

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
OF RUTHERFORD  
**Mission Study 2024**



open doors for all

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OF RUTHERFORD

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1 East Passaic Ave, Rutherford, NJ 07070

Approved at the Stated Session Meeting on 12/18/2024

# CHAPTER 1 – THE PROCESS

## Prayerful Discernment

### Committee Member Recruitment and Session Approval

Volunteers were invited to join the Mission Study Committee based on their gifts, interests, and commitment to the process. The Session reviewed and approved the committee members to ensure alignment with the church's vision and governance.

## Understanding Our Story

### First Committee Meeting (June 18, 2024)

We began by reflecting on our church's history, traditions, and accomplishments. The committee also evaluated current ministries, membership trends, and resources.

### Congregational Timeline Event (July 21, 2024)

Using Post-It notes, congregation members described the good, the growing, and the tough periods of the church's history. The committee synthesized these insights into key themes that shaped our understanding of the church's story.

## Exploring Our Community

### Second Committee Meeting (July 23, 2024)

We reviewed demographic data for our congregation and the surrounding community to better understand the context of our ministry and identify opportunities for growth.

### Third Committee Meeting (July 30, 2024)

Key takeaways from the timeline findings were discussed. The committee also planned for the Storytelling and Congregational Discernment events.

### StoryTelling Events (August 22, August 27, September 8, 2024)

Congregation members shared personal stories, experiences, and perspectives on our church's role in their lives and the community. These sessions deepened our understanding of the church's impact and uncovered recurring themes for growth.

## Theological Reflection & Visioning for the Future

### Congregational Discernment Event (October 13, 2024)

Participants prayerfully reflected on Scripture and theology, exploring how God is calling us to respond to community needs and live out our faith in impactful ways.

### Fourth Committee Meeting (November 7, 2024)

The committee shared what excited us most from the discernment event and began drafting the final report, assigning writing tasks to members.

### Fifth and Sixth Committee Meetings (November 19, December 2, 2024)

During these meetings, we conducted a table read of the draft report, refined its content, and finalized our Mission and Vision Statements to reflect the congregation's insights and God's call for our church.

## CHAPTER 2 – OUR TIMELINE



*The timeline event allowed us to take a visual and narrative journey through the history of our church, reflecting on how God has guided our congregation through milestones, challenges, and growth. We highlighted key moments of positivity, spiritual growth, and times of struggle, offering insight into how our faith has shaped the church's story.*

### Big Themes

#### A Welcoming Spirit

*"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."  
— Romans 15:7*

Our church has always embraced a spirit of warmth and hospitality, making everyone—whether new or longtime members—feel like part of a loving, supportive family.

### Empowering Community Through Connection

*“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” — Romans 12:4-5*

The church thrives on deep connections and relationships, with members coming together in times of joy and need. This is reflected in both large church events and smaller gatherings, such as Vacation Bible School, Bible and book studies, Youth Group, and even ministries like Yoga.

### Nurturing Faith Across Generations

*“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” — Deuteronomy 6:6-7*

Our church has always been committed to nurturing faith across generations, from children's baptisms and Sunday School programs to youth retreats and family services, ensuring a strong spiritual foundation for both young and not-so-young alike.

### Celebrating Worship and Music

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” — Colossians 3:16*

Music and worship have been central to our church's life, with choir performances, Christmas pageants, and community concerts bringing the congregation together in joy and praise, enhancing our worship experience.

### Serving Beyond Our Walls

*“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me... Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” — Matthew 25:35-40*

Service to those in need has always been a key mission of our church, from preparing meals for the homeless to organizing drives for food and clothing, showing our commitment to outreach and compassion.

### Investing in Sacred Spaces

*“O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own.” — 1 Chronicles 29:16*

Maintaining and improving our church's sacred spaces, like the organ refresh, stained-glass windows and roof repairs, reflects our dedication to creating a welcoming and beautiful place for worship and community gathering.

## Navigating Change and Honoring Our Legacy

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”  
— Ecclesiastes 3:1*

While change is often challenging, our church has persevered through leadership transitions and evolving traditions, honoring our legacy while embracing new opportunities for growth and connection.

## Big Gaps and Questions

### Rediscovering Our Identity Beyond the “Glory Days”

*“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” — Isaiah 43:18-19*

While we honor past milestones like the 150th anniversary celebration, it’s time to rediscover our identity as a church moving forward. The energy we bring to new initiatives, such as mission drives or community involvement, reflects God’s new work among us.

### Revitalizing Our Musical Presence

*“Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.” — Psalm 96:1-2*

Our musical ministry can be renewed through fresh expressions, much like our joyful Christmas choir concerts and Bach festival contributions. These efforts give us a platform to reflect God’s glory and deepen connections with one another.

### Navigating Lay-Leader Transitions

*“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” — Ephesians 4:11-12*

The transition of leadership, especially after the departure of pastors who were beloved by some but not well-received by all, has left a gap. But with new leadership, we’re working together—through events like mission sponsorships or confirmation services—to nurture faith and maintain unity.

### Strengthening Cross-Generational Attendance

*“We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.” — Psalm 78:4*

Building a multi-generational church is essential. As seen in past decades, such as the vibrant children’s ministry and annual youth group participation, passing on faith through generations is essential to our church’s ongoing vitality.

## Addressing Financial Sustainability

*“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” — 2 Corinthians 9:6-7*

We face financial challenges, especially with decreased tithing and after significant repairs like the roof and windows. Yet, the ongoing spirit of generosity seen in events like the capital campaign and mission drives shows that God continues to provide as we work together for sustainable growth.

## Summary

In summary, this section of our mission study highlights the key themes and challenges that have shaped our church’s journey. From our longstanding tradition of hospitality and community connection to the revitalization of our music ministry and efforts to navigate leadership transitions, we have seen both triumphs and struggles. Our reflections reveal a congregation committed to nurturing faith across generations, serving beyond our walls, and investing in sacred spaces. At the same time, we acknowledge the gaps and questions that remain, particularly in areas such as financial sustainability, cross-generational engagement, and rediscovering our identity. These insights provide a clear picture of where we have been and guide us as we look toward the future with hope and determination to live fully into our missional identity.



# CHAPTER 3 – WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD – THE DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT

## Population & Growth

In 2023 the total population within a 10 minute drive of the church was estimated to be 109,883 and is estimated to be 113,995 by 2033. This rate is somewhat faster than the statewide growth rate. The church membership is also growing and seems to remain in alignment with the percentage growth of the surrounding area. The average person per household is 2.64, which is lower than the statewide average of 2.73. Family households are growing as fast as the total population suggesting that the increase is from families having additional children.

## Family Structures & Age Groups

Out of the households with children in the surrounding area, 72.9% are married couples and 27.1% are single parents in 2023. This is projected to be 71.8% married couples and 28.2% single parent households by 2028.

In our congregation, there are many single parents attending with or without their children. This does not necessarily mean it is a single parent household, only that the spouse or significant other does not attend church services.

The average age of the population of the area in 2023 was 40.37. It is projected to be 41.21 by 2028 and 41.96 by 2033.

The breakdown of age groups in the surrounding area is as follows: families and empty nesters 35-54 makes up 26.2% of the community, followed by over 65 years at 18%, children ages 5 -17 at 16.7%, ages 55-64 at 13.1%, single and young families at 11.3%, college/career ages 18-24 at 8.2%, and the smallest population infant – 4 at 6.3%. The statistics for the congregants are broken into slightly different age groups, they are as follows: ages 71 and over at 33.7%, ages 56-70 at 27.3%, ages 26-40 at 21.5%, and ages 41-55 17.4%. The young families and singles group is slowly growing but we lack the school age and teen populations.

## Housing Types & Education Levels

Since 1999, the number of housing units built in the area has been very low, reflecting the density and lack of open space. Housing prices vary significantly by town, with Rutherford being the most expensive, while Lyndhurst and East Rutherford have similar, yet slightly lower pricing. Rents are also high in the area.

In the study area, 28.4% of adults have a minimum of a HS degree or GED. This percentage is slightly higher than the NJ average of 26.4%. Adults with associate's (7.1%) or bachelor's degrees (26.6%) are also slightly higher than state levels with NJ averages being associate's 6.7% and bachelor's 25.1%. However, adults with graduate and professional degrees are 13.8% which is lower than the NJ average of 16.4%. Looking forward to 2028 the trends remain about the same with a small increase in graduate and professional degrees. There is no information available on the specific educational attainment of our congregation.

## Economic Indicators

In the surrounding area, the average household income in 2023 was 117,282 and is projected to be 129,200 by 2028. In 2023, approximately 6.8% of local households had an income below the poverty line, which is \$15,000. This is consistent with Bergen County's poverty rate of 6.77%. Projections suggest that the percentage of households living below \$15,000 will decrease slightly to 6.1% by 2028.

Regarding occupational distribution, our locality is 70.4% white-collar to 29.6% blue-collar workers, which mirrors the overall split in New Jersey.

## Culture and Language

The racial-ethnic diversity of the area is 61% White, 24% Hispanic/Latino/a/x, 10% Asian, 3% Black/African American and 2% Pacific Islander/American Indian/Other. These percentages are projected to remain about the same over the next 5 years. Our congregation is approximately 95% White non-Hispanic, which is a significant difference than the local population.

**Source of Data:** The majority of statistics provided in this report are from MinistryInsite provided through the Presbytery of Northeast New Jersey and the self-reported data to the PC(USA).

## CHAPTER 4 – STORYTELLING SEASON

The need to be a part of a community appears to be a common thread throughout the interviews with the congregants. While community-based activities are an integral part of any suburban town, the church is the place where like ideas and like beliefs become paramount to the general population. Storytelling becomes a way to discern the different paths each person takes to arrive at a Christian sanctuary that fulfills the needs deeply embedded in themselves. First Presbyterian Church of Rutherford took that journey and the results are a testament of how grateful an individual is when they realize they have been welcomed into the family of Jesus Christ.

Several sessions were held with different congregants and the most important theme throughout the interviews was the welcoming presence each felt, not only by the beauty of the sanctuary but the congregation as well. It is well documented that each interviewee held various expectations; some wanted tradition, camaraderie, a comfortable space, church activities, while others wanted a renewed connection to God. The most endearing aspect of these interviews was watching the faces of the speakers as they reminisced about how they were drawn to this church.

Negativity was all but absent; albeit there was a consensus of sadness of the departure of the previous pastor. This sadness comment was quickly replaced by the joy of having a new young enthusiastic interim pastor with whom they felt fully engaged.

The participants all gathered together to share their stories of discontent at their previous religious affiliates and found a happy, welcoming, traditional as well as progressive place of worship that fit their lifestyles. As the lilting sounds of organ music fill the sanctuary, they feel they have found a home where they can worship and socialize with others who have also found a place at the First Presbyterian Church of Rutherford.

## CHAPTER 5 – WHERE IS GOD CALLING US?

Finding a common thread throughout the congregation is a monumental task. Because of the different needs of each individual, it becomes a multi-layered house that must address the welfare of the entire populace. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on the towns throughout the state and people are just emerging to resume their lives and lifestyles. The church must take this opportunity to re-engage the community in ways that will bring them back to God. The people yearn for this connection and to be part of a conducive group. Finding middle ground that envelops our community and welcomes all those seeking sanctuary without judgment or labels seems to be the goal of our congregation.

When the call came for the congregation to gather to express their thoughts and visions for the future of this church, the response was positive. Each person came with their requests and ideas moving this church forward into the future. With the requisite of purpose, vision, and mission, the responses were enthusiastic and diversified depending on where one was in his/her life journey. An important point throughout the conversations was the willingness to infuse the love of God within walls of the physical church to reach out through the members to the community. If the church was to represent a way of living under Jesus' example of inclusion, the congregation needs to strive for flexible leadership, involvement of members and relevant committees, fellowship, and outreach to those expressing a desire to belong to a faith community.

The family unit was a theme repeated throughout the discernment as the future of the church and many ideas of how to engage the parents and the children with innovative activities such as midweek Sunday School, children's choir, Christian-based arts and crafts, and sports were some of the ideas discussed. Along those same lines comes the need to expand social and print media to the surrounding towns to engage these communities in the church calendar and available programs offered to singles, couples, families, and retirees.

The congregants are asking for inclusion, support, engagement, strong leadership, education and most importantly peace in God's hands. This exercise has been well received and the various recommendations meld into a collective love of FPC Rutherford.

## CHAPTER 6 – WHAT IS OUR VOCATION, OUR VISION, AND OUR FUTURE STORIES AND HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE?

### Mission/Vocation Statement:

During our discernment event, we identified the need to encourage new and creative forms of leadership. We hope to share in worship, blending tradition and contemporary and expanding our reach beyond Sundays. Our Mission is to increase visibility within the community and improve communication in all mediums to showcase Jesus's ministry of Love and Inclusion.

### Vision Statement:

Our vision is to become a renewed family-centered congregation that nurtures faith across generations.

### Action Steps:

In the next 6 months:

1. The Deacons will open the role of Greeter to the entire congregation (members & non-member worshippers).
2. The Deacons will create a new name tag system for Greeters, Elders, and Deacons.
3. The Session will create a process to market, attract, and engage congregation members for manageable time commitments to short term projects/events/activities.

In the next year:

1. The Session will empower the Christian Education Team to investigate the weekday evening ministry for children and young families.
2. The Session will engage in a meaningful way for three significant Rutherford/surrounding Borough events.
3. The Session will develop a Thanksgiving/Christmas Taskforce for Community Engagement.
4. The Stewardship Team will create a one time per month Moment for Mission to connect the congregant's story/journey with stewardship and our Missional Identity.
5. The office of the Pastor will create a contingency/disaster plan to host safe gatherings after significant/traumatic events.

# CHAPTER 7 – CHURCH TRENDS & FINANCIAL INFORMATION

HOME ► FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ► YEAR AT A GLANCE: OVERVIEW

**First**

1 E Passaic Ave

Rutherford, NJ 07070

Web: [www.fpcrutherford.org](http://www.fpcrutherford.org)

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## Year At A Glance: OVERVIEW

November 18, 2024

<b>Membership</b>	<b>2022</b>
Membership as of 12-31-2022	172
Attendance	36
<b>Gender</b>	
Females	108
Males	64
<b>Racial Ethnic</b>	
Asian / Pacific Islander / South Asian	3
Black / African American / African	2
Latino	2
Middle Eastern / North African	1
Multiracial	0
Native American / Alaska / Native Indigenous	0
White	164
<b>Income</b>	
Regular Contribution	\$68,095
Bequests	\$0
Investment Income	\$58,133
Capital Building Funds	\$106,893
Subsidy Aid	\$0
Other Income	\$0
Total Income	\$233,121
<b>Expenditures</b>	
Local Program	\$340,361
Local Mission	\$0
Other Mission	\$10,000
Per Capita	\$8,064
Capital Expenditures	\$164,231
Investment Expense	\$0
Total Expenses	\$522,656
<b>Leadership</b>	
Deacons	1
Ruling Elders	9

PC(USA) does not have sufficient information to make an accurate interpretation for all "zero" responses. Here are some of the uses for "zero" in the Church Trends tables.

- Zero is the valid response for this question. There are no members in this group, no finances to report, etc.
- The information was not available at the time that the report is filed.
- The question was missed or skipped.
- No Session Annual Statistical Report was filed.

The source for Church Trends data is the Session Annual Statistical Report.

## YEAR AT A GLANCE

[Overview](#)

[Membership](#)

[Financials](#)

[Diversity](#)

[Education](#)

[Leadership](#)

## SUMMARIES

Due to changes in the Session Annual Statistical Report, the "Four Years At A Glance" report is no longer available. To request multiple years of data, please contact: [research@pcusa.org](mailto:research@pcusa.org)

## Financial Information

### Income Sources

The church benefits significantly from rental income at the Karen Kaiser Parish House, where we currently host a variety of organizations, including a local Congregational Church, a program for people with disabilities, and a nursery school.

The UBS Global Wealth Management team manages all church investments with significant gains each year. The Deacon Board benefits from a substantial endowment to support its efforts both within and outside the church.

### Financial Stewardship

It is essential that the Session actively re-engage in a Financial Stewardship program each year.

### Parsonage/Manse

The next installed pastor must live in the unfurnished parsonage within walking distance of the church, as this is a gift from a restricted endowment.

### Financial Realities

At this point, the church draws down from both the Capital Endowment & Operations Endowment at a rate that is not sustainable due to significant unexpected expenses. There are currently active methods to reduce our discretionary spending after a substantial investment in the physical property (including the 1 East Passaic Campus (sanctuary/chapel/offices), Parish House, and Manse).

# CHURCH LEADERSHIP

## 2024 MISSION STUDY TASK FORCE

Maria Artime  
Louise Cavallo  
Jackie Dembowski  
John Ledwith

## ELDERS

**Clerk of Session:** Linda Lanz

**2024:** Akua Yeboah-Asuamah, John Ledwith, Ruth Neuhauser

**2025:** Diane DeSantis, Mark Kosa, Bonnie Sheppard

**2026:** Karen Bell, Jackie Dembowski, Junior Oppido

## DEACONS

**Moderator of the Deacons:** Lena Merrill

**2024:** Carolyn Mellick-Guerrero, Dimitra Skenderi, Lena Merrill

**2025:** Lia Abrams, Louise Cavallo

**2026:** Rachel Buonavolonta, Tiffany Kushner

## PASTOR

Rev. Justin J. Warner, Interim Pastor & Head of Staff

## STAFF

Margaret Ahn, Music Director & Organist  
William Rood, Director of Finance & Buildings Administrator  
Jeff Scott, Administrative Assistant  
Laurie Gentile, Christian Education Teacher  
Mark Gentile, Custodian