

Old Tennent Presbyterian Church Mission Study 2023



Approved by Session 4/23/2023,
viewed and notes recieved by COM 5/2/23

Mission Study Survey Results

Mission Study Team Survey Results were received in February of 2023 after the survey was distributed in November. Due to the holidays and illness, getting enough responses took a long time. The survey used was the Holy Cow Conversations tool for smaller congregations. Our Holy Cow consultants were Emily Swanson and Elizabeth Hamilton. Twenty-three responses were collected to give us the following data. With 23 responses, a majority of the 25-30 worship and event-attending participants were represented. We know that many of the responses fall in the middle ground and that this might otherwise be seen as the respondents either being unaware or non-committal about these questions. Our understanding within the church is that our folks are open to a variety of ways of doing things and ways of understanding, and so they don't answer in emphatic ways.

The top three priorities given by our members are:

1. Deepen our sense of connection to God and one another through stronger worship experiences.
2. Develop ministries that work toward healing those broken by life circumstances (e.g., grief, divorce, job loss, addiction, family violence, homelessness, immigration issues, etc.).
3. Work to renew and revitalize the community around the church by building coalitions with partners that share this vision and commitment.

Theological Perspectives

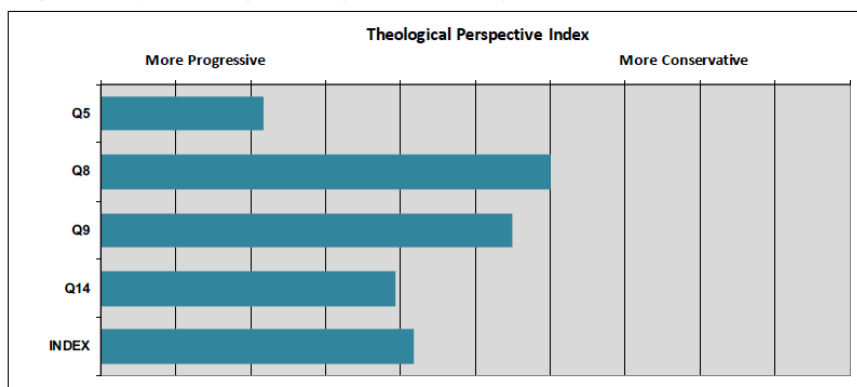
In the study, perspectives were given on a spectrum using 'progressive' and 'conservative' to define members' views on the theological questions asked. The questions were on a scale from "Strongly Disagree" to Strongly Agree". Our church falls in the middle ground on most theological perspectives, we do not think that converting people is a theological priority.

Question Text
Q5 Converting persons to Christ must be the first step in creating a better society.
Q8 Our congregation is committed to abide by the historic faith as handed down through the centuries.
Q9 Scripture is the literal Word of God without error, not only in matters of faith, but also in historical, geographical, and other secular matters.
Q14 The main purpose of Christian education is to help people know what is in the Bible.

Response Percentages (These are the scores from your congregation.)

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Tend to Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q5	4.5%	18.2%	27.3%	36.4%	4.5%	9.1%
Q8	0.0%	5.0%	5.0%	45.0%	30.0%	15.0%
Q9	9.1%	4.5%	22.7%	50.0%	4.5%	9.1%
Q14	0.0%	4.3%	30.4%	34.8%	30.4%	0.0%

Comparative Profile (These show how your scores compared with other churches.)



Flexibility Index

This scale measures if the church members as a whole are more settled or adaptable when it comes to the life of the church. Overall we are a more settled congregation.

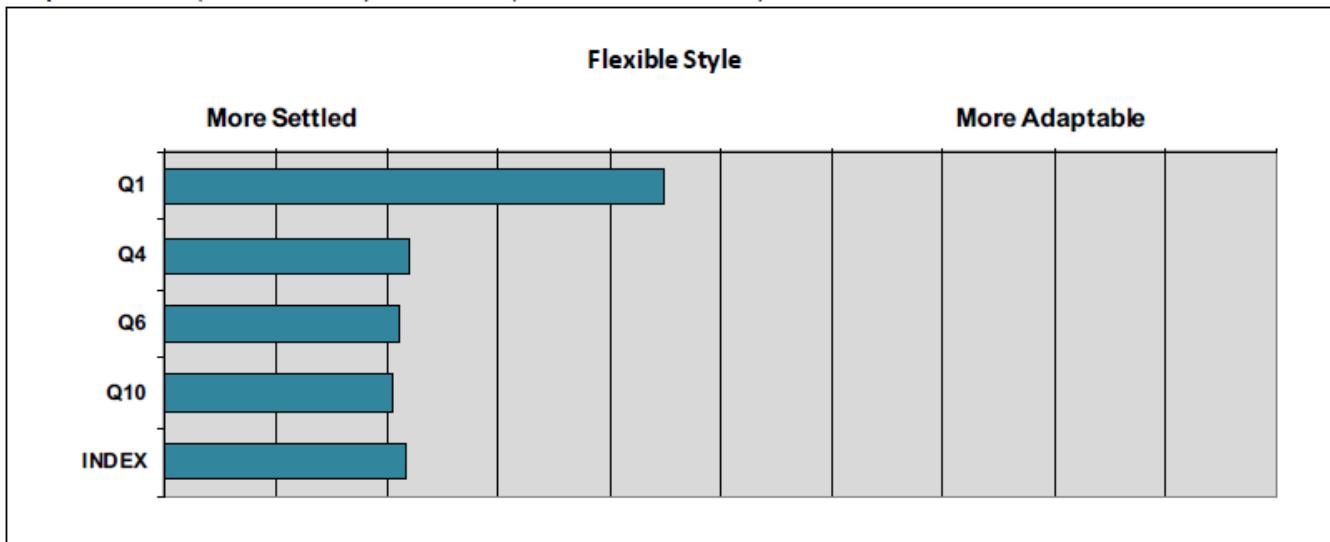
Question Text

- Q1 Our members welcome changes in worship.
- Q4 Our church tends to stay very close to established ways of doing things.
- Q6 We are willing to adapt our worship to the needs and circumstances of the people we want to reach in our local community.
- Q10 Our church changes its program from time to time to meet the changing needs of its members.

Response Percentages (These are the scores from your congregation.)

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Tend to Disagree	Tend to Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1	0.0%	5.6%	33.3%	50.0%	5.6%	5.6%
Q4	0.0%	0.0%	9.5%	38.1%	33.3%	19.0%
Q6	0.0%	12.5%	25.0%	50.0%	12.5%	0.0%
Q10	5.6%	5.6%	27.8%	44.4%	16.7%	0.0%

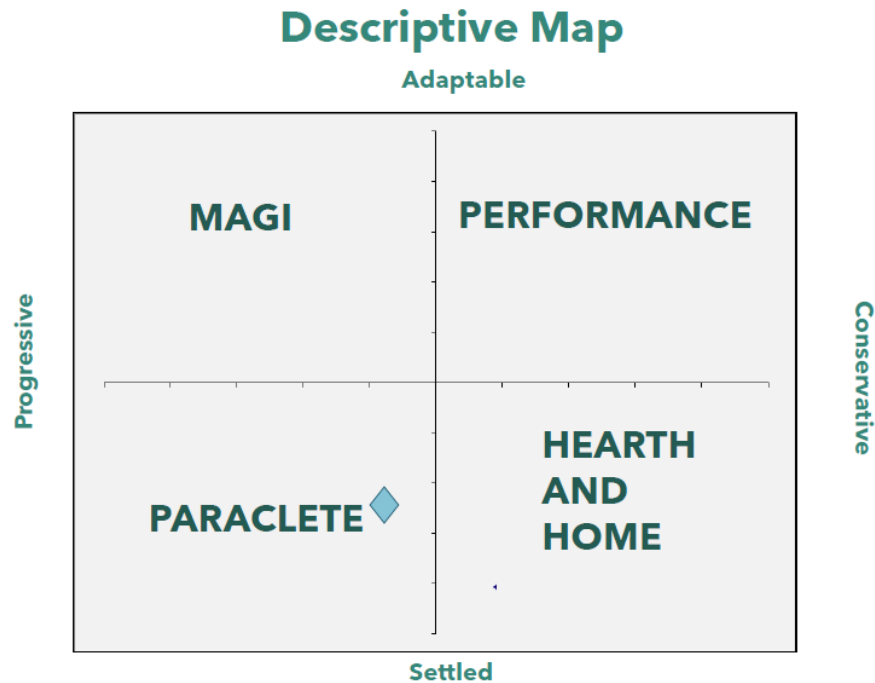
Comparative Profile (These show how your scores compared with other churches.)



Note: A question with an asterisk is negatively worded relative to the index. In the Comparative Profile, the polarity has been reversed. In every case a longer bar suggests a more adaptable evaluation.

Church Style Map

This map combines the theological and adaptability information, and with the addition of Elizabeth Hamilton's interpretive names for each quadrant, we find that we are a Paraclete church. The Paraclete is from John 14:15 and is described there as a "helper, advocate, encourager and friend who comes alongside us to help us." We are a helping church.



Elizabeth shared with us the gifts and "shadow side" of a Paraclete church or common difficulties for a Paraclete church.

The gifts we think we reflect as a church are

- We are intellectually open but pay attention to structure and ritual.
- Hospitality, inclusiveness, and spiritual practice are priorities.
- We are comfortable that everyone is on their own journey, but that there are patterns to faith that are important.
- We have good ministries of healing and hospitality.

The difficulties we reflect are:

- We overcommit to meeting the needs of others, leading to burnout in members and leaders.
- We sometimes fail to hold people accountable in the name of peace.
- The power of the Gospel and the story of Christ sometimes is less of a priority than the comfort of our community.

Congregational Health Perspectives

This section asked various questions about the congregation's health in the named areas. We learned that overall our congregation's responses fell in the center (fewer strongly agree/disagree than somewhat agree/somewhat disagree or agree/disagree) but with a strong leading to one side or another.

Hospitality -- 85% Agreed to the statement

"I sense an atmosphere of genuine care and concern among our members in time of personal need."

Conflict Management -- 94% Disagreed with the statement

"There is a disturbing amount of conflict in our congregation."

Governance -- 87% Agreed with

"The leaders of our church show a genuine concern to know what people are thinking when decisions need to be made."

Spiritual Vitality -- 86% Agreed with the statement

"I work to connect my faith to all the other aspects of my life."

Ministry Support -- 67% Agreed with the statement

"Our church does a good job supporting persons in ministry by reminding them that they are making a difference."

Worship -- 73% Agreed with the statement

"The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content."

Open Responses

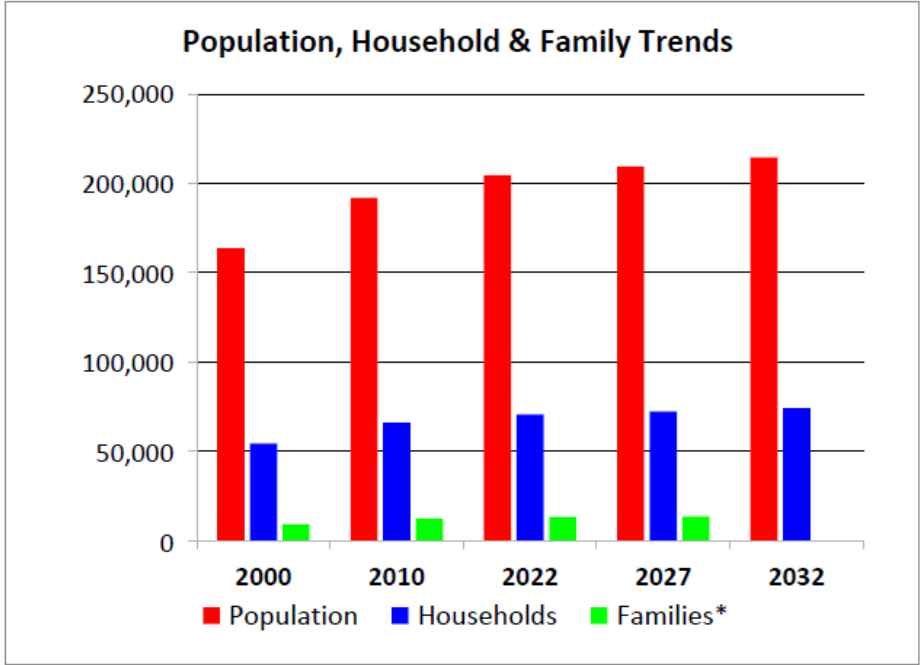
Q25 asked for individual responses: "What might we do in the future that would make us different from every other church in our community?" The majority of responses fell into these five areas:

- Increase membership, e.g., have social events.
- Shut-in ministry.
- Create youth programs.
- Repair Neff, which will give us space to host social events.
- Create a welcoming, non-judgmental atmosphere.

Conclusion

Elizabeth explained that based on churches similar in size to ours, we ranked "high energy / high satisfaction." She said the data says we are a healthy church, in fact, more so than average for this time and in her experience working with churches during changes. The data showed that growth is our goal, and we take calculated risks to move the church forward.

Population



The population for our area is 204,773 people. The population is projected to grow 2.3% in the next five years, a higher growth rate than average for New Jersey.

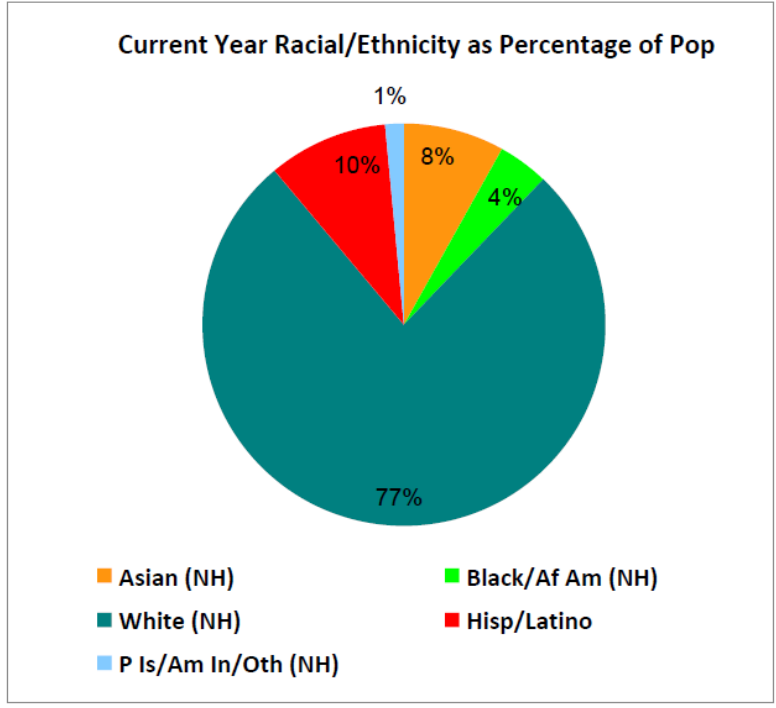
NOTE: Family Household data is not projected out 10 years.

Income

The average income for our area is \$142,661. The average income per person is rising, while family income is projected to remain steady.

Race

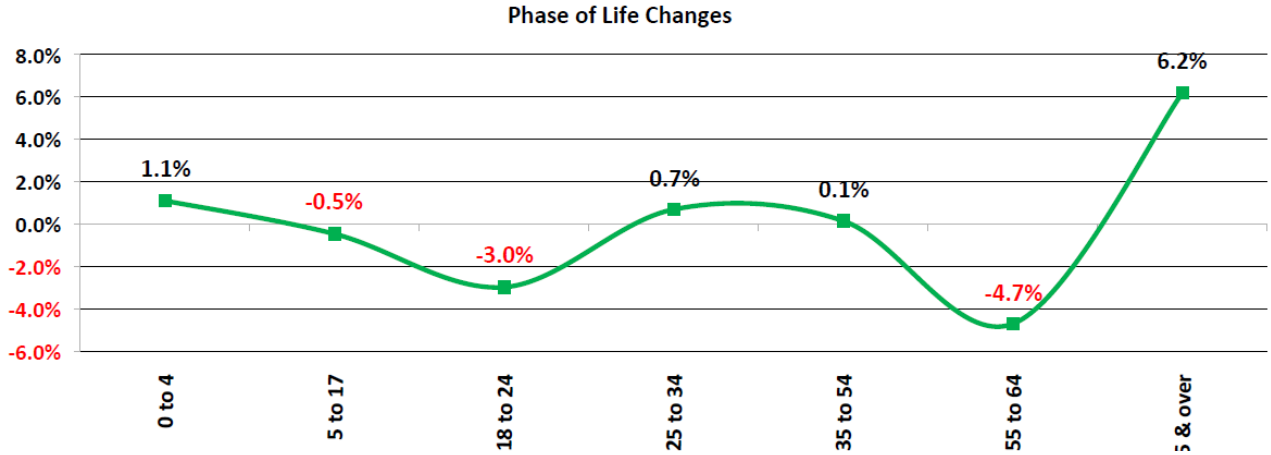
The racial makeup of our area is seen in the pie chart. The major changes anticipated for the next five years are that the population of white residents will go down by 1.77% and the population of Hispanic/Latino residents will rise by 1.05% while the other groups remain stable.



This chart shows the percentage of each group for the current year estimate.

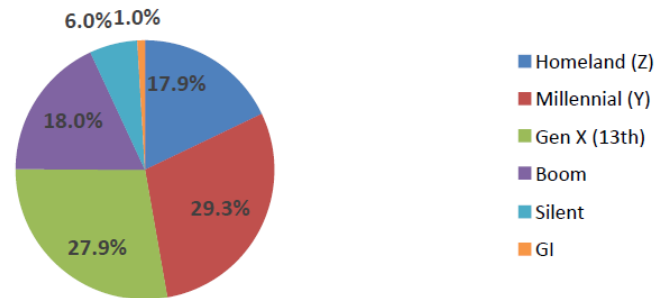
Age Demographics

The age groups for our area are growing in number for 0-4 and 65+, maintaining for 5-17, 25-34, 35-54 and in decline for 18-24 and 55-64.



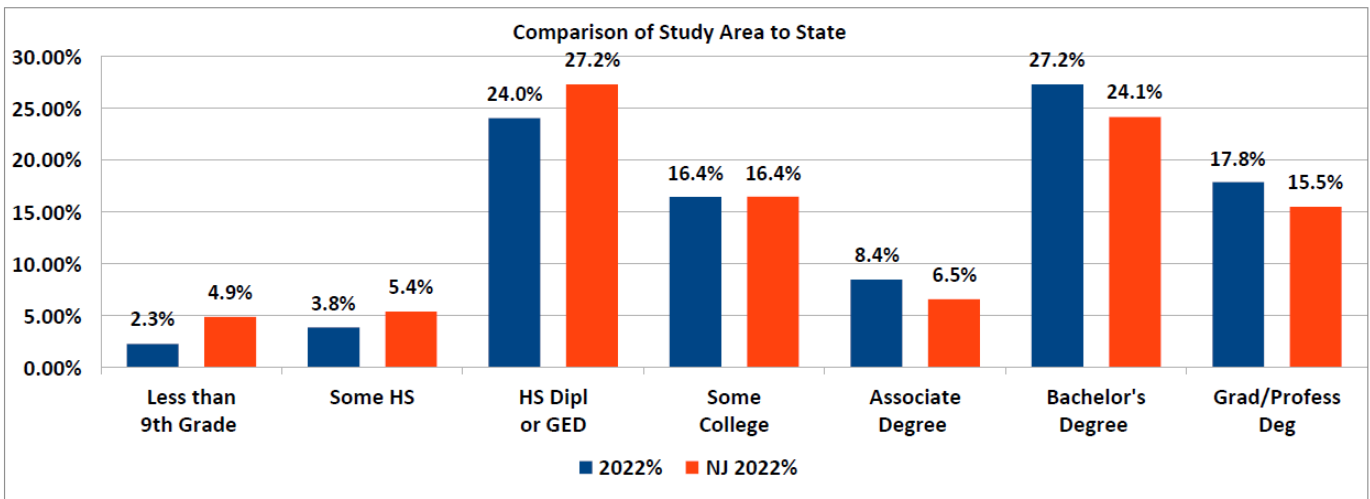
This pie chart to the right shows the layout of the generations for our area for 2023.

Generations Current Year Percentage



Education

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL COMPARED TO THE STATE



This graph shows the education level for our area in blue and for the state of New Jersey in orange. Our main takeaway is that most of our population have graduated high school and a large percentage with education beyond high school.

A Brief History of Old Tennent Church

Early history

From our website (<https://www.oldtennent.org/our-story.html>)

"With the increasingly hostile environment of the 1670s and 1680s, 200 Presbyterians (then called Covenanters), were banished from Scotland for their beliefs. They gathered aboard the sailing ship, Francis and Henry, and began their voyage to the new colonies. Arriving near the current city of South Amboy, many of them longed and searched for a suitable place to worship. In 1692, Walter Ker, aided by John Johnstone and several others, purchased a one-acre plot of ground near the Wickatunk depot and named this new site Free Hill. They built the first Meeting House upon this sacred piece of land."

That meeting house was the first meeting place of the newly formed Presbytery in December of 1706. The pastor of Old Tennent, John Boyd, was examined and ordained as the first duly ordained pastor of the new Presbytery at its first meeting.

In 1731 the church moved to its current location; our current building was built in 1751. the building was then used as the field hospital for the Continental Army during the Battle of Monmouth in the Revolutionary War.

We have continued in worship for 331 years.

Recent History

Part I: General Trends from 1980 - Present

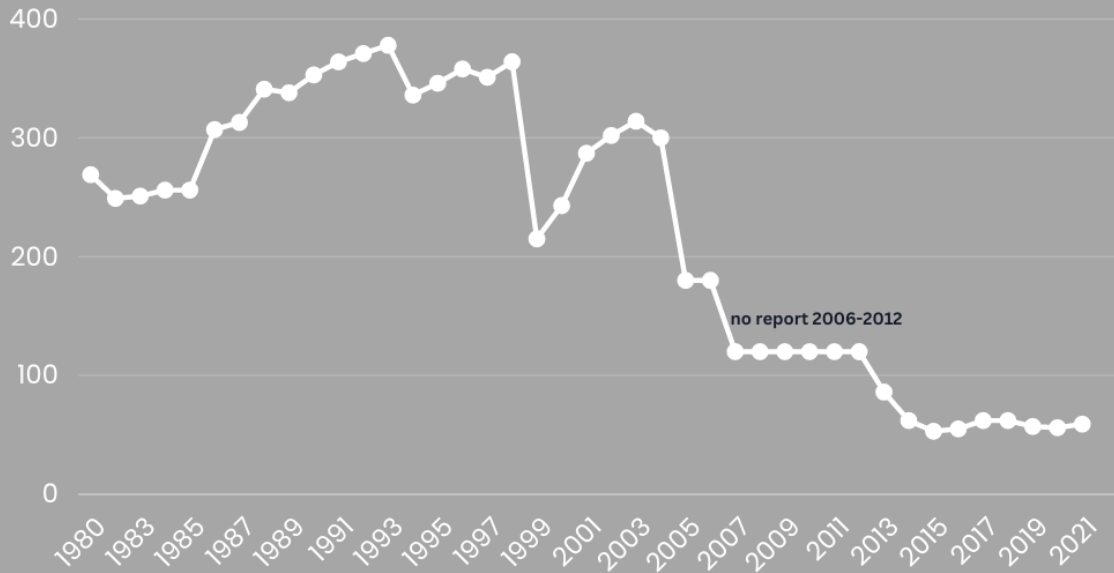
The following events occurred on a regular basis over the decades.

Regularly scheduled events (in no order):

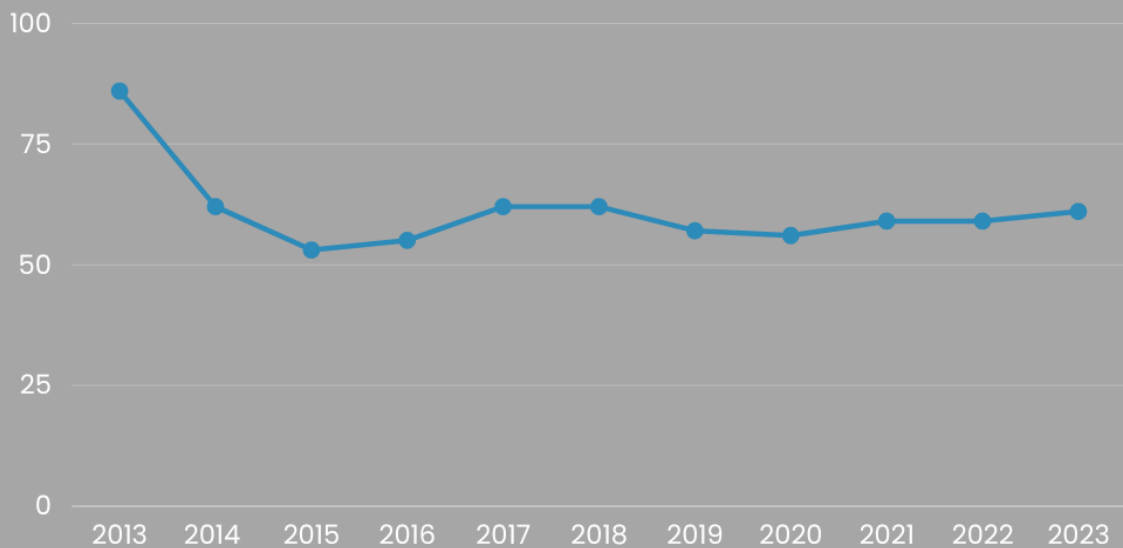
- We regularly support AA, NA, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Girl Scouts by providing space for their meetings.
- Gave donations to a variety of local causes as well as regional and international.
- Heritage Day is the last Sunday in October.
- Provided the Pastor's Discretionary Fund to help congregation members in need (until the 2010s, Deacons do care fund now).
- The Samaritan Center is a community food pantry. Old Tennent Church is a part of the board, the founding and ongoing running of the Samaritan Center. In addition we support with volunteers, financial donations, and food drives (e.g., Soup-R-Bowl Sunday).
- Heifer Fund Collection.
- Easter Sunrise Service followed by a continental breakfast and an 11 am service.
- Various covered dish dinners and family nights.
- Fall Bazaars.
- Confirmands were a continuous activity that ran throughout the decades until 2020.
- Adopted children through a mission program (World Vision).
- Sponsored three seminary students.
- In June – (on the Sunday that ended Sunday school) – “Children's Sunday.” Third graders would receive a bible with their name on it, and the children would take over the Sunday service.
- Vacation Bible School. Structure and numbers varied greatly. It is now a one-day event with approximately ten children participating.
- New member classes.
- Crop Walk with the Freehold Clergy Association faith communities.
- Handbells & Choir (often performed in a variety of public locations, up to 2019).
- Hanging of the greens for Christmas and de-greening in January (this could not have been accomplished without Boy Scout Troop 180).
- Christmas Drive-thru (years vary). We could not accomplish this without numerous community volunteers and the help provided by Boy Scout Troop 180.
- Christmas Eve – Held 7:30 pm service with a live Nativity in the 90s. We now hold evening services at 7:00 pm and 11:00 pm.
- 1990s and 2000s Sunday School Rotation Model was used.
- Consistently throughout these decades, work was done to maintain the buildings.
- Monthly newsletters are mailed to all church members.

Church membership numbers

Membership of Old Tennent Church



Membership of Old Tennent Church 2013-2023



Part II: 1980-1989

- Reverend Donald Ball, who served for 15 years, vacated the pulpit on April 13, 1980, and was replaced by Reverend Hugh MacKenzie in January 1981.
- The youth ministry was active and well-attended. Fundraisers, retreats, Rock-a-thons, Bike-a-thons, and sleepovers occurred regularly.
- Throughout the years, adult members had regularly scheduled covered dish fundraisers, men's and women's bake-offs, progressive dinners, and square dancing.
- Families were involved in spring picnics, Harvest Home dinners, Christmas parties, family retreats, and camp nights that were all well attended and profitable. Funds were always donated to various charities, including the Samaritan Center and Open Door, to name just a few.
- Two bell choirs were created. They performed during Sunday services and at outside venues, especially during the holiday season.
- The first Christmas drive-through began in 1987 and continued throughout this decade
- The decade began with 269 active members and, in December 1989, ended with 338.

Part III: 1990-1999

- The Master Ringers had the opportunity to perform at Disney World. Various fundraisers took place to finance the trip, including:
 - End-of-month bake sales;
 - Car washes;
 - Tupperware party; and
 - Breakfasts.
- An updated pictorial directory of members was created.
- In 1992, the church celebrated its 300th anniversary. A year-long celebration scheduled one event per month that included some of the following:
 - Memorial tree project;
 - Harvest Home dinner;
 - Time capsule;
 - Heritage tour;
 - Restoration of Old Scots burial ground; and
 - Scottish night with dinner and entertainment.
- Sunday school children collected clothing and food for the Samaritan Center. They participated at the annual Bike-a-thons and Christmas pageants and attended vacation bible school.
- The Junior and Senior Highs started meeting together. They attended various events, including bowling, ice skating, and roller skating, attended concerts, and went on retreats.
- The drive-thru and Harvest Home resumed; both were a great success year after year.
- In 1999, the church had a temporary pastor as Rev. MacKenzie was called up to military service in Europe.
- A Mission Study survey and report were undertaken in 1992 through 1993.
- This decade began with 338 active members and, in December 1999, ended with 243.

Part IV: 2000-2009

A Time of Conflict and Upheaval

The 2000s were a time of great turmoil and pain for Old Tennent. The good ministries of the church, including worship, children and youth, mission-service, and hospitality, continued and even thrived during this time. However, other things went badly. Whenever the congregation met for a Congregational meeting, there was bickering and fighting over decisions to be made. Areas of disagreement included:

- Lack of clear communication between church ministry areas;
- The church was upset at denominational choices being made about the place of LGBTQ+ people in the ministry and leadership of the larger church;
- There were sides taken over the leadership of the pastor and his role; and
- Disagreements about church finances between the Board of Trustees and the Session.

In 2001-2002, the pastor was away often as he served in the military at Ft. Monmouth and had to be part-time during this period. Upon his return, there was so much conflict that the pastor asked the Presbytery to institute an Administrative Commission (“AC”), which was granted. The AC began its work on January 14, 2004, and presented a report on November 20, 2004. In August 2004, Rev. MacKenzie resigned and departed. The November report of the AC names tension over Rev. MacKenzie’s leadership as a primary presenting issue; the recommendations included:

- Addressing long-standing problems of power and leadership between the Session and the Trustees;
- ·Lack of compliance to the Book of Order as it regards to the content and behavior at a Congregational meeting;
- The roles and boundaries of leaders being transgressed;
- Lack of communication in the church; and
- ·Lack of trust among the members.

The Congregational meeting was held on December 12 2004, and although some things were accepted, others were not. Notably, the move from a bicameral organization to a unicameral organization failed. Over time, the AC continued working to fix the situation. Still, the conflict between the Session and Trustees continued, culminating in a New Jersey State court case and Ecclesial charges being filed in 2006. In the end, the Trustees were understood, per Presbyterian policy, to be a board under the Session's leadership. The court case concluded in February of 2007 that the cemetery and church must become separate organizations. The land surveys and mediation work took until January 4, 2009, to be completed. The Administrative Commission continued work to assist the church with structure and process until 2012. In February of 2005, Rev. Barbara McDonald became the pastor at Old Tennent. She helped to implement needed changes and reinstated some clarity and focus on ministry within the church while also serving as a part of the court and Presbytery proceedings on behalf of the church.

Part IV: 2000-2009

Continued

This decade began with 243 active members and ended with 120 or fewer (records are unclear 2007-2012).

During this decade, many events raised funds for charities. Some included:

- Heifer International
- 30-Hour Famine
- Samaritan Center
- AIDS Center in Asbury Park.

Part V: 2010-2019

Rev. Barbara McDonald's term ended on 12/31/12. Her time as our Interim Pastor was fraught, but she did lead us well through all the difficult realities of the disagreements and needs that happened in those years. By the time she left, we were heading for a more stable and hopeful future, even as we were tired and still smarting from the difficulties of the previous years.

Rev. Doug Hughes began his time as our pastor shortly after Rev. McDonald's departure. Following this, things began to pick up again, with many past events resuming. Energy and connection returned in the church. Members returned to doing the work of being church to one another and for the community. Always a big fundraiser, Harvest Homemade profits were divided into various charities and special church events.

Records indicate that 2013 started with 86 active members. By 2017, there were 62 active members.

Church youth held many fundraisers and participated in volunteer work. Among these:

- Planted dune grass at Seaside Heights;
- Donated toys and snack food to the Samaritan Center;
- Held a youth fair and flea market;
- Picked and donated apples to the Samaritan Center;
- During the Holiday Boutique, they sold potato soup and cranberry relish;
- Collected cans of soup for the Samaritan Center; and
- VBS raised \$101 for the Heifer Fund and raised 39 lbs. of food for the Samaritan Center.

The Deacons sent meals to members who were ill. They also supplied food donations to five Samaritan Center families and food baskets were made up for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

From September 2016 to May 2017, Alex Kim was our new intern. A grant from Princeton Seminary provided funding. Starting in September 2018, Sarah Jane Nixon became our new intern. In April 2019, she accepted a pastoral position with the New Dublin Presbyterian Church in Virginia. That August, church members attended her ordination.

Part VI: 2020-Present COVID and Life Beyond

The members of Old Tennent were reluctant to stop in-person services during COVID. In compliance with the public health mandates, this was done. At the time, our sanctuary facilities and member capabilities were not conducive to live online services. Spiritual support and church business were provided using the church website, Zoom and conference calls. Worship services were filmed and added to the website later in the week until the arrival of Rev. Dixon in September 2021, who began live-streaming worship first on Facebook and later to the church's YouTube channel.

As soon as some of the restrictions were lifted, in June of 2020, the worship committee taped off every other pew so social distancing could be maintained. A “family pew” was designated for folks with children. Hand sanitizer and masks were available in the narthex. The ability to open the sanctuary windows to provide fresh air and natural ventilation was a blessing.

The sanctuary was cleaned and sanitized weekly. Bulletins were available online for anyone wishing to remain at home. For communion, wafers and juice were handed out in individual, sealed cups.

The annual church picnic, spring luncheon as well as the Harvest Home Dinner, and the Christmas drive-thru were all canceled due to COVID, although the drive-thru did start again in 2022.

We are slowly resuming to the way things were before March of 2020, starting with some of the old tried and true events that brought our congregation together.

Part VI: 2020-Present Activities and Events

From January to April 2021, Olivia Sandel was our intern. In August, Rev. Hughes resigned effective August 1, 2021 (to move to Florida). Pastor Jessica Dixon was offered a contract as interim Pastor.

In September 2021, it was approved to allow Ken Burns, a documentary filmmaker, to film both the inside and outside of the church for a documentary on the Revolutionary War. The filming took place in June of 2022 with the anticipated documentary airing in 2025.

By 2022, Rev. Dixon, Rev. Alan Olson of First Presbyterian Freehold, and the church leaders planned joint Lent and Holy Week worship services. Then the churches shared Pentecost with a BBQ at First Freehold Presbyterian Church, a Fourth of July BBQ at Old Tennent with the First Presbyterian Church, and Vacation Bible School. The church held a "Craft & Stuff" bazaar, including a bake sale. The Christmas Drive-thru resumed, as well as the Ladies' Holiday Craft and Dinner. Pastor Jessica also held our second annual Pet Blessing event in October.

We continued with fundraising events that included:

- One Great Hour of Sharing;
- Christmas in July (food donations went to the Samaritan Center);
- 20 school bags and hygiene kits were donated to the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance;
- Soup-R-Bowl Sunday;
- CROP Walk;
- Continued support to a child through World Vision and
- Collected supermarket gift cards to give out to families at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Christian Education continued to serve adults and children. In the future, a preschool Sunday school class may be added. A dedicated volunteer and a couple of substitutes provided the nursery child care.

Part VII: Old Tennent Now

Our current life as a church is going well. We welcomed five new members in February of 2023, representing a total of 5 families, including six children. We are excited to welcome this new energy and the visitors who have been joining us for the last two years. We look forward to seeing what new directions the Spirit is leading us and how we will maintain our good traditions while welcoming the changes that will make us the best church we can be into our future, starting with the calling of our new installed pastor sometime in the year ahead. Our leadership and members are hopeful about the future and what is possible in the next generation of the life of our church.