
MISSION REVIEW REPORT

First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn



MAY 1, 2025

124 Henry Street, Brooklyn NY, 11201

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn is an intentionally inclusive and diverse Christian community committed to serving God in our world.

As followers of Christ, we seek to:

**Be a fountain of spiritual and emotional comfort for all people;
Glorify God through music and song;
Be joyful participants in the worship and life of our community;
Be ambassadors and activists for peace and justice in the world;
Provide for the physical needs of those within our church,
community and world;
Be models for our children and youth
to be compassionate citizens of the world; and
Be stewards of our financial blessings and foster congregational growth.**

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I. Background on the Mission Study

A. Purpose of the Mission Study

While pastoral transition is a major event for any congregation, this transition is especially important for First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn because there have been several interim pastors, installed pastors, and leaders over the last 19 years.

It is especially important that this Mission Review describe as fully as possible the journey of this historic congregation, its remarkable ministries in the community and wider world, and the significant place it holds in the hearts of its congregants. In recent years the church has continued to grow its programs and ministries, both internally and in the community, and is energetically embracing this opportunity to continue its journey as the beloved community at 124 Henry Street.

The following questions guided our process to understand how we are realizing our mission today:

- How has the history of our church shaped our congregation, our worship, and our ministries?
- How is First Presbyterian shaping the lives of our congregation?
- How is First Presbyterian ministering to our broader neighborhood and the world?
- What are the needs of our community/world and how do we propose to meet them?
- What is God calling us to do in the next phase of our ministry?
- What kind of skills, experience, and personal characteristics do we need in our new pastor?

The results of our reflection, contained in this Review, will inform the work of our upcoming Pastor Nominating Committee, as it prepares a Ministry Discernment Profile, which will provide a description of the mission and ministry of our church, a “job description” of our pastoral position, and basic key attributes we are seeking in our new pastor.

B. Committee Members

The following members have served on the Mission Study Team: Dennis Barton, Current Elder Dimitri Moise, Chi Ling Moy, Andrew Rounds, Caroline Sheehan, Interim Pastor Danila Noble, and our Liaison from the New York City Presbytery, Anne Conroy.

C. Activities of the Committee in Preparing this Mission Study Report

Under the procedures of the Presbyterian Church USA, we are called upon to conduct a search for a new pastor following specific steps. Our first task is to prepare this Mission Review, which is approved by the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn Session, and then forwarded to the Presbytery of New York City Commission on Ministry for review and approval. Once approved, First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn can elect a Pastor Nominating Committee, which will conduct the search for a new pastor and present a candidate to the congregation for its approval. In preparing this Mission Review, the committee has:

- Reviewed historic church documents and recent annual congregational reports.
- Designed and fielded an online survey of our congregation that received 168 responses, as well as several brief surveys on purpose and practice.
- Conducted online and in-person focus groups with members of the congregation, including teenage members (12), parents of all children (13), men's breakfast fellowship (8), women's retreat (24), Queerly Beloved(7), recent new members from the past 5 years (13), Power Hour Adult Bible Study (8), choir (20), and a general group (4) for a total of 109 participants.
- Collected background information on our community and the ministry of our Church.
- Reviewed and collated interim pastor interviews with 80 members and attenders.
- Prepared this Mission Study Report for review and approval by the Session and the New York Presbytery Commission on Ministry.





II. About First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn

A. Church History

In the third decade of the nineteenth century, with a population close to 5,000, and with the distilling of alcohol its most profitable industry, the village of Brooklyn was about to experience ‘change’ as a third certainty of life. Some villagers resented the bustle and progress, preferring the old sights and sounds – the Brooklyn of the leather-breeched butchers, tallow candles, street corner pumps (dispensing questionable water), and swine wandering at will in the streets. These “traditions” no doubt reassured a few residents.

However, a NYC guidebook of the time announced, “You should extricate yourself from the narrow, dirty and disagreeable streets of Brooklyn with all possible dispatch.” Hence the first municipal laws of the City of Brooklyn were enacted: “Sheep, hogs, and bulls are not permitted to run at large; Landlords must provide sidewalks; Bakers must use ‘wholesome flour’ or risk a ten cents a loaf fine. . .” But nothing that occurred in the year 1822 was more representative of the awakening energies of the village than was the founding of the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn.

Established in 1822, The First Presbyterian Church at 124 Henry St. was constructed in 1846 and was designed by William B. Olmstead. The church’s memorial doorway, added in 1921, was designed by James Gamble Rogers. The church features a 90-foot crenellated tower with pointed arch windows. Many of the stained glass windows are by the Louis Comfort Tiffany Studios.

First Presbyterian Church was established in Brooklyn in 1822 and has been in continuous existence since that date. The original building was on the site of what is now the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims. First Presbyterian sold that site to Plymouth Church in the 1840s. The church is part of the Brooklyn Heights Historic District, created by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission on November 23, 1965.

From an informal group meeting held in 1821 at the Brooklyn Sabbath Union Sunday School, Ezra Woodhull and nine others (six men and three women) a year later petitioned the New York City Presbytery to formally organize the First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn. Our church building on Cranberry Street was the first church structure in Brooklyn Heights.

Since then, seventeen pastors/heads of staff have led the congregation through times of peace and war, reconstruction and two pandemics, times of conservatism and liberalism, more and more with an eye toward justice and mercy, and commitment to diversity and welcome.

By 1835, the congregation had grown to 603 members. The church's third pastor Dr. Samuel Hanson Cox (1837 to 1854) assumed the leadership of First Church in the very year of the great Presbyterian schism.

American Presbyterianism was in decided dissension regarding various theological disputes, a plan of union with the Congregationalists, and the question of slavery. Dr. Cox aligned himself with the more progressive Presbyterians known nationally as the New School. Through his ardent and articulate voice, he would become known as "Brooklyn's first abolitionist."

Among a straighter sect of Presbyterians, who held that salvation was reserved for a limited company of the elect, he was regarded with suspicion. Cox held that the atonement of Christ knew no bounds, that it was the basis of salvation offered to all people in the preaching of the gospel.

The next three pastorates were relatively brief, one interrupted by the Civil War and another by desperate financial difficulties and detachment from the community. In 1877, First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn called Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall (1877 – 1899.) He possessed the qualities needed to reinvigorate a discouraged church and restore its once close association with its neighbors. If Dr. Hall fit the times, he fit the place as well. An historian has noted, "Brooklyn Heights was entering the days of its maturity, days of pleasant affluence, of dignified well-being, assured, complacent, the very apex of self-respecting Protestant society." Dr. Hall was very much in harmony with his setting. In the course of his two decades as pastor, membership would increase by more than 800. Church revenues would grow far beyond anything previously imagined. His ideals guided the gift-giving of parishioners which left us with tangible evidence of their generosity and of his spirit. It was the great flowering of First Presbyterian Church. After twenty years at First Presbyterian, Dr. Hall accepted a call few would have denied him, the presidency of Union Theological Seminary. The Session in its minutes noted that "those who will come after us might not gather

from the record any proper conception of how his personal ministrations have endeared him not only to those of his own flock but to a multitude throughout the city who feel his leaving our church a personal loss.”

Dr. L. Mason Clarke next arrived at First Presbyterian (1897 – 1924) when the congregation was financially solvent, in fact, adding several endowment funds, and another Tiffany window. A sincere and talented preacher with a well-informed inquiring mind, Dr. Clarke consistently drew listeners to his pulpit for more than a quarter of a century. His preaching strove to make religion intelligible to every man and woman in the pews, something they could use in dealing with the complexities of life. He was also a courageous fighter for freedom of thought and found intolerable the exclusion of the Unitarian Church of the Savior on Pierrepont Street from the union services conducted by the local churches on special occasions. At his urging, the Unitarians were invited to join the circle, permanently.

Dr. Clarke also challenged those within the Presbyterian Church itself who tried to shackle the Christian spirit. By the end of World War I, many Presbyterians assumed that a liberal interpretation of the Bible had long since been accepted. They were dismayed and disheartened to learn otherwise when a militant faction of the national church took up theological arms to preserve the faith as they saw it. These were the fundamentalists who with great zeal fought to drive modernists from seminaries and pulpits. The fundamentalists held tenaciously to the acceptance of the virgin birth, the resurrection of the body, a rigidly orthodox doctrine of atonement, the infallibility of the Scriptures and a literal second coming of Christ. They rejected any other possible interpretations and forbade any honest difference of opinion.

The most famous of these differences of opinions was the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 which pitted a liberal reading of Genesis against the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution. The Sunday after the Presbyterian General Assembly had voted in favor of the fundamentalists, the worshippers of First Church assembled in tense expectancy to hear Dr. Clarke's response. He said: "I charge the assembly with being afraid of the light...with what is perilously near to blasphemy against the spirit of God who has always been leading men into a clearer truth." Squarely, boldly, he had taken the stand for intellectual freedom and his congregation supported him.

In 1932, Dr. Phillips Elliott (1932 – 1961) arrived to address the growing pains of Brooklyn and his church. Dr. Elliott had to meet the needs not only of the old brownstoners but also of the less established younger people of the apartment houses. He tactfully extended a welcome to lonely young men and women, unobtrusively renewed their faith, gave them friendship and guidance, and sent them forth strengthened and ready to do their share.

One of the most self-illuminating comments Dr. Elliott would make in his distinguished career was about the church's strength. "It lies," he said, "in the fact that it ushers people into a new kind of friendship with others, which, if it is

extended and increased, will mean that eventually all the world will be bound together in understanding and peace.”

After two very brief pastorates, Dr. Samuel L. Taylor (1969 – 1983) arrived as the church was becoming multicultural, including many ethnic groups, patrician Heights’ families and street people. Once again, First Presbyterian Church was a true community church. Dr. Taylor was instrumental in persuading several Heights’ churches to provide overnight sheltering to the homeless. Many activist groups were welcomed to First Presbyterian space. Dr. Taylor is remembered as a compassionate pastor, particularly to the ill and the lonely.

In 1986, Dr. Paul Smith became pastor with the determination to create a truly diverse and welcoming church. Spurred by his encouragement, the church music program, emphasizing gospel, was expanded and refined with professional instrumentalists and outstanding voices. The service music also encompassed rock, jazz and traditional hymns, styles which reflect the growing multicultural membership. In 1997, the General Assembly denied ordination on the basis of sexuality. First Presbyterian joined the dissenting churches.

Dr. Smith is the most recent beloved pastor, someone whom congregants often refer to as having influenced their lives and the life of the congregation most deeply. Many church discussions on various topics will include references to him and his ministry that shaped the mission and ethos of the church, especially with regard to diversity and inclusivity. Under the leadership of Rev. Paul Smith in the 1990’s, the theology of Rev. Howard Thurman was introduced to the congregation to great effect. Thurman’s book, *Footprints of a Dream*, nourished a desire in the congregation to become intentionally inclusive and diverse. Since that time, the congregation has been more diverse than most churches and more intentional as well.

Dr. Smith preached at the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa, for their centenary. His ministry grew to include interfaith outreach to local congregations. He brought sensitivity training to the local police precinct, introduced a lunch program for the homeless, and brought many famous leaders to his pulpit, among them The Dalai Lama from Tibet, Ambassador Andrew Young, Arthur Ashe, and the then Speaker of the House Tom Foley, all speaking for important social causes. In late summer, 2002, Dr. Smith was selected as chaplain for a day in the House of Representatives.

Following Rev. Smith’s retirement in 2006, First Presbyterian Church experienced a number of transitions in leadership. One ministerial candidate withdrew because the congregational vote threshold he established was not met. Following, are the leaders during these past 19 years:

The **Rev. Dr. Cari Jackson** served as Interim Pastor from 2006 to May 2009. The **Rev. Beth Waltemath**, June to October 2009, was an intern recently ordained and moving to a call in Georgia, but stayed for several months.

The Rev. Stephen Phelps served as Interim Pastor from November 2009 to Oct. 2010, when he became Interim Pastor at The Riverside Church in Manhattan.

The Rev. Dr. Flora Wilson Bridges was installed as Pastor/Head of Staff from December 2010 to May 2012.

The Rev. Nadine Hundertmark served as Interim Pastor from November 2012 to June 2016.

The Rev. Adrienne Thorne was installed as Pastor/Head of Staff from July 2016 to July 2022, when she became Pastor/Head of Staff at The Riverside Church in Manhattan.

Staff Member Conor Foley served as preacher and worship leader from July 2022 to December 31, 2023.

The Rev. Dr. Danila Corinne Noble has served as Interim Pastor from January 1, 2024 to the present.



“Prayer Works” banner made by children and youth

B. Healthy Congregations and the Action Planning Team Report

In 2021 – 2022, the Presbytery Stated Clerk, at the direction of the Committee on Ministry and the First Presbyterian Church Session, invited a facilitator to conduct a Healthy Congregations Congregational Assessment. This assessment included 50 interviews of both former pastors and current members, an educational event on “Congregations as Emotional Systems,” two surveys, and a final report. Also, an Action Planning Team was elected to use the final

report in creating specific recommendations for action that would address the areas of concern and improvement from the facilitator's report.

The Action Planning Team report has been used as a guide for the work of Interim Pastor Noble. For the first six months, Rev. Noble interviewed 80 members of the congregation to make their acquaintance, to learn of their experiences as members, and to hear their concerns and hopes. The interviews produced a rather uniform result- members both loved their church and freely offered their concerns over past conflicts. They are devoted to the church's ministry and mission and determined to move forward in a positive and healthy way. More detail on these interviews is found on page 29 of this report.

After these interviews concluded, **specific activities** related to the Action Planning Team report have been addressed, including, Session preparation each January (servant leadership included), Session retreat each spring, Session guidelines adopted for productive and spiritually rooted meetings, Session training in conflict transformation (with sermons on the same), a review of fiduciary responsibilities, and encouragement to participate in presbytery activities, specifically to offer a workshop for other congregations on technical aspects for broadcasting worship services, something First Presbyterian does very well. The presbytery has awarded the congregation a \$25,000 grant to start this process. And a task group formed by Session has recommended reinstating a board of deacons in 2025. It has been 30 years since such a board was disbanded. A number of members who are former Stephen Ministry caregivers are available to help inform this ministry. All these activities have been shaped to address the APT report.

C. Church Staff

Interim Pastor Rev. Dr. Danila Corinne Noble

Rev. Noble came out of retirement in 2024 to serve as Interim Pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn. She works closely with many committees and meets regularly with all staff. Since the church is short on office space, staff generally work from home, except for Rev. Noble, Anne Solages, and Victor Forde. She moderates a session of 15 elders and generally preaches 3 weeks per month.

Conor Foley

Conor, a seminary graduate currently seeking ordination with the United Church of Christ, came to First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn in 2021 as an intern and is now Minister of Outreach Ministry. Conor is currently serving the outreach ministry by knowing our visitors and inviting them to new member classes, supporting the Communications and Marketing Committee, organizing Firelight Community, writing grant applications for social action, managing

Wednesday night homeless ministry, moderating Becoming Peacemakers, and organizing Young Adults. Conor continues to preach occasionally.

Victor Forde

Victor has been Building Care Manager for 16 years. He is part time for our church and part time with St. Ann's School, which is in our building. He lives in a manse apartment.

Amy Neuner

Amy has been the part time Director of Music Ministry since 2001. Her 30-voice choir is one of the best loved facets of First Presbyterian life. This choir is open to all who are interested and is bolstered by numerous actors and singers from the city's theatres. In 2024, Amy added the youth group to her ministry responsibilities. The group has grown to about 15 youth, both junior and senior high. Amy's creativity and magnetic personality make her an organizer of many church activities, such as the all-church retreat and the Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, both significantly attended. She and husband Chris live in a manse apartment.



Amy Neuner and Matt Podd with the choir, Easter 2025

Chris Neuner

Chris, our part-time Media and Technical Director, works with a rotating team of interns who broadcast our Sunday services and many other events, including guest events. He secured a \$25,000 grant from the presbytery to support our training and offer technical assistance to other churches that want to learn how to do their own broadcasts. Chris is involved in developing our fellowship hall (Elliott Room) as a rental space for community groups. He also subs for instrumentalists in the church band.

Matt Podd

Matt has been our part time Instrumentalist and Arranger since 2015. With years of Broadway experience, he can play anything on all his keyboards. He creates many of our vocal/instrumental arrangements and hires, schedules, and leads our Sunday worship band.

Anne Solages

Anne, our Director of Church Operations, has been holding down the office since 2008. She provides oversight of the church's financial and administrative operations and is the first contact for many who contact the church. She works closely with many committees and is highly valued for her commitment and attention to detail.



Church Manse next door

D. First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn 2025 Budget and Finances

Income	\$1,108,220
Contributions, gifts, grants	\$463,331
Earned income	\$559,800
Fundraising	\$18,000
Investment income	\$85,089
Expenses	\$1,113,867
Payroll expenses	\$520,092
Music, Tech, Worship	\$86,120
Children, Youth, Families	\$22,880
Session, Meetings, Fellowships	\$19,960
Mission	\$77,505
Administrative	\$27,800
Presbytery Apportionment	\$12,192*
Building and Manse	\$356,608

*\$2,981 will be added from the mission budget.

Expenditures (from 2024 statistical report)

Local Program	825,458
Investment Expenditures	0
Local Mission	38,150
Per Capita Apportionment	14,288
Capital Expenditures	123,971
Other Mission	14,519

Financial planning has been challenging in recent years. Stewardship results have remained around \$300,000 for the last ten years, with the current year enjoying a welcome ten percent increase. Expenses have not remained stagnant, however, thus leading to a sense that the church is doing more with less. At the same time, programs and ministries are expanding, creating pressure on the congregation's resources.

Over the last thirty years the church has enjoyed the reliable presence of the preschool portion of Saint Ann's School, a prestigious school whose upper grades are located just down the street. The income received from this tenant has amounted to 1/3 of the annual church budget. St. Ann's is refitting a larger building near its main campus that will include the preschool in mid-2027, so our church is currently seeking other tenants to be available by that time. First Presbyterian is also renovating the Elliott Room to host outside events, possibly wedding receptions, starting in 2025. A consultant has been retained to organize and manage that new income opportunity. There is also an interest and growing activity in applying for grants that the church can use to support its various ministries. Those grant applications have begun to provide meaningful income. And a successful church fundraiser has inspired a more intentional effort to schedule and raise funds within the church.

In 2024, we met our pledge goal in dollars. Another important aspect of the church's financial picture is the desire to grow the number of pledgers and givers. The effort for 2025 brought in a few new pledging units but fell well short of the goal. This concern will be addressed again in the upcoming year by helping more new members and visitors find their place in the ministries of the church which will hopefully increase the likelihood of new pledges.

First Presbyterian's membership is quite evenly distributed among all ages. Over the last few years, the number of children and youth has grown to 41. This has been bottom-up growth, meaning the high school youth are just beginning to grow in number as younger youth mature. In addition, many new adult members are in the younger adult categories. Over the last 5 years, 75 new members have been welcomed.

Other 2024 statistics

Average Weekly Worship Attendance 248
 Almost evenly divided between in-person and online.

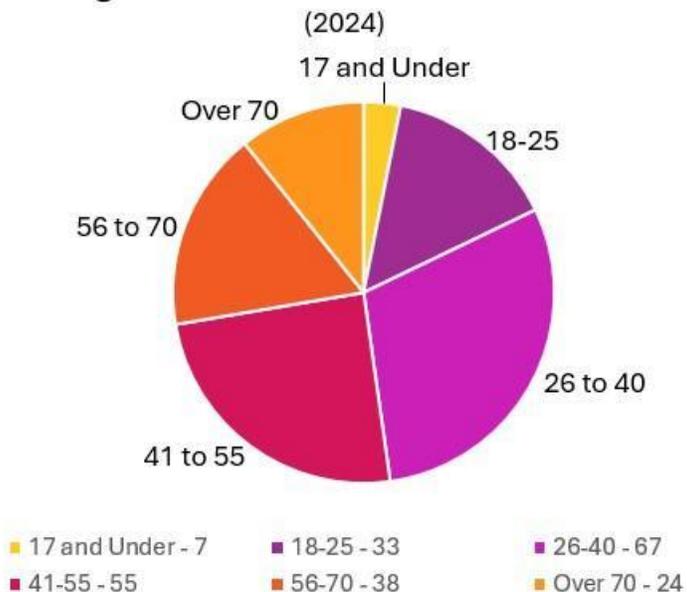


Intergenerational apple picking fellowship in NJ

Age Distribution of **Active Members** (2024)

17 & Under	7
18 - 25	33
26 - 40	67
41 - 55	55
56 - 70	38
Over 70	24

Age Distribution of Active Members



Gender Distribution (2024)

Female	139
Male	75
Nonbinary	10

Youth in Congregation (as of 12/31/24)

Age 4 and under	11
Elementary School (K – 5 th grade)	15
Middle School (6 th – 8 th grade)	6
High School (9 th – 12 th grade)	7

Race/Ethnicity (2024)

Asian/Pacific Islander/South Asian	11
Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous	0
Black/African American/African	64
White	117
Middle Eastern/North African	2
Multiracial	8
Hispanic/Latino	22

F. Session Committees

Session is currently composed of 15 elders, one clerk of session, and the interim pastor. Elders comprise a wide range of diversity like the congregation's. Elders are generally chairpersons of committees, although occasionally an elder not currently serving is chair. Session meetings are on the evenings of the third Monday of the month. A Saturday Session retreat is held in February to prepare for the coming year. And a May, day-long Friday retreat is held to explore various leadership topics and acquire new skills and knowledge. Recent topics have included conflict transformation, brainstorming on long range planning, and reviewing a proposal for a new Board of Deacons.

Adult Christian Education

Adult Christian Education at First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn consists of Sunday Morning Bible Study and special events in our church's calendar. In the past year these encounters often combine the exploration of sacred texts, Biblical reference points and personal witness, to enrich our understanding of God's Spirit in our lives. We have read and studied the works of authors as varied as Elaine Pagels, Howard Thurman, and Dietrich

Bonhoeffer among others. These "Power Hour" sessions have recently included discussion of the Parables of Jesus, where we have found that Biblical scholarship and personal engagement with otherwise well-known texts can create new perspectives on this unique genre of sacred literature. These discussions are animated and spirit-led and include approximately 12-15 people, both in person and online.



Buildings and Grounds

This sacred space has been a beacon of faith, hope, and love for generations, and it is our privilege as the Building and Grounds Committee to care for this legacy. The church building was built in 1847, and both it and the manse are in

good condition. In 2024, the committee addressed roof repairs, masonry restoration, plumbing and floor repairs, heating and electrical system maintenance, and upgraded energy-efficient lighting. Ceiling inspection and repair is also underway in the sanctuary after several ceiling portions fell during the night. The committee has adopted a Safety First Initiative to ensure the building is safe for all. This initiative includes a comprehensive safety audit, video intercom installation, and PHYLSence (sensors to monitor moisture levels.)

Building and Grounds Rental Income

- Two manse apartments are currently rented to the public. One of those is a two/three bedroom apartment usually occupied by the pastor.
- Two apartments are presently occupied by staff members.
- The Elliot Room (fellowship hall) in the church building has been improved to enhance its rental potential. A consultant had been retained to develop rentals in 2025, such as wedding receptions.
- From time to time the sanctuary is rented for large group community events.

Children, Youth, and Families

However you define family, you are welcome to ours. We believe the children are the church.



Kids' Church- Launched in the Fall of 2023, children ages 2-11 are welcomed to sing, pray, be creative, move, learn and grow together. We discuss stories from the Bible, say a prayer, and dive into discussions related to the stories. The curriculum is created and taught by an elder and committee leaders. Attendance ranges from 4 to 22 children. A Christmas pageant, written by a church member, featured all the children and youth, as well as some adults on a Sunday morning in December.



Youth Group- Also launched in 2023, up to 15 youth (junior and senior high) meet once a month after worship for a variety of activities. And off campus events are planned throughout the year, including being involved in the first all-church retreat which involved 70 participants of all ages. A Youth Sunday included 5 youth contributing to a sermon as well as leadership in the rest of the worship service. Organized and led by the Minister of Music.

Parents Night Out offers a Saturday evening when caregivers are provided for young children at the church so parents may have a free evening or time to meet together for support and friendship.

Churchwide Nominating

This committee follows the Book of Order and Church Bylaws to nominate elders, church officers, and others as needed. There are no deacons at this time.



Communications

We aim:

- To faithfully promote the mission and vision of the church.
- To ensure clear, consistent communication within our congregation and in the greater community.
- To create and coordinate diverse methods of sharing information
- To assist our committees and ministries in advancing their programs and initiatives.

This committee creates and updates a church website, publishes a weekly online newsletter, and has a presence with thousands of followers on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Threads.

Marketing

We create and develop stories that will encourage people to worship at First Presbyterian. The committee will tell the stories of our ministries and committees, from the joy we experience on Sundays to the way we serve and show up in the world and our neighboring communities. One result is a creative homecoming video.

A significant product is the ten professional quality videos of the church's history, found here: <https://www.firstchurchbrooklyn.org/bicentennial-celebration/>.

In 2025, the Communications Committee and Marketing Committee were combined into one committee working on both internal and external communications and marketing. Their responsibilities include weekly emailed newsletters, the church website, social media (Instagram, Facebook), short marketing films, banners for the fence in front of the church, and mailboxes in front of the church where passersby write and deposit cards sharing their worries and pick up words of encouragement. Current efforts center on more sharply focusing our message to the community.

Finance

The Finance committee creates a budget for the Session to consider and approve annually. Finances are monitored throughout the year and the committee works closely with Personnel and Buildings and Grounds and with the Director of Church Operations as financial opportunities and challenges are addressed. The Director of Church Operations works day to day to receive and deposit monies, to keep financial records, and to cut checks for part time personnel.



Salsa lessons at one of our weekly summer garden parties

Membership and Fellowship

Membership and Fellowship arranges greeters, ushers, and offering counters for Sunday worship. It also arranges fellowship hour after worship at which up to 80 people enjoy good food and conversation. Connecting with visitors is part of this ministry as is follow up and new member classes three times per year. Membership in New York City can be transitory with people coming and going for professional advancement. First Presbyterian seems to have a special relationship with tourist groups from France, with up to a dozen or more guests each week at worship. Apparently we are featured in some tourist information as the place to be on Sunday mornings.



A few of our many marchers in the 2024 Brooklyn Pride Parade

Queerly Beloved, an LGBTQIA+ group, welcomes all people, “not in spite of the gospel but because of it.” Queerly Beloved holds monthly gatherings, participates in the Brooklyn Pride Parade and the Brooklyn Interfaith Service, and leads worship in our own Pride service in June. Recent activities included the film *1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture*.



Making Sandwiches

Social Action

The **Food Pantry** is open every Thursday from 9 to 11 a.m. An abundance of volunteers comes from the church and community. 150 households are served weekly, including many canned foods, frozen meat, and vegetables from the new pantry freezer.

The **Community Fridge**, located on the sidewalk in front of the church, is a collaboration between the church, the Service Collective and Downtown Friendly. The food is contributed by community and church members and is available to anyone who needs it.

The church supports the **Eastern Farm Workers Association** by providing funds to acquire clothing, office supplies, hygiene items, and printing. We hold a toy drive during the holidays; this year, we provided two carloads of Christmas toys for children. Each Super Bowl Sunday, church members purchase hundreds of tamales made by the farm workers in order to make a donation to the Association.

The **Church of Gethsemane**, a nearby PCUSA church, is devoted to ministry with current and formerly incarcerated people and their families. Ministry

includes providing a home cooked meal for the congregation monthly following worship, regular visits to men's and women's prisons, and monthly opportunities are also provided after our worship to write letters of encouragement to those who are incarcerated.



Church of Gethsemane + FPC Brooklyn

Homeless Ministry is conducted each Wednesday evening as members visit with those living on the streets and provide food, clothing, hygiene items, and conversation.

CHIPS We prepare 150 sandwiches after worship monthly that are used on the following Monday at a local soup kitchen. Funds are also contributed to transitional housing for unwed mothers and funds for kitchen equipment.

The **Saving Our Democracy** ministry meets weekly and addresses and mails postcards to urge voter registration and voting.

White Rose Ministry provides funds to feed senior citizens at La Fernanda Presbyterian Church outside Havana and funds for sustainable farming at Lavistida Center in Santiago de Cuba. This ministry also travels to Cuba from time to time to deliver aid (partly collected from church fundraisers) and to deepen relationships between us..

Personnel

Church bylaws allow the Session, by a majority vote, to establish an Executive Committee which shall consist of the Pastor, Clerk as chair, and 3 to 5 active elders that may serve as a personnel committee.

The Personnel Committee helps ensure policies, procedures and processes that support staff and volunteers. It also ensures compliance with state and federal labor laws.

Stewardship and Spiritual Growth

The Committee on Stewardship and Spiritual Growth encourages all First Presbyterian members and friends to act as stewards of our church and its many ministries and activities, and more broadly, to be stewards and servants of our communities and the world. We are aiming to create a deeper and more robust culture of giving which will sustain the church and all of its ministries for years to come. No amount is too small; we are aiming for 100% participation.

In 2025, pledges totaled \$332,000, slightly exceeding the goal of \$330,000. In May, a Stewardship Fair was held to encourage the giving of time and talent with regard to committees and ministries. In the coming year the committee plans to fold in planned giving, grant writing, and fundraising events to its portfolio.





Choir and band

Worship and the Arts

We aim to nurture faith and respond to the evolving needs of our congregation, blending artistry and spirituality to create a worship experience that is both sacred and inclusive.

A 30-voice choir and 5-piece band lead worship with a wide variety of musical styles but usually including gospel style anthems and solos. Many musical pieces are composed and arranged by the band leader and original musicals by choir members are sometimes performed.



A children's sermon has been added to worship on each First Sunday. Sunday services are live-streamed and recorded each week and made available on demand on the web site. A Tech Team is adept at using slides, videos, sound,

and lighting to create unique environments for worship. An annual Christmas pageant has included an original script the past two years written by a choir member.

First Presbyterian Church is blessed by the incredible talent attracted to its music program. Many excellent musicians find their way here—singers who have sung in church choirs for years, and band members who are noted professionals around the city. Numerous Broadway and Off-Broadway performers contribute their abilities under the expert direction of Amy Neuner. Our band leader, Matt Podd, nationally known as an arranger for school choirs, as well as a Broadway music conductor, creates memorable arrangements for our musicians to offer. Many who worship here say the music program is key to their continued attendance.

Newer Task Groups include:

Strategic Space Planning Committee

Strategic Planning Committee was elected by Session in late 2023 to explore and pursue options for replacing our long-term tenant, St. Ann's School multi-class kindergarten. This current tenant supplies approximately 1/3 of the church budget and also provides special projects for the church, such as new windows in the fellowship hall and a ramp to the front door.

Firelight Ministries

Firelight Ministries includes Becoming Peacemakers, a combination of speakers, films, Bible study, and discussions on peacemaking in today's world. Homeless Ministry is a Wednesday evening walk through downtown Brooklyn to meet the homeless, engage in conversation, distribute care products, and share a meal. Young Adults brings together younger members for fellowship and service, and Sacred Space, a Wednesday evening prayer time, offers an alternative worship experience.

Tech Team

In recent years the church has invested in high quality broadcast equipment and we are blessed with an extraordinary tech team that records, broadcasts live on several channels, and manages sound and video. The

congregation appreciates the consistently high production values of their work. Broadcasting worship is their main objective, but they also manage sound and video for events that rent the sanctuary, education programs that seek a recording, concerts and special events, and fundraisers. The Team has been awarded a presbytery grant to share its expertise with other churches and train individuals to build tech capabilities at those churches. A number of tech team members have moved on to professional employment in the industry. In addition, a series of 10 professional-level videos covering the history of our church have been produced.

G. Interim Pastor Interviews

Upon commencing ministry on January 1, 2024, the interim pastor began inviting and interviewing 80 members and attenders to learn about their personal and spiritual journeys, their concerns and joys with the church, and what their hopes would be for the church's future.

In her first 3-month report to Session and presbytery, the interim pastor noted several common themes. First, there was great joy in belonging to this church community. Worship, music, and fellowship opportunities were very important to many lives. This church has been the most dynamic, diverse, and welcoming of any church many have attended. Second, there was, without soliciting, a desire to share their experiences of hurts and pains from previous church conflicts and a fear that they might be hurt again. Some of this pain occurred 4 and 5 years ago and there has been a sense that conflict has abated for the most part. Leadership and members have been encouraged to follow the Matthew 18 protocol for transforming conflict rather than seek triangulation. Session has received training on conflict transformation. We are highly educated and passionate people. We are continuing to learn how to share our views and work together. We have made good progress and are determined to grow even more. Third, there are silos of relationships, often differentiated by how long the persons have been with the church. We have tried encouraging a change in seating at worship, with limited results. And we have given conversation topics for fellowship time, also with limited results. One wonders what energy would be unleashed if acquaintances and friendships were more broadly experienced.

We are a community motivated by ardor. We have so many ministries because individuals have felt such deep passion around particular issues. Sometimes teams develop around these ministries and sometimes not. Order may be our greatest challenge- how to organize our work together so all the pieces create a synergy that makes the result of the whole greater than the sum of the parts. With our recent years of leadership changes, that may not be

surprising. We are moving ahead with organizing which may be a continuing project for several years to come.

H. Mission Word Clouds (June/July 2024)

At worship, the congregation was asked for one word that describes our congregation's mission:



At worship, the congregation was asked what value they individually hold most highly.



Smiles after Sunday worship

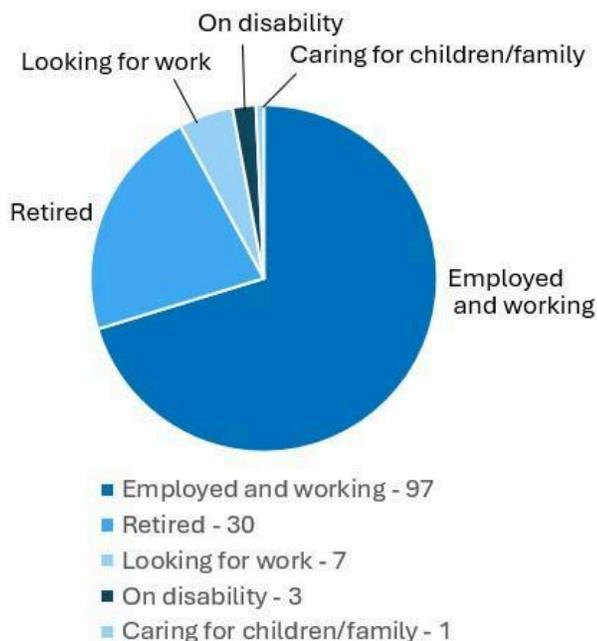
I. Congregational Survey Results

The congregational survey was administered on Sunday, November 18, 2024. Other than the survey, it was an ordinary Sunday with no other special activities, although for the preceding weeks the congregation had been advised of the survey and invited to attend. A total of 168 persons took the survey, the great majority on that day and a few more in the three weeks that followed. The survey was accessible in both digital and written form. Eighty-five percent of respondents (143) took it digitally and the rest by written form. The following sections of this report are the results of those 168 surveys only. Not every survey was fully completed. Some questions were skipped by some respondents, therefore, totals for each category may not add up to exactly 168.

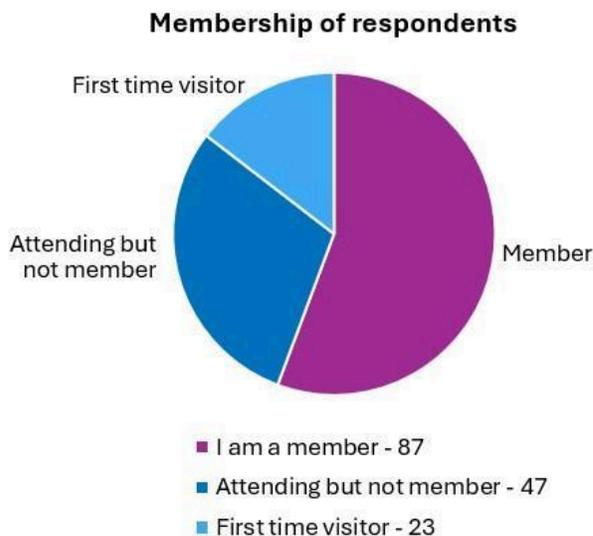
Congregational demographics

Most respondents are working or retired.

Those answering the survey said they were:

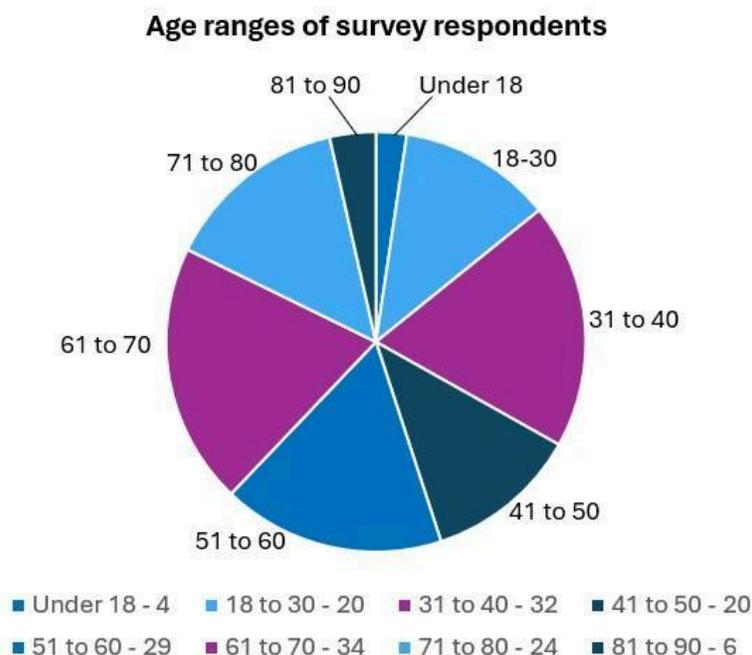


About half of respondents are official members of the church, while the other half were either first-time visitors or attendees who have not officially joined.



In terms of duration of church participation (whether official members or not), about 25% of respondents (44) started to attend First Presbyterian in 2024. An additional 40 more started to attend 1-5 years ago. The large proportion of more recent members reflects our new member classes: in 2024, we welcomed 21 new members.

Our generational diversity was reflected in survey responses, with a relatively even split between those 50 and younger (45%) and over age 50 (55%). The majority of respondents (61%) were female.



Gender identity of respondents

Female	102
Male	53
Nonbinary	5

Close to half of respondents who answered about their church backgrounds (45%) said that they were not active in another church before coming here. Most of these respondents were visitors or nonmembers of the church, but one-third of members were not active in another church before joining here. A plurality of respondents come from a Presbyterian background, but an almost equal number were former Catholics. Eight percent (12) were not raised in any faith tradition, while the remaining respondents were raised in different mainline or Pentecostal denominations.

Were respondents active in another church before attending FPCB?

Yes	89
No	69

Where respondents currently resided

■ Brooklyn - 121	■ Other NYC boroughs - 17	■ NY State - 4
■ Midwest USA - 3	■ South USA - 2	■ Europe - 2
■ S America - 2		



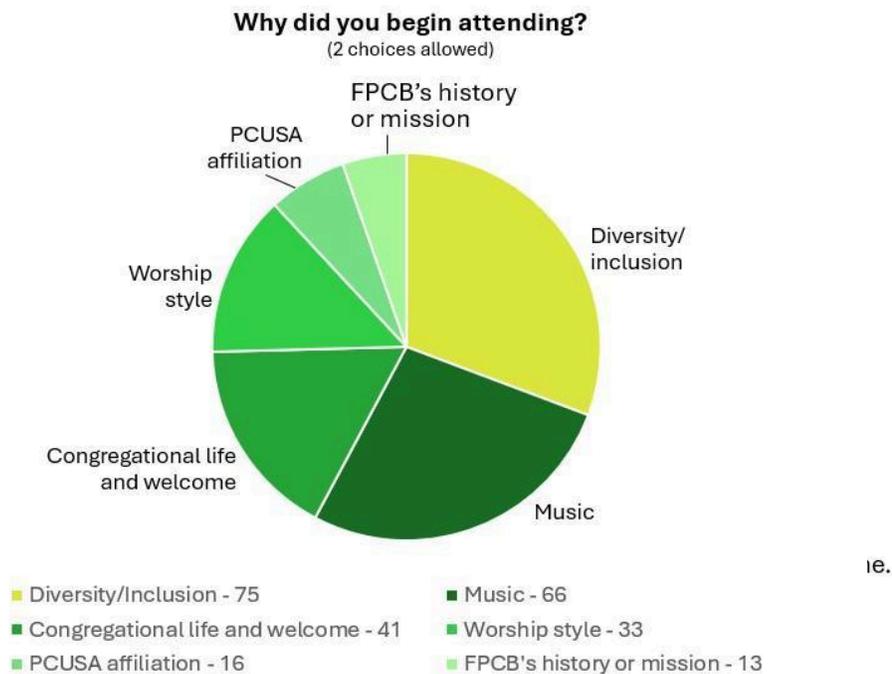
First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn casts a wide net, both for visitors and members. About ten percent of respondents were from outside NYC. Of the local

respondents, 11% come to church from a different borough. While the survey didn't ask about neighborhoods, the majority of our Brooklyn residents do not live in Brooklyn Heights, and travel from a different neighborhood to attend church.

Worship

In multiple choice questions, respondents were drawn to the church primarily because of music and its diversity and inclusion.

Two-thirds of respondents attend worship regularly (every week or every other week), either in person or through the livestream; the remaining were visitors or more casual attendees who come when they can. Typical weekly attendance at First Presbyterian includes 130 in person and 100 online, including from countries in Europe and South America..



Among 42 other responses that were written in, several respondents were influenced by Rev. Dr. Paul Smith (8) or invited by a friend/family (7).

Importance of Worship

Respondents shared that worship is a rewarding experience and very important in their faith life. They describe worship as joyful and energetic and an important aspect of connecting with God and others. Chief among the important aspects of worship are the music and preaching. First Presbyterian's choir is large and strong, filled with very talented musicians who are often involved in church leadership and ministries. The church worship band is professional and remarkable. It can't be overstated how often members and attenders say the inspiring and elevating music is what captures them and keeps them coming. In fact, after the church was listed on a French tourist website, there are numerous weekly visitors from France. For well over a decade now, these visitors have included our church on their itinerary for the worship and music.

Other comments on music include:

- "The music brings joy that lasts all week and come to mind in good and bad times."
- "The choir seems to have created a deep sense of community that might be replicated elsewhere in the church."

In free-text questions about worship, respondents appreciated the joyful, thoughtful nature of our services, and called out many other areas that they wish would change. Naturally, many of these opinions were conflicting!

IN WORSHIP

“I’m glad we…”	“I wish we could…”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sing • Invite many members to lead and speak • Address what’s going on in the world • Pass the peace • Listen to each other without judgment • Create a joyful, inclusive, nourishing community • Are positive, energetic, and vibrant. • Pray and praise God • Have relevant, thoughtful sermons • Connect • Are together • Are welcoming • Welcome children • Hug • Space to be our whole selves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have more quiet reflective time • Deepen the sense of sacredness and spirituality • Be mindful of the diversity of worship leaders • Keep worship closer to an hour • Make announcement time shorter • Use a variety of the arts • Go deeper into scripture • More prayers of the people, less prayers of the people • Not applaud sermons • More children’s sermons • More children participating • More congregational singing • Hear more direct contrast with evangelical theology • More accessibility

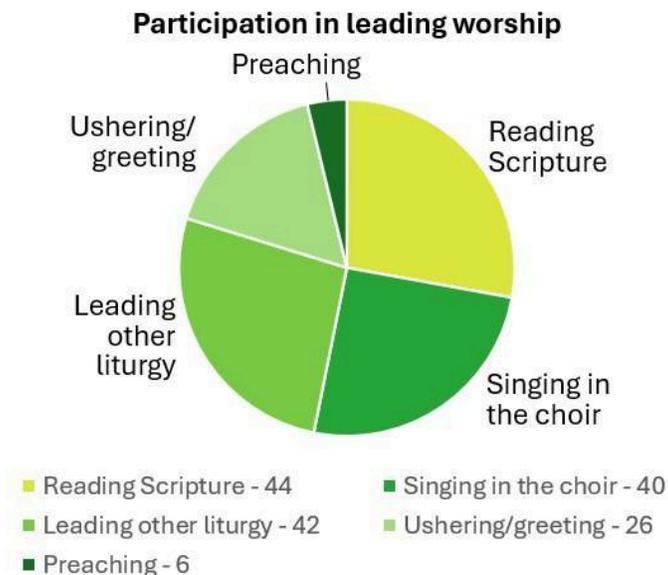
In multi-select and free text questions about the sermons, participants appreciated their spiritual instruction and calls to action, though opinions on politics in sermons are divided.



- “The sermons to which I feel the most connected leverage historical context and lessons from scripture to ground us in the world we live in today and call us to action through the prism of our mission statement.”
- “Sometimes too political.”
- “Would love to hear more about how Jesus’ life and teaching and resurrection gives us directives and hope for today.”

Since interim time started on January 1, 2024, preaching has largely been the responsibility of the interim pastor. Outreach Minister Conor Foley preaches occasionally. Guest preachers have included our own elders and other pastors from the presbytery. Conor Foley was previously the primary preacher from mid-2022 through 2023, following the departure of Rev. Adriene Thorne.

Of the respondents who indicated that they participate in leading worship, many serve by reading scripture, leading other liturgical portions of the service, or singing in the choir.



Personal aspects of worship and church life

Having friends at FPCB		FPC is inviting and welcoming	
Is important to me	102	Yes	147
Not important to me	5	No	3

The vast majority of respondents said that the church community is welcoming, and that friendships here are important. There are numerous opportunities to make friendships at First Presbyterian, including Queerly Beloved, Knitting and Needlework, Men's Breakfast, Women's Monthly Potluck, Annual Women's Retreat, Youth Group, Annual All-Church Retreat, Fellowship after Worship, and Choir, to name a few.

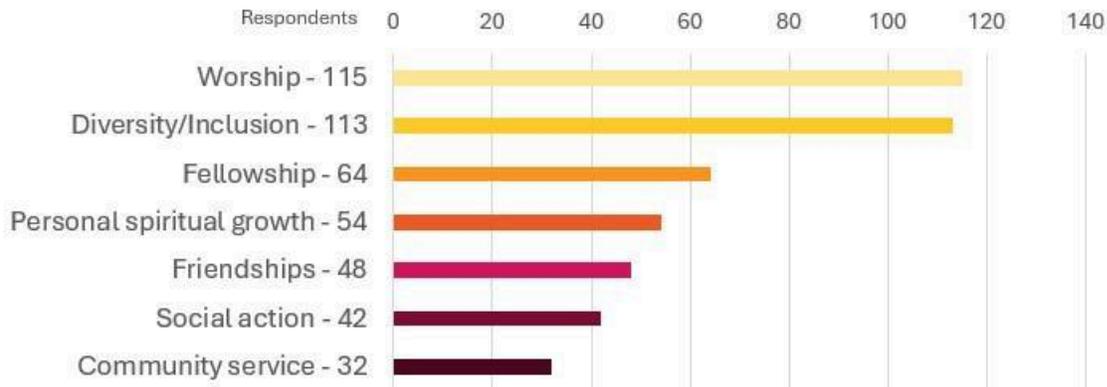
At Sunday worship, the front door is attended by two volunteer greeters who generally serve one Sunday per month and at the end of services by the Outreach Minister who greets visitors and captures names and contact information.

Written comments include:

- "More acquaintances rather than friendships."
- "It is my second home."
- "I have friends who have come and not felt welcomed due to their own faith, understanding, or cultural background."
- "200% fulfilling, welcoming and open."
- "not as welcoming as it should be to those who have different views of the world."
- "It has been awfully tough but I think we are in a better place than ever."

When asked to pick their top three most valued aspects of the church, participants named worship and diversity/inclusion as the clear top choices, with fellowship as a third.

Most valued aspects of FPCB



Most people said that they find it easy to serve, though several free text responses indicate that they were finding their place or figuring out how to serve. Slightly more than half of respondents reported that they've served on a church committee or ministry. The variety and depth of participation in different ministries is shown in the table below.

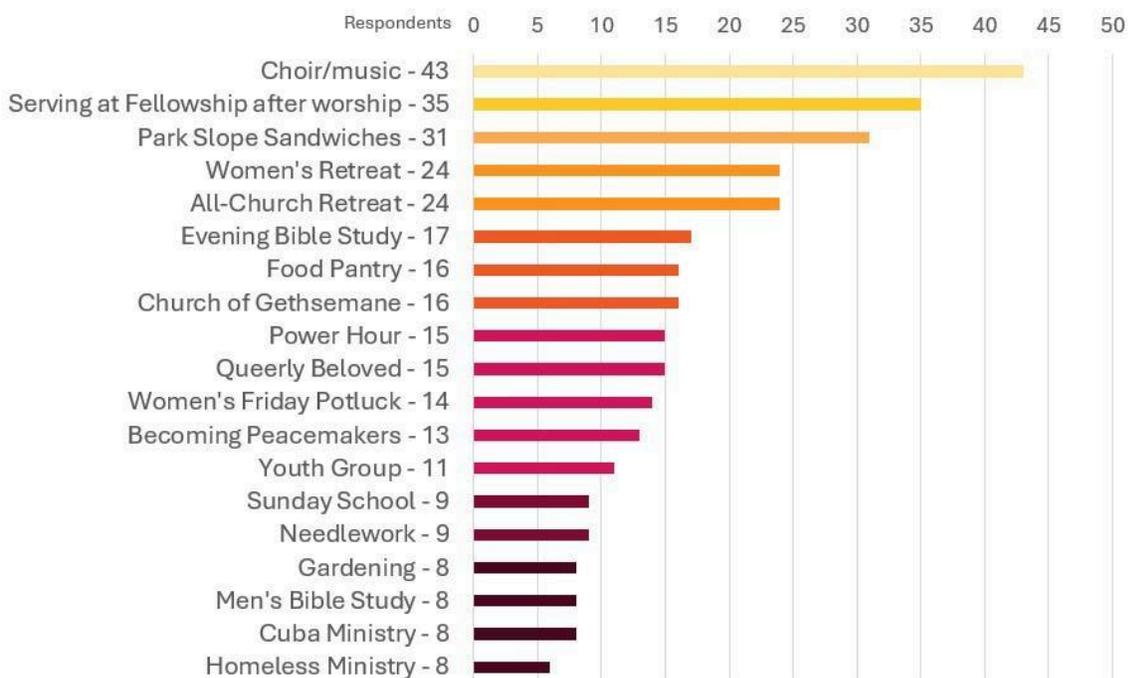
Are gifts and skills appreciated and is it easy to serve?

Yes	118
No	14

I have served on a church committee or ministry

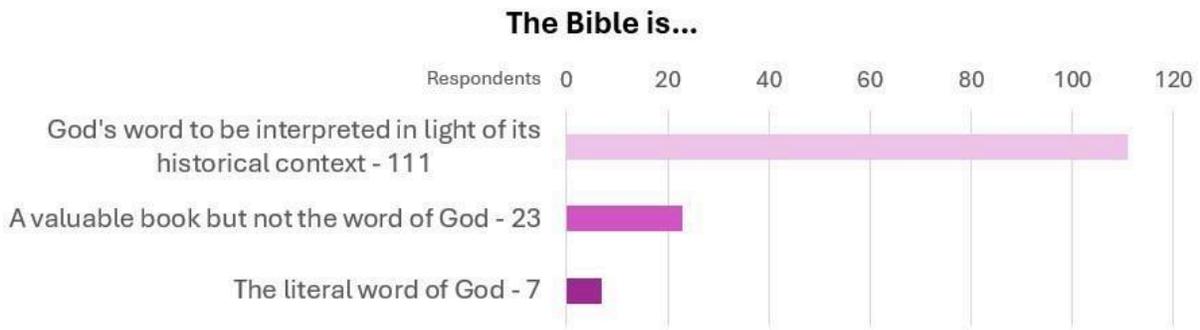
Yes	87
No	71

I have participated in...



Theological views

Respondents overwhelmingly believe that the Bible is divinely inspired

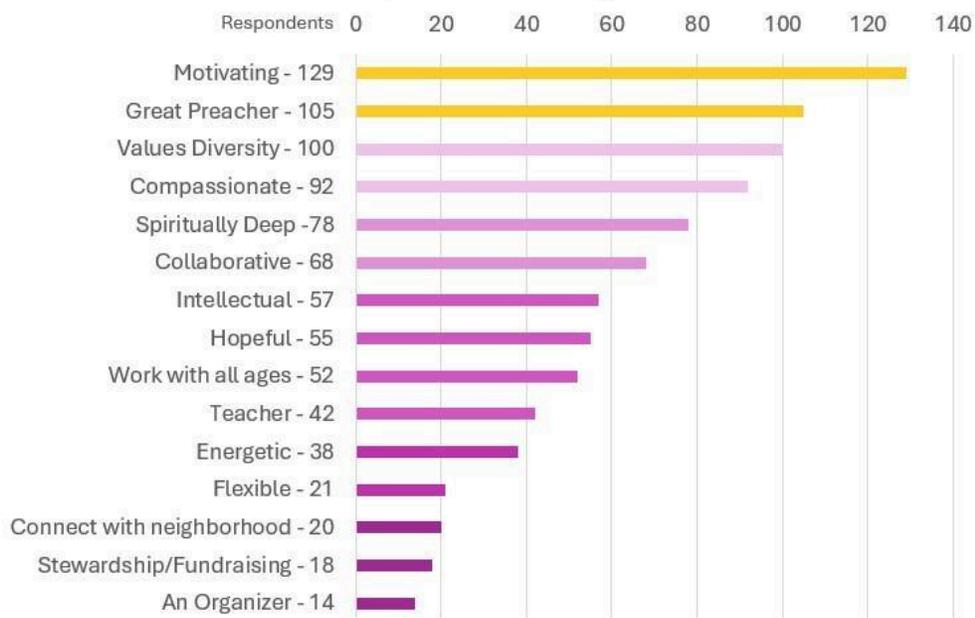


Comments included:

- “The word of God brought forth through the human pen.”
- “I’m currently having a challenge because of how the Bible has been used to oppress and control.”
- “An important work documenting a particular peoples’ history...but also reflects what we now find to be patriarchal, misogynistic, nationalistic, and backward.”
- “A guide to achieve enlightenment when you know how to read it.”
- “Rich and divinely inspired. Some of it is historically accurate and some a metaphorical lens through which the divine is illuminated.”

Given how much our congregation values the worship experience, respondents emphasized worship leadership when asked about preferred characteristics for a new senior pastor. They also want a compassionate leader who appreciates and listens to diverse perspectives.

Personal characteristics of a new Pastor/Head of Staff (6 choices allowed)



Written comments included:

- “Must be able to accept advice and constructive criticism.”
- “An effective manager of key relationships within the church, presbytery, and community.”
- “Pastoral care.”
- And several times it has been mentioned that previous installed pastors in recent years have not been PCUSA but members of other denominations, causing some to wonder if there is a difference in style and skills.

Small Group Conversations

In a series of congregational conversations over 2 months, members were asked to share what two aspects of our mission statement means to them:

What does it mean when we say we will be joyful participants in the worship and life of our community?

Joyful participation begins with walking into church. Members emphasized the sense of community and welcome they feel here because of our “come as you are” philosophy. They don’t feel judged for (among other things) their past religious experiences, their sexual orientation, their clothing, their children’s behavior, how much money they give, or if they’ve had an absence from the church. Music in worship brings people joy, to both the congregation listening and the choir making the music. Like many other church communities, we find joy in community and relating to each other, whether in hugs during the passing of the peace, in fellowship hour after worship, or during special events like the women’s retreat or all-church retreat. More unusual is the loving acceptance and active, not passive, welcome that people feel. A large number of members have joined First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn after experiencing religious trauma or exclusion. This is often due to their gender and sexuality, or their pushback to rigid dogma. People experience healing by being seen and loved for who they are; many expressed that welcome is not just what we say, but what we do. Among choir members and recent church members (within the past 5 years), joy was framed as an active choice, going deeper than happiness. People express that being part of the church gives them a chance to consistently choose and experience joy, and motivates them to extend joy to others.



What does it mean when we say we’re an intentionally diverse and inclusive community?

Even in a self-selecting forum like the small group discussions— where, presumably, people who feel excluded by the First Presbyterian community would not sign up— members highlighted just as many ways we fall short of our mission as ways we succeed.

In some ways, everything that fosters joy also fosters diversity and inclusion. Members frequently noted our multiracial congregation and spectrum of gender identities and sexual orientations, and how our community feels like love triumphing over the forces trying to outlaw diversity, equity, and inclusion. There are so many ways to serve the church, each requiring different talents and treasures, that members often felt welcome and included when they could contribute to church life according to their own unique strengths.

On the other hand, many members, across ministry groups, struggled to feel included, discover opportunities to serve, and deepen relationships. Members wish for more systematic communication: both the gathering of information (to get information on people's backgrounds, to add people to the e-newsletter and get them plugged into opportunities, etc.) and the dissemination of information (events, volunteer opportunities, ministry groups, etc.). Youth group members in their group discussion (age 8-16) praised the opportunity to bond socially with others outside their usual school- or neighborhood-based circles, but yearned to feel more included in the theological life of the church, specifically asking for sermons or discussions that apply to them, and not solely small children or adults.

Others wonder how much we are "talking the talk" vs. "walking the walk" of diversity. Within the church, how deep are our relationships with people different from us? Outside the church, are we similarly committed to being in community with people from all walks of life? A longstanding open question among church members, posed seriously or with tongue in cheek, is how welcome people of diverse and different religious/political backgrounds might feel, considering our public positions on topics such as LGBTQIA+ issues, DEI, racism, and the war in Gaza.

In addition to the two questions about our mission statement, some small group conversations had the chance to speak directly about what they would like to see in a new senior pastor, whether they were asked by team facilitators or the matter came up organically. Multiple members wanted to see a pastor with some kind of marginalized identity or life experience that could help them more deeply understand and connect with our congregation. Others, particularly in the men's breakfast, wanted a Presbyterian pastor who is familiar with Presbyterian history and leadership practices.

III. Community Demographics and Challenges

A. Community Demographics

First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn is located within the neighborhood of Brooklyn Heights in Brooklyn, N.Y. Brooklyn Heights is bounded on the north by the Brooklyn Bridge, on the east by Cadman Plaza, on the south by Atlantic Avenue, and on the west by the East River/New York City Bay.

Originally referred to as Brooklyn Village, it has been a prominent area of Brooklyn since 1834. The neighborhood is noted for its low-rise architecture and its many brownstone row houses, most of them built prior to the Civil War.

Directly across the East River from Manhattan and connected to it by subways and regular ferry service, Brooklyn Heights is also easily accessible from Downtown Brooklyn. Columbia Heights, an upscale six-block-long street next to the Brooklyn Heights Promenade (on the river/bay), is sometimes considered to be its own neighborhood.

The following demographics show some dramatic changes as one moves out from Brooklyn Heights into greater Brooklyn.

Brooklyn Heights

.32 square miles
 22,352 population
 Median rent- \$5000
 Median household income - \$179,395
 Masters degree or higher- 47%

2023, from City-Data.com

White	72.3%
Two or more races	7.6%
Asian	6.7%
Hispanic or Latino	5.9%
Black	4.8%
Some other race	2.7%

Brooklyn Heights/ Fort Greene

Median household income is \$136,230.

In 2022, there were an estimated 135,987 people in Fort Greene/Brooklyn Heights, of which

Asian	10.2%
Hispanic	12.1%
Black	15.8%

White 55.5%

Brooklyn total

69.4 square miles
 37 median age
 \$76,912 median household income
 43.5 % Bachelors degree or higher

According to the **2010** Census,

2,504,700 population
 35.7% non-Hispanic White,
 31.9% non-Hispanic Black or African American,
 10.4% non-Hispanic Asian,
 0.4% from some other race (non-Hispanic) and
 1.6% of two or more races (non-Hispanic).
 19.8% of Brooklyn's population was of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
 origin (they may be of any race).

In the **2020** census data for **Brooklyn** from the [New York City Department of City Planning](#), there were

2,736,074 residents
 35.4% White
 26.7% Black
 18.9% Hispanic
 13.6% Asian

B. Challenges in Our Community- Opportunities for Ministry and Service

Poverty and Homelessness

From City-Data.Com

19.0% of Brooklyn, NY residents had an income below the poverty level in 2023, which was 25.5% greater than the poverty level of 14.2% across the entire state of New York. Taking into account residents not living in families, 23.9% of high school graduates and 51.8% of non high school graduates live in poverty. The poverty rate was 24.8% among disabled males and 30.2% among disabled females. The renting rate among poor residents was 89.7%. For comparison, it was 67.6% among residents with income above the poverty level.

By race, income below the poverty line in Brooklyn includes 144,506 Blacks, 142,014 Whites, 114,179 Hispanics, and 59,114 Asians. Nearly half of

families in poverty are headed by a single female. By contrast, our immediate neighborhood of Brooklyn Heights and nearby communities has the lowest poverty rate of 11%.

Currently, over 120,000 people sleep in homeless shelters each night in New York City, with over 40,000 being children. It is estimated a total of 350,000 people are without homes in New York City. (*Coalition for the Homeless*)

In January of 2024, there were 4140 individuals found sleeping unsheltered in the streets of Brooklyn. In total, 36% of all families eligible for shelter services in New York City come from Brooklyn.

Our response

First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn operates a once-a-week food pantry serving 125-150 households with canned and dried food as well as frozen meat and fish. Our Wednesday evenings homeless ministry goes into the streets of downtown Brooklyn to offer hygiene supplies, dinner at nearby restaurants, and relaxed, friendly conversation with homeless individuals old and new. Firelight Ministry, a relatively new ministry at First Presbyterian, is raising funds and organizing ministry for these neighbors in need. Some of these friends have been invited and have attended programs and dinners at the church.

Once a month our church makes 150 sandwiches for CHiPS (Community Help in Park Slope), which serves 600 people daily. This organization reports 1,300,000 people in New York City experiencing food insecurity, including 25% of all children. This is a newer mission activity and has proven to be very popular on both sides. Volunteers line the sandwich making table each month after worship, and CHiPS has already increased the number of sandwiches requested in order to meet their need.

Immigration

New York State is home to 470,100 undocumented workers. 25% of New York City's undocumented persons live in Brooklyn.

First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn's Session has studied migrant rights and has adopted plans to support them in the church. It is uncertain at this time how much the church can be of help for migrants in the greater community.

Drugs and Alcohol

FPC Brooklyn currently offers weekly space for four twelve-step programs.

Incarcerated and Recently Released Prisoners

First Presbyterian Church supports the Church of Gethsemane, a nearby PCUSA church that serves this population. We visit nearby prisons with that congregation and supply a Sunday meal monthly at Gethsemane.

LGBTQIA+

Approximately 750,000 New York City residents, including 50,000 transgender individuals, live in New York City. They are mainly concentrated in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. With a new presidential administration in 2025, directives have been targeted at this population that call safety and future viability into question. As an intentionally inclusive congregation, First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn offers safe space and community for those seeking a church environment. Queerly Beloved offers fellowship and ministry opportunities. Church leadership includes LGBTQIA+ members. During June, our church celebrates Pride with multiple activities, including an interfaith Pride service and a large group marching in the Brooklyn Pride Parade (while also passing out information and favors to parade guests). And the pride flag is flown especially now to show solidarity with a queer community that is feeling oppressed.



Delivering two carloads of toys to the Eastern Farm Workers Association for Christmas 2024

C. Challenges in Our World

Cuba

Our White Rose Ministry visits Cuba and supports Presbyterian churches there as noted on page 24. Continuing help is needed.

Gaza/Israel

In 2024, the Session approved a statement opposing the Gaza/Israel war that closely aligned with the PCUSA statement earlier in the year. Staff Member Conor Foley traveled to Israel in late 2024 on a PCUSA sponsored trip to study the situation, meet with Palestinians and those opposed to the war, and bring back a first-hand account for the church's Peacemakers group and the congregation as a whole.

IV. Conclusion

First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn is an historic congregation with a contemporary sensibility. Being involved in the community and world, we serve in many ways. Our worship of God is lively and we broadcast it around the globe. Our children and youth ministries are growing, our fellowship opportunities are multiplying, and our music will put you on your feet. “All are welcome,” is not just words, but an intentional practice. Here, friends are made that can change your life. We’re just getting started!

To continue to live out our mission, we seek a senior pastor who can uphold these exciting and fulfilling aspects of our life together while inspiring our collective growth. We seek someone who motivates us, leads with both authority and collaboration, and loves our broken pieces. We seek a pastor who can build bridges and deepen connections, so that we care for each other seven days a week as opposed to just on Sunday mornings. We seek a pastor who will continue the church’s tradition of racial justice, and guide our own community’s journey of racial healing and reconciliation. We seek a pastor who embraces our ardor while creating some order! In this way, we can continue to flourish in our third century as a congregation, demonstrating the love of Christ throughout Brooklyn and beyond.



Appendix

All small group summaries

Parents were generally happy and grateful for the programming and kids' involvement. Their children were enthusiastic about coming to church. Teens and tweens were motivated to attend because they've formed relationships in the Youth Group and in addition to the Youth Group activities, they are also involved in collecting offering, singing in the choir. Parents of the younger children were very grateful for the babysitting staff and the quality of the childcare.

Parents expressed a desire for a dedicated staff youth minister to build up a more structured program and more Scripture. They wanted to see content for younger children who are transitioning from babysitting (ages 3-8) and expressed the desire for more communication with the leadership about the programming for that age group.

Parents themselves felt connected to the church through the choir and a strong sense of community and joy. They felt supported by activities such as the Parent's Night Out events where babysitting is available to them, open participation in the choir, and the relaxed attitudes about nursing babies in the pews. They find the sermons to be relevant and find the church to be a place of acceptance where you can push back on rules and there is no fear of God.

Youth group is a place where kids enjoy interacting with people outside their usual circle. As a result, it's a safe space to vent about what's going on in daily life. Youth group is also a rare chance to discuss feelings and emotions, as opposed to events/daily happenings. Youth have a strong desire for sermons that connect to their lives and have messages with a concrete application to their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Teens, in particular, are interested in content or lessons that's not dumbed down, as youth-oriented activities often feel to them; specific suggestions included discussing current events and ways that teens/adults can improve problems in the world and in their own lives. In the next senior pastor, they desire someone who has struggled with religion, so the pastor can better empathize with their own doubts and complexities. They want someone who puts an effort into interacting with and understanding them, who can then go on to push their ideas of religion into a new direction or deliver new insight through explanatory depth, novel ways of presenting information, and practical applications of theological ideas.

In the choir, joyful participation includes singing and music making (and honoring the talent involved in music making). It expands beyond music to the following: acceptance and embrace of who we are, often more openly than past churches; actively choosing joy and working on it, distinct from simple happiness; fostering joy through community and extending good welcoming energy to

others; healing from past religious or family trauma; and caring for/developing relationships with other choir members and other church members.

Intentional diversity and inclusion means deep care for each other. We struggle with this: sometimes we pat ourselves on the back/have token relationships rather than deep relationships, or we don't extend past our existing relationships to truly welcome and get to know new members. People here feel included because there's no singular faith journey, and they feel welcomed despite (or because of) their history of exclusion in other churches or faith traditions. We desire to extend inclusive community to people outside the church, and have several ideas for how to do so.

At the women's retreat, women felt called to joy through music in worship. They feel togetherness and community through multiple dimensions: special events like retreats, regular ministries like choir, physical closeness like hugging during passing of the peace, and intergenerational community. Diversity and inclusion feels like love winning and every person being seen as a child of God. We work together without judgment. However, some feel unwelcome because of their political beliefs.

The men's breakfast participants found joy in their work to create the "beloved community" by participating in worship, especially the sacraments; engaging in Christian service outside the church, e.g. through activities with the church of Gethsemane; and through their fellowship over men's breakfast, where many have gathered for years. When discussing intentional diversity and inclusion, the men focused predominantly on how they think the church can improve. They wish to see more systematic surveying of the congregation to understand their makeup and develop future leaders, so that everyone can be fully included. Understanding the diversity in religious backgrounds of church members at large, as well as our Presbyterian history, the men expressed that they want a future senior pastor who comes from a Presbyterian background and can lead in a highly collaborative manner.

New or new-ish members feel joyful participation in the community because they are encouraged to "come as you are," with no judgment about what they wear, their sexual orientation, their kids crying, how long they've been away, or their faith. These members feel a true sense of community and a deeper sense of joy that transcends other experiences, because it's rooted in God, intentionality, and connection with others.

Diversity and inclusion: Being drawn closer into the community was easy for some and harder for others. For some members it has taken time to break through and find their place. Several others have noted that Jewish friends who have accompanied them to our services have felt uncomfortable, which caused the member to wonder what it means to say, 'all' are welcome. Members also highlighted that they felt included because the church welcomes a variety of gifts

and offerings with encouragement, not judgment. They found multiple ways to serve.

In a new pastor, these members predominantly want a servant leader who will guide us to be a better church. Many think that the pastor needs to be Black and/or female to fully identify with congregational struggles.

In the final open conversation, members felt joy through community—specifically, being together in person and in worship, different from other communities in their lives. This community reflects the love and acceptance, without blame or shame, in the church. For diversity and inclusion, members highlighted racial diversity, service, and sexual orientation/gender identity inclusion as strengths. We can do better with: improving outreach (sharing information broadly, engaging diverse people to welcome them to the church, and being more thorough/systematic in gathering info about new people so we remember them and get them connected).

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