferences for the next pastor at NPC by responding to two questions: (a) What priority should the next pastor at NPC give to a set of specific tasks? And (b) what characteristic styles and kinds of ministry are most important for our next pastor? The responses to these two questions are set forth in **Exhibit K**. An initial interpretation of each of the two questions is put forth below. [Note: The numbers in parentheses refer to the mean or average scores on the scale of 1 (low priority) to 4 (very high priority). For specific definitions of the terms used below, see the footnotes for **Exhibit K**.]

Initial interpretations: What priorities should the next pastor at NPC give to various tasks?

- (1) The five tasks with the highest priorities for the next pastor are (in descending order):
 - #7: Preaching the Word of God with urgency and conviction (3.40)
 - #6: Planning/leading worship sensitive to the needs of the worshiping community (3.31)
 - #8: Attending to the spiritual development of members (3.14)
 - #15: Developing a strong sense of community among members (3.12)
 - #3: Involving laity in planning, participating in, and leading congregational events (3.08)
- (2) The top-listed task priorities in (1) also have relatively low standard deviations, indicating a fairly broad consensus among the respondents that these are important tasks.
- (3) The tasks that received the lowest priority are (in ascending order):
 - #5: Involvement in local community activities, issues, and problems (2.37)
 - #11: Supporting the world mission of the church (2.45)
 - #16: Seeking continuing education opportunities and investing time in developing Biblical and theological expertise (2.54)
 - #13: Holding before members critical issues of social justice and concern (2.61)
 - #2: Stewardship development (2.62)
- (4) In contrast to the highest priority items in (1), the four lowest prioritized tasks in (3) also have relatively high standard deviations, suggesting that considerable variation exists among the respondents with regard to these tasks. Of interest is the “stewardship development” task, which has a relatively low mean (2.62), but which also has a relatively low standard deviation (0.7457) when compared to the other four tasks listed in (3).

Initial interpretations: What characteristics of the next NPC pastor should have the highest priority?

- (1) The five characteristics with the highest mean scores are (in descending order):
 - #11: A strong preacher (3.65)
 - #13: Warm, outgoing personality (3.48)
 - #12: High degree of spirituality (3.37)
 - #4 Tends to be thought-provoking and challenging (3.22)
 - #1 Expertise in Biblical and theological matters (3.19)
- (2) The five characteristics identified in (1) that have the highest mean scores also have relatively low standard deviations, suggesting that a fairly strong consensus exists among the respondents that these are

high-priority “styles of ministry” for the next pastor. A very clear result is the consensus that being “a strong preacher” is very important, which is evident by the very low standard deviation (0.5115)!!

- (3) The five characteristics that are given the lowest priority are (in ascending order):
- #9: Advises people what to do (1.98)
 - #14: In good standing with denominational officials (2.57)
 - #10: Is a strong administrator (2.71)
 - #8: Helps people figure things out for themselves (2.73)
 - #7: In preaching and teaching, usually emphasizes contemporary issues and ideas (2.78)
- (4) The characteristics listed in (3) generally tend to have relatively high standard deviations, indicating considerable variation among the respondents regarding what priority these items should receive.

Section 7: Summary and Conclusions

The Vision for Mission Committee prepared a draft of this Vision for Mission document, complete except for Section 7, and distributed copies to members of the Session of North Presbyterian Church and members of an *ad hoc* review group. These members reviewed the document for typographical errors and minor corrections and, more importantly, provided written comments on substantive issues and challenges for consideration by the Session.

The Session met on April 24 and May 8, 2006 to discuss these comments. Session members in attendance reached a consensus for the summary and conclusions documented in this section.

1. Summary of Findings.

Session members reached several conclusions in response to the question, “From a review of this document, what have we learned about ourselves?”

They identified four activities that the church does well consistently. They are:

- Worship services, memorial services and music programs
- Local and world-wide mission activities and support
- Public recognition of members’ achievements and service
- Programs for children and youth including Sunday school, vacation Bible school, confirmation, and mission trips.

Other significant findings include:

- NPC is a congregation concerned about issues of social justice, including interest in our relationship with world-wide Islam.
- We, as a congregation, are generally open to new ideas.
- Members have diverse theological views on the authority of the Bible, with about 70 percent of the congregation in the “middle” ground, and the views of the remainder about evenly divided between “liberal” and “conservative”.
- We need to give thought to the issue of “hospitality” and to how well we “do hospitality.” The survey reveals, for example, that some members of the congregation do not feel a sense of belonging.
- Some members believe that there should be more visitations by elders, deacons and the pastor.
- A somewhat strange anomaly exists in that the NPC congregation is above average when it comes to the education levels of the members, including a large proportion with advanced degrees; yet, only a relatively small percentage (8 percent) of the survey respondents identified “adult education” as a “valued” aspect of NPC activities. Why is this? What are the implications for other concerns, such as adult education and spirituality?
- Much concern is voiced about the fact that NPC scores very low (the 5th percentile) when it comes to “growing spiritually.”
- It was recognized that, despite the historical decline of mainline congregations, some specific conflicts within North Church, and transitions in leadership, a remarkably positive spirit is evidenced by the “50 Years in Amherst” celebration in the fall of 2005, and by a relatively stable, if not growing, membership.
- We also celebrate the fact that we have a well-functioning professional staff. However, it was recognized that that much competition exists for the time and energy of the members of the congregation. This certainly reflects conditions in the current American culture, but it also

impacts the ability of NPC to staff its committees and to find volunteers to meet some programmatic needs. At the same time, NPC ranks significantly above the average when it comes to “focusing on the community” in mission-related and outreach-related activities. These activities are largely carried out by NPC volunteers.

2. Issues, Concerns, Priorities, Challenges, and Growth Opportunities.

After reviewing the findings of the VFM draft report, Session members identified what they believe to be the major issues facing North Presbyterian Church. Other than as issues these areas may be viewed, rightly, as concerns, priorities, challenges, or growth opportunities. For brevity, these are called “issues”. Ten issues were identified as needing immediate attention. Other issues, also important, are those that should be addressed during the next two years. These are called 2008 issues. Issues in both categories may vary greatly in the amount of study and examination required and the length of time required to come to a satisfactory resolution.

a. Immediate Issues

Session identified ten immediate issues, or challenges. Each is summarized below. Session members and committees addressed eight of the ten issues in some detail, often providing challenging goals, ways to measure effectiveness in achieving the goals, tasks and identification of the committee responsible for taking action. Papers were presented for each of these issues. Session was reluctant to shorten or paraphrase this work for inclusion in this summary. Therefore these comments are included in **Exhibit M**.

Issue 1. Long Term Planning for North Presbyterian Church

Session members agreed that we have a general idea of where we are headed in the future. However, they realized, also, that a major challenge for the church is the development of a comprehensive and long term plan, and that the plan should address each of the issues discussed below. The consensus was that the planning process should be started immediately. It was also agreed that membership growth should not be the focus of church planning since successful planning that addressed important challenges would, most likely, result in significant growth in membership. However, as important as this challenge is, no member or committee volunteered to suggest goals, measures, action items or assignment of responsibility during the VFM review process. Accordingly, there are no additional comments addressed in **Exhibit M**.

It should be noted, however, that NPC did start a planning process in 2005. This effort was prompted by the leadership of the former pastor/head of staff. It did produce “The Next Fifty Years’ Plan” and three committees were formed to take action. The process stalled after the departure of the pastor.

Issue 2. Accessibility

Session agreed on the importance of this great challenge. In 2006, Session voted to “make spaces in each of the three floors of the church building accessible to persons in wheelchairs, except for small closets and the boiler room, and that handicapped accessible restrooms be available in the basement and the first floor.” Church committees and a task force have been active and will continue to devote considerable energy to this task. We have, in hand, a preliminary architect’s design that would meet this requirement. The cost would be approximately \$600,000. As of this writing, there is no funding plan.

It appears that most of the congregation and Session support this initiative. However, some members have expressed reservations as to the timing, stating that no commitment should be made until the next pastor/head of staff is on board.

In the near future, Session and the congregation will need to address this timing issue and the following tasks:

- Come to a decision on the final design and architect.
- Develop a plan and strategy for funding.

Also, Session and its committees and task force must communicate to the congregation all the essential aspects of this project.

Goals, objectives, action items, committee responsibilities and schedule for this challenge are addressed in **Exhibit M**.

Issue 3. Communication Among Members, Especially About Our Diverse Views on Theological and Political issues.

Most NPC members, and perhaps all who have been members for more than a year or two, know that there is wide diversity of theological and political views among members. This reflects a similar diversity within the denomination and is supported by the findings of the Congregational Life Survey. This diversity of views has exacerbated past conflicts and presents a difficult future challenge to the membership.

We have recently agreed to a covenant that, although neither designed nor expected to “win over” those with opposing views, seeks to promote civility in communication and relationships among members.

This challenge is addressed in **Exhibit M** in two parts:

- Diversity.

Goal: To develop a church “culture” where our diverse opinions can be heard and freely discussed without fear of censure so that North Church becomes a community that nurtures Christian life.

It is suggested that several leaders and committees develop and conduct workshops on topics such as: Being Accepting: Active Listening: An Inclusive Jesus

- Communication Among Members

Goals: Develop (1) a church structure so that members can better know and value one another, and (2) a procedure to inform church members about the activities in the church so that they can more fully participate

Issue 4. Empowering Members with Leadership Skills, Opportunities, and Experience

Session concluded, and the survey affirmed, that many of our members are highly educated and have jobs that require significant leadership skills. However, many of them do not know how to use these skills effectively as volunteers and leaders in committees and task teams. Session recommends that this challenge be met by establishing goals, measurable objectives, action items and responsibility

assignments. See **Exhibit M** for several recommendations for offering leadership growth opportunities using a wide array of educational and spiritual formats.

Issue 5. Staffing Model for the Next Five Years

The Personnel Committee responded to Session's request to be specific in setting goals and measures of effectiveness in staff related planning. They attempted to do so. The committee identified, for Session's consideration, significant major short and long term staffing related opportunities on which to focus, and several related goals. These include:

- Being flexible in our response to new opportunities and emerging or pressing needs
- Methods to measure volunteer effort
- Help the Nominating Committee identify candidates for committee membership
- Balance the ages of committee members
- Focus on volunteer work by short term task groups
- Consider paid child care workers on evenings when large groups meet
- Evaluate the feasibility of sustaining, in the future, two full-time pastors.

Goals, accountability measures and schedule for these challenges are addressed in detail in **Exhibit M**.

Issue 6. Cooperative Programs and Shared Resources

Session recognizes the opportunities we have to reach out to other churches in our area to develop cooperative programs and to share resources. We have done this to some degree in the past, mainly in cooperative worship services and musical events. **Exhibit M** presents goals, action items, measures and committee responsibilities for two programs:

- Stephen Ministers' Pool
- Cooperative Youth Outreach

Session believes that there are, most likely, several other areas where NPC may work cooperatively and effectively with other churches, should reach out to other churches to identify opportunities and pursue them.

Issue 7. Spiritual Maturity and Biblical Literacy

We discovered, in our Vision for Mission study, a challenging need to improve spiritual maturity and biblical literacy among members of the congregation. As indicated in the responses to the Congregational Life Survey, many of our members are highly educated persons who subscribe to "a lifetime of learning" in their professions. However, they seem reluctant to utilize the same approach to promote growth in their life of faith. Most are reluctant to share their personal beliefs in church or in the community.

Session views this as an immediate and long term challenge which we hope to address using a wide array of educational and spiritual formats. The creation of a dedicated adult education hour has given new enthusiasm to our efforts.

This challenge and suggestions for future programs are discussed in **Exhibit M**.

The goal of our effort is spiritual growth. Measures of our success would include greater attendance at NPC events and a marked increase in the number of people expressing themselves at meetings. Another, indirect measure, would be an increase in stewardship.

Issue 8. Members' Prayer Life and Prayer Opportunities

Session members agreed that we should be more responsive to members' needs for prayer. Suggestions included:

- Time allotted and space reserved for prayer on a regular basis
- Group discussions on prayer
- Ways to enhance personal prayer life
- Various types of communal prayer

As important as this challenge is, no member or committee volunteered to suggest goals, measures, action items or assignment of responsibility during the VFM review process. Accordingly, there are no additional comments addressed in **Exhibit M**. Some members suggested that this issue is closely related to Issue 8, above, and, therefore, the two should be combined in subsequent tasking.

Issue 9. Integration of New Members and Others into the Congregation

The specific challenge of this issue is, "How can we be more effective in the integration of new members and the inclusion of non-members into our programs, committees and other activities?" Session recommends a goal to double the number of new members well integrated into church functions in the next year. Progress will be measured by evaluating attendance at worship services and Sunday school, and participation in programs, circles, committees and other activities.

The Membership Committee would assume primary responsibility for improving the level of integration of new members and measuring our success in reaching goals. **Exhibit M** presents an approach to working on this issue in more detail.

Issue 10. Pastoral Care to Members and Outreach to Residents of Presbyterian Village

Three Measurable Pastoral Care Goals:

Session has received an outline for an approach to providing pastoral care to church members, their families, and residents of Presbyterian Village. The approach includes the following goals:

- Increase connections to the residents of Presbyterian Village by increasing the number of church activities shared with them
- Reestablish a Stephen Ministry at North Presbyterian Church by recruitment and training of candidates for this ministry
- Increase the number of pastoral care visits by staff members, elders and deacons
- Create an effective communication link between the church and those who might benefit from pastoral care

This issue, including objectives, actions and schedule, is discussed in more detail in **Exhibit M**.

b. 2008 Issues

Issue 11. Outreach to the Community.

- Increase outreach to the community (in the context of both mission and continued growth of membership) is of concern.

Issue 12. Witnessing in the Community and the Workplace

- Learning how to “witness.” We were unable to really define what witnessing is.

Issue 13. Programs for Young Adults

- Discussion also focused upon the need to develop programs for those between 18 and 35 or 40 (i.e., post-high school individuals and young adults and couples). One person also mentioned the possibility of developing links to students at UB. This concern has obvious relevance for adult education programming and communication efforts.

Issue 14. Contemporary Worship Service

- Another concern expressed relates to the need to develop a contemporary worship service. Mention was made of possibly hiring a part-time music director who would be willing to help promote this. Also, the point was made that the Session should indicate to the PNC that the next pastor should be a person who is enthusiastic about developing such a worship service.

It should be noted that Session and the congregation see the children and youth programs as vibrant and successful. This view is substantiated by the impressive children and youth music and drama performances in worship services. However, Session members, volunteers and staff, who work closely with the children and youth, have some reservations and concerns about the programs and attendance. Session did not include this challenge among the ten immediate issues. However, it is fair to say that it is one, and it is being addressed, currently, by the Session.

3. Mission Statement

During its review of the draft Vision for Mission document, Session decided to review the current NPC mission statement. Several members took on this assignment and prepared the following revised mission statement for consideration by Session and the congregation.

(PLACE REVISED MISSION STATEMENT HERE)

4. Conclusion

Session appreciates that the information obtained from the Vision for Mission effort and the analyses that have been made are extremely valuable and should be more than sufficient for development of the Church Information Form. Also, the information in the VFM document should provide prospective pastors with comprehensive insight into the attributes of North Presbyterian Church. However, Session recognizes the need to take important additional steps to meet the challenges and opportunities presented. Specifically, for each issue listed, Session should take the lead to assure that:

- Goals and objectives are clearly defined.
- For each goal and its objectives, effective measures are established.

- A prioritized set of tasks is developed and described clearly and in detail.
- For each task, the method by which the tasks are to be accomplished is described.
- A responsible committee or task group is assigned to each task.
- A schedule for starting and completing each task is made.
- A method for reporting progress and achievement is established.

Exhibit M:

Issues, Concerns, Priorities, Challenges and Growth Opportunities

In April and May 2006 North Presbyterian Church's Session members met to discuss the content of Section 7 of the Vision for Mission document, Summary and Conclusions. Session members, and others, reviewed a draft of the document and identified ten issues, concerns, priorities, challenges, and growth opportunities that are worthy of immediate action. Each of these is included in this exhibit.

Session members and committees addressed eight of the ten issues in some detail, often providing challenging goals, ways to measure effectiveness in achieving the goals, tasks and identification of the committee responsible for taking action.

Session was reluctant to shorten or paraphrase this work for inclusion in Section 7 of the document. Therefore these comments are included herein.

Issue 1. Long Term Planning for North Presbyterian Church

(Aspects of this important challenge are outlined in Section 7.)

Issue 2. Accessibility

Goal: Make spaces in each of the three floors of the church building accessible to persons in wheelchairs, except for small closets and the boiler room, and that handicapped accessible restrooms be available in the basement and the first floor.

Objective 1: Decide on the structural changes that will accommodate the degree of accessibility desired and allow for possible modest and cost-effective expansion.

Strategy. Provide opportunities for members of the session and the congregation to contribute their thoughts on what is needed.

Action Steps. Devote a portion of a session meeting for members to make suggestions. Put a notice in North Star inviting people to write or call members of the committee and share their thoughts.

Schedule a "town meeting" between services one Sunday giving people an opportunity to share thoughts.

Responsibility. Session

Resources. Modest to none

Time Frame. Completed by the end of July 2006.

Monitoring Function. Report progress at Session meetings monthly

Objective 2. Select architect and final plan

Strategy. Have at least three and perhaps more architects with prior “church” experience submit concept sketches and select one favored design.

Action Steps. Arrange for initial visits by architects
Accessibility committee vet ideas and present concepts to session
Appoint a building committee composed of individuals familiar with construction
Decide on “favored” architecture and have more extensive concept plans developed.
Work with architect to eventually converge on final design
Make presentation to session and congregation for general acceptance of plans and agreement to costs

Responsibility. Initially, the Accessibility Committee. When the concept is accepted appoint the building committee to work with the architect on the final plans.

Time Frame. Completed by end of December 2006.

Monitoring Function. Report progress to Session and Congregation, monthly

Objective 3. Select contractor

Strategy.

Action Steps.

Responsibility.

Time Frame.

Monitoring Function. Report progress to Session and Congregation, monthly

Objective 4. Construction.

Strategy.

Action Steps.

Responsibility.

Time Frame.

Monitoring Function. Report progress to Session and Congregation, monthly

Issue 3. Communication Among Members, Especially About Our Diverse Views on Theological and Political issues.

This is seen as a two-part issue. In addition to our diverse political and theological views, communication is involved in other topics such as involving people in the church, having them feel comfortable, and even growing membership.

1. Diversity

We claim that diversity is a North Church strength. However, we seem to be afraid of discussing views that may be unpopular with other members. This is not healthy diversity. Knowing that there are other points-of views, but not being able to discuss them cuts the heart out of a family or an organization. How can anybody be authentic when you have to be so careful not to offend others or worry about being cast out for your opinions? No wonder it is difficult to be friendly, welcoming or caring. We believe we have to be very careful in our communication with others. However, diversity involves understanding other points of view and accepting the person who holds those views. Understanding does not mean we have to agree with the views, it just means understanding them.

Goal: To develop a church “culture” where our diverse opinions can be heard and freely discussed without fear of censure so that North Church becomes a community that nurtures Christian life.

The covenant, which was written this year, is a good start but needs to be put into practice throughout the church. Perhaps each of us should live and communicate according to this covenant. Real change can be difficult, especially when it is important to do so.

Possible activities:

- i. **Reading the covenant** often in group settings; Session, Deacons, Sunday School, Youth groups, Committees
- ii. **Workshops** involving such topics as: Being Accepting: Active listening: An Inclusive Jesus

Who: Church leaders and Staff, Session, Sunday School Personal, Committees, Youth Group Leaders, Adult Discipleship Organizers.

Measure: Church wide in-house survey once a year. Each group should also assess its progress once a year.

2. Communication Among Members

Goal 1: Develop a church structure so that members can better know and value one another.

1. Neighborhood organizations
 - a. Possible activities
 - i. Become more active and cohesive. Maybe have projects to work on together as well as looking out for one another.

Who -Deacons
2. Continue to offer social gatherings for all ages and stages of life, particularly college age students and other young adults.

Who -Fellowship Committee

Measure – In- house survey about relationships within the church.

Goal 2: Develop a procedure to inform church members about all the activities in the church so that they can more fully participate.

1. Committee Fair – Good start. Chance to see what is available.

Who-Membership Committee
2. Have Committees report regularly, not just for the annual report. Not all the committees would report at the same time, but often enough so people know what is happening or trying to happen. Hopefully people would feel more involved

Who - Committees

*Could be done in the bulletin and/or the North Star.
1. Provide information about other groups in the church such as the women’s circles and the secret book club.

Who- Individual groups

*Could be done in the bulletin and/or the North Star, but it always works best when a personal invitation is involved.
2. Make readily available information about various church funds and how they are used or how contributions are made.

Who – whoever is in charge of said funds.

*Could be done in the bulletin and/or the North Star or in pamphlets.

*Publicity Committee could oversee or provide help.

Measure: In- house survey about member perception of knowledge of church activities.

All surveys could be done in one short specific survey.

After one year would like to see a 5% increase over the results of the current survey.

Issue 4. Empowering Members with Leadership Skills, Opportunities, and Experience

In the course of our Vision for Mission study we discovered a need to empower members with leadership skills, opportunities, and experience.

Our members are often highly educated and have jobs that require significant leadership. They do not always know how to translate these skills in a church environment with volunteer team

members. The goals are a bit ephemeral and it is more difficult to attach measurable objectives and task steps.

We view this as an immediate and long-term challenge and will continue to offer several leadership growth opportunities using a wide array of educational and spiritual formats.

1. The creation of a dedicated adult education hour has given new enthusiasm to our efforts. Future programs will continue to address leadership skill development at an average of 1 session every 8 weeks.
2. Explore possible use of a facilitated study of continuous improvement processes such as “The ABC’s of Natural Church Development” by Christian Schwarz. (Again, much has been done and we could build on this base.) Incorporate the 8 quality characteristics and action items for each, in our 2008 Vision for Mission/Strategic Plan by May 2007.
3. Add a module to the new Session member orientation on leading committees by fall 2007.
4. The presbytery of WNY provides an annual Presbytery Day. Often this event is hosted at NPC. One focus is on leadership skill development. We will increase attendance by 10% in 2007 and 2008. Our members will offer to present topics on leadership.
5. NPC members contribute many leadership hours to the Presbytery of WNY. We will sustain this and improve the communication to NPC participant/members about the work done.
6. We will explore ways and resources to help integrate our faith in the workplace. Resources we might use include:
 - Os Hillman. www.marketplaceleaders.org
 - www.fcaw.org
 - The NPC library and the Resource Center
 - “Faith at Work” and “Lead Like Jesus”

Our goal may include explaining how to use these tools to learn how to witness at work by March 2007 and how to measure results of our efforts by June 2007. Keeping a log of witnessing efforts might be a way to tell our story and capture it in a vignette.

7. We recognize that it is difficult to pull young family parents to evening meetings (especially single parents). We will commit to having increased child-care available to facilitate increased participation.
8. Increase use of short-term ad hoc task forces.

9. Provide a way for people to take a sabbatical when burned out and get back on the team when rested.
10. We will find ways to increase the use of our library and the Resource Center as tools to enhance leadership skills.

Issue 5. Staffing Model for the Next Five Years

Updated thoughts from the personnel committee to Session 2006.05.08 as modified after Session input 2006.05.09.

Possible insert in section 6.f. staffing.... or section 7.4.b. Major short and long term Opportunities on which to focus.

In regards to personnel issues the following trends, issues and recommendations are being discussed. Several goals have been identified.

1. **Flexibility:** NPC staff patterns have been relatively stable and traditional, however we have, on occasion, displayed a nimbleness to respond to pressing needs and opportunities. We expect to continue to try different things in response to emerging needs and opportunities. Volunteer committee and task group structure will continue to change.
2. **80/20 rule:** It has long been true that at any given time it appears that 80% of the effort is contributed by 20% of the volunteers. We are blessed with highly dedicated people and challenged to get more people involved. This has become a bit more difficult as families have 2 wage earners and many extracurricular commitments.

Related Goals:

- Consider a mechanism to develop and track the number of hours worked by volunteers and staff on projects, by 11/2006.
 - Support the Nominating Committee in its task of identifying candidates for committee membership via its fairs (first one on 5/21/2006) and other tools, by 1/2007.
 - Balance the ages of committee members with at least 30% under age 50 by 10/2007 and 40% by 2008.
 - Complete at least 30% of the volunteer work by short-term task groups instead of long-term committee endeavors, by 6/2007.
3. **Volunteers:** there has been a trend toward more paid staff, replacing what used to be accomplished by volunteers. More people feel so time harassed that they would rather have someone paid to do things. Examples include the nurse, child-care, and payroll.
 4. **Child Care:** We need to provide child-care in the future. A few years ago we recognized the need to have a consistent professional presence on Sunday Morning. A

key role, for the paid position, was the coordination of volunteers. In the future we may need to consider paid child care workers on evenings when large groups meet, such as committees and classes. This would accommodate single parents who wish to participate. We did this with paid staff at our “Tuesday Night Together” events during the past few years.

Related Goal: Provide child-care at church services and other events, as required, by 10/2006.

5. **Two-Pastor Model:** Session and the congregation will be evaluating the feasibility of sustaining, in the future, two full-time pastors. Many members see ourselves as continuing to have a large enough church to have needs and financial resources to require and sustain a two-pastor model. We will remain open to this possibility. In this model, tasks among staff members may be divided in new ways as follows.
 - a. Our current structure has several tasks, normally included in the pastor job description, being completed by part time employees. They do not receive health insurance benefits. This may become problematic if they do not have a spouse to carry the family coverage.
 - b. The associate pastor is more likely to be less experienced (younger, perhaps) and have an emphasis on up-lifting, contemporary worship and ministry to youth and young adults.
 - c. The present Youth Director position may be merged back into the associate pastor role.
 - d. Some churches around us may decrease in size to a point where they can no longer sustain programs and services. NPC may be called upon to reach out with resources, staff and assistance.

Related Goals, Senior Pastor

- Vision for Ministry document approved by Committee on Ministry by 7/30/2006
- Pastor Nominating Committee elected by 9/30/2009
- First round of candidate interviews started by 3/30/2007
- Offer extended to a Pastor candidate by 8/30/2007
- New Pastor/Head of Staff at work at NPC by 1/2/2008

Related Goals, Associate Pastor

- Decide if we will call an Associate Pastor, by the time we complete the Church Information Form for calling the Pastor
- If so, completion of the job description for youth/young adult ministry and contemporary worship

6. **Accountability:** Creating specific goals, and accountability for measuring and achieving them, are seen as crucial by some and as unacceptable and unwanted business practice by others.

Related Goals:

- Include the first draft of Session's goals in the NPC Vision for Mission, by 6/2006.
- Complete a revised set of Session's goals, with objectives and tasks, by 8/30/2006.
- Complete and approve the first major update to Session's goals by 8/30/2007/

Issue 6. Cooperative Programs and Shared Resources

Stephen Ministers' Pool

- Suggested Churches: University, Amherst, Williamsville, Clarence
- Goal: To work together with Stephen Ministers from other churches using leadership, organization, administrative resources and staff to serve all.
- Measure: Monthly meetings are required of an active group. Record meeting attendance and service calls to clients.
- Actions: The pool of clients could be used as a source of prospective Stephen Ministers, serving where and as needed. Mary Lou George has already begun to contact trained Stephen Ministers plus other interested persons. Require publicity at all participating churches to welcome clients. Training programs required.
- Responsible Committee: Pastoral Care

Cooperative Youth Outreach

- Suggested Churches: Amherst, Williamsville, Clarence
- Goal: Widen the scope of youth outreach
- Measure: Attendance at first and subsequent events. Assess interest in continuance.
- Actions: Determine the applicable age group. Meet with disc jockeys and agents of selected Christian music stars. Consider one full time youth pastor, shared with Clarence Presbyterian Church. Meet with youth leaders of each participating church to plan activities. Identify the most popular performers.
- Responsible Committee: Youth Ministry Team

Issue 7. Spiritual Maturity and Biblical Literacy

In the course of our vision for Mission study we discovered a need to improve spiritual maturity and biblical literacy among the congregation.

Our members are often highly educated. Many subscribe to a program of "a lifetime of learning" in their professional lives but they seem reluctant to engage in the same process of growth in their life of faith. They have no problem publicly declaring ("professing") their

knowledge as professors, doctors and teachers, but they are reluctant to share their personal beliefs in church or in the community.

We view this as an immediate and long-term challenge which we hope to address using a wide array of educational and spiritual formats. The creation of a dedicated adult education hour has given new enthusiasm to our efforts. Current programs have anticipated this need as follows:

- 1) Our program on Peace Unity and Purity of the Church has tried to establish principles or talking about our faith and our life together. It reminded us to encourage a style of dialogue that fosters personal expression.
- 2) Mary Mohlke's Soul Feast is a nationally recognized holistic experience offering alternative paths to spiritual growth. We need to support this program better and take pride in its origins at North Church.
- 3) Our current offering on "What Presbyterians believe" tries to encourage a discussion of basic tenets of the reformed faith.

Future programs:

1. We will address "Reading the Bible the Presbyterian way" The Series will culminate with presentations of the Reverend Dr. Jack Rogers, former moderator of the General Assembly at North Church on October 22, 2006.
2. Explore programs, such as "Spiritual Direction", that are designed to promote spiritual growth.
3. The Adult Discipleship Committee is also committed to a number of issues exploring the several manifestations of faith in our community and our culture.
4. Explore the formation of small groups dedicated to Bible study and prayer.

While the goal of our effort is spiritual growth, measurable objectives could be found in the attendance figures of various events, the number of different people expressing themselves at the meetings and indirectly in an increase in stewardship.

Issue 8. Members' Prayer Life and Prayer Opportunities

(Aspects of this important challenge are outlined in Section 7.)

Issue 9. Integration of New Members and Others into the Congregation

Integration of new members into congregation activities and inclusion of non-members in our programs

1. SPECIFIC GOAL: North Presbyterian Church will improve in integration of new members and the inclusion of non-members into our programs, committees and other activities

2. **HOW TO MEASURE PROGRESS:** We will look at the last five membership groups and assess the degree of integration, as measured by regular attendance at Worship and Sunday School, participation in programs, circles, committees and other activities. Our goal is to double the number of new members well integrated into North in the first year, and to have 80% of new members well integrated after five years.
3. **WHY:** Without data, it is hard to know where we stand or what kind of goal is attainable, but this goal is clearly a relevant response to both the identified concern, and the desire to grow North's membership.
4. **WHEN:** The year one goal should be attained by September 2007 and the five year goal by September 2011.
5. **WHO:** The Membership Committee will assess past levels of integration and assume primary responsibility for reaching the goals of improving the level of integration of new members in the future.

Possible procedure: Beginning with the Fall 2006 Inquirers Class, each potential new member will fill out a survey that provides information on interests, hobbies, activities, job and talents. This information will be used to select a mentor(s) from current members. This mentor should share interests, and will be the key person for integration of the new member. The mentor will attend worship with the new member, attend membership classes and, hopefully, interact socially with the new member. The new member's profile will be shared with Session members for incorporation into committees and other activities, but the mentor has primary responsibility for the new member's involvement in North. If the mentor assesses that the relationship is not developing, he/she should report to Membership for possible assignment of a new mentor. The mentor's role continues until the new member is fully integrated into North Presbyterian Church. *(This is very similar to what is now done, but suggests increased accountability, especially by the mentors. The issues involved in carrying out this procedure and measuring progress, as well as identifying additional actions in support of this goal need to be developed by the members of the Membership Committee who are and have been directly involved.)*

The only resource needed is a list of current member's activities and interests for matching as a potential mentor.

The new software used for church financial accounting and reports will be evaluated for use in this task.

In August of each year the Membership Committee will assess the involvement of each new member for the past year and continue this for the full five years. The mentor will help membership assess the integration of the new member.

The Membership Committee will report to Session each September how successful the integration of new members has been.

Issue 10. Pastoral Care to Members and Outreach to Residents of Presbyterian Village

Three Measurable Pastoral Care Goals:

I. Goal: Increase Connections to Presbyterian Village

- A. Objective: Establish activities as a Deacons' project
1. Deacons will identify activities to be shared with Presbyterian Village through collaboration with the pastor, Christian educator, music leaders and any others with programs/activities to share.
 2. Deacons will initiate 2-3 new, shared activities during the coming program year. (Onset, September 2006-completion June, 2007)
 3. Evaluation tool will be administered at achievement of goal to assess effectiveness.

II. Goal: Reestablish Stephen Ministry at North Presbyterian Church

- A. Objective: Recruit and train 4-6 Stephen Ministers by fall 2006.
1. Realign current members already trained as Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers
 2. Increase awareness of Stephen Ministry as recruitment tool
 - a. Bulletins/North Star
 - b. Highlight workshop at First Trinity Lutheran, Tonawanda, New York on March 25th for those with an interest in Stephen Ministry
 - c. Recruit and complete application and interview process by end of May, 2006
 - d. Plan and execute training for candidates during summer of 2006
 - e. Fall, 2006: Commission new Stephen Ministers and implement program at North

III. Goal: Increase number of pastoral care visits by staff, elders and deacons at North Presbyterian Church

Objectives:

- A. Develop a measurement tool to track visits of all groups including the Pastoral Care Team, Interim Pastor, Director of Pastoral Care, Stephen Ministers, Parish nurse, and all other congregants.
- B. Track visits and determine frequency- increases, etc. to make for a greater number of connections with those in need in the congregation
- C. Create a clear communication link for those needing care.
 1. Involve the new Communication Committee to implement the program.