

Fifth Avenue  
Presbyterian  
Church



# MISSION REVIEW

April 2007

Mission Review Committee

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## Where We've Been

### MISSION STATEMENT

*"Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church exists to continue the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ by recruiting disciples for the Kingdom of God, renewing disciples in their faith commitment and reaching out in love and compassion to a world in need."*

Established in 1808 with 26 members as the Presbyterian Church in Cedar Street, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church has consistently impacted local, national and global mission. The first minister called to our pulpit, the Rev. Dr. John Brodhead Romeyn (1808-1825), was considered one of the most eminent preachers of his day. He sat on the commission that established Princeton Theological Seminary and helped found the American Bible Society. Early member Joanna Bethune is credited with beginning the Sunday School movement, which initially provided classes for poor children and adults.

In the post-Civil War years, we moved to our current location at Fifth Avenue and 55<sup>th</sup> Street, just south of the then-new Central Park. Under the celebrated 30-year ministry of the Rev. Dr. John Hall (1867-1898), the congregation started Bible schools and fresh air camps for children and founded America's first Loan Relief Society for the working poor.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the church continued to be blessed with spiritual leaders who eloquently addressed the needs of the times in the name of the Lord. The Rev. Dr. John Henry Jowett (1911-1918) built a record membership of 2,606 through the trials of World War I. Then, amidst the grim reality of the Great Depression, World War II and the Korean War, the Rev. Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell (1935-1962) was a voice of hope and confidence, beginning both a radio ministry and Dial-A-Prayer, a telephone ministry that continues to this day.

As the rebellious 1960's and '70s brought challenges and change, the clear and unshakeable faith of the Rev. Dr. Bryant M. Kirkland (1962-1987) kept the church anchored in Christ. His message, "*You can't go it alone in New York*", squarely addressed the problems of coping with the pressures of big-city living and fostered a strong fellowship within the church and a commitment to mission "*beyond the walls*". With ceaseless energy, Dr. Kirkland and talented lay officers sponsored over 40 refugees, worked to grow our investments with the \$16,000,000 sale of our air rights, supported community housing projects and established a Shelter for the Homeless.

The Rev. Dr. R. Maurice Boyd was called in 1988 and attracted many who had been alienated from organized religion. A gifted orator, his compelling sermons filled the sanctuary. Sadly, he left a fragmented congregation with his departure in 1992.

In 1994, the arrival of our 16<sup>th</sup> Senior Pastor, the Rev. Dr. Thomas K. Tewell brought enthusiasm and "*an extra-large vision*". Under his leadership, FAPC experienced unprecedented growth and development in every area. Existing programs were strengthened and new programs developed as members were encouraged to expand their faith beyond worship to nurture themselves and reach out to a world in need.

Encouraging members and friends to engage in intellectual and spiritual inquiry as part of a life-long process of growth in the Christian faith, a Center for Christian Studies was established in

1996. By 2002, 2,400 students were enrolled. CCS became a model for adult Christian education for many congregations across the country.

Christian education for children and youth also underwent a remarkable transformation during Dr. Tewell's tenure. In 1986, 133 children were enrolled in our church school. By 2002, enrollment doubled to 278 children. In 2004, the Rev. Paul Rock was called as Associate Pastor for Young Adult and Youth Ministries. Under his leadership, the Family Ministries Committee, made up of staff and parent leaders, provides programs and events that cultivate the spiritual formation of our children, youth, and families at FAPC.

Our ministry to the homeless, begun during Dr. Kirkland's pastorate, expanded in 2004, allowing us to welcome twelve men to our shelter 365 nights/year. When other homeless persons began sleeping on our steps, we initiated an outreach and befriending ministry that led to a confrontation with city government. When the police cleared the homeless off our steps, we sued the City of New York in federal district court to preserve their sanctuary. Ultimately, in November 2004, the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit affirmed the district court's preliminary injunction requiring the City to cease its disruption of the homeless sleeping on the church steps and held that our ministry to the homeless is religious conduct protected by the United States Constitution. Since our homeless ministry began, more than 325 homeless friends have found permanent housing.

In the mid-1990's, mission trips have provided opportunities for hands-on ministry beyond New York City. Congregants, both adults and youth, have now visited Guatemala, Jamaica, India, Madagascar, Romania, Egypt, Ghana, South Korea and Mexico, as well as domestic sites in Maine, South Dakota, Colorado and Appalachia. We have also joined with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to build homes for those devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

Historically, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church has been a welcoming congregation that embraces diversity as one of God's gifts. In the past twenty-five years we have broken down barriers by having women, African-American and Latino ministers. In 2005, Session voted to become a part of the Covenant Network because we believe it is consistent with our mission philosophy and our signboard which says, "*This is God's House. All Are Welcome*".

Music has contributed enormously to Fifth Avenue's worship and evangelism, and the congregation has been noted for its exuberant singing of hymns. We have historically enjoyed gifted choirs of professional and volunteer singers. During Advent and Lenten seasons there have been special concerts and oratorios, some with orchestra and guest artists. Happily, the children's choir has expanded along with the growth of our Sunday School.

With inspired sermons and programs so well received, the congregation swelled from 2,196 members in 1994 to 3,253 in 2001. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this growth necessitated expansion to two traditional Sunday morning services, a late afternoon contemporary service and permitted a radio ministry. The significance of our location was vividly dramatized by the events of 9/11. For weeks, multiple daily prayer services and numerous heavily attended memorial services were conducted, stretching the capacity of staff, building and finances. Due in part to the post-9/11 surge in church going, our annual worship attendance grew from 39,905 in 1995 to 110,187 in 2002 (Figure 1).

To accommodate the needs of a growing congregation, an ambitious “Crossroads Campaign” raised over \$29,000,000 for the first major renovation program since 1925 to modernize our antiquated building facilities. The David B. Skinner Shelter for the Homeless and the LaDane Williamson Christian Education Center were the centerpieces of the award-winning renovation completed in 2004. For almost one year the congregation took a spiritual and physical journey, worshipping and continuing a modified program schedule at multiple locations, primarily at neighboring Central Synagogue.

Another measurement of FAPC’s development was the growth in stewardship. Pastors and officers led the congregation to understand stewardship more fully and contribute “Time and Talent” as well as financial resources. Pledge commitments during 1994-2004 grew from \$646,000 to \$2,298,000, particularly notable in light of the concurrent Crossroads Campaign (Figure 2).

The congregation reeled from the announcement in mid-2005 that our beloved pastor had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with a congregant. The congregation concurred with Dr. Tewell’s request to dissolve the pastoral relationship. Unsettling announcements continued in 2006 with the departures of several ministers and members of senior staff.

As they did during the difficult transition times in the early 1990’s, FAPC’s lay and ministerial leaders took deliberate actions to maintain worship, educational and outreach programs despite the fall off in attendance and pledges. Associate Pastor Randolph L.C. Weber became Head of Staff; Associate Pastor Paul T. Rock was joined by Temporary Supply for Pastoral Care, the Rev. Katharine A. Dunn; and the Rev. Roland P. Perdue III joined us as Interim Senior Pastor during the summer of 2006.

## **Where We Are**

Amidst the fast-paced hustle and bustle of midtown Manhattan, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church represents Christ’s love to a world in need. Our congregation is a diverse body that reflects the dynamic tapestry of humanity and mirrors the richness of our great city. With Christ as our center and focus, we seek to have a place for everyone and we offer an extensive and inclusive ministry. Though our congregation is large, we are a collection of various overlapping smaller communities which foster fellowship and create a feeling of familiarity when members and visitors walk through our doors.

Under the dynamic leadership of Interim Senior Pastor Roland P. Perdue III, our church continues to welcome to membership people from all parts of the United States, as well as more than thirty countries around the world. A majority are college educated, a significant number hold advanced degrees and many are professionals who were drawn to New York by opportunities in finance, law, advertising, as well as fine and performing arts. Young adults are the fastest growing segment of the congregation, with people under the age of 35 constituting a large percentage of new members. But we are also experiencing growth in the “baby boomer” age group, some of whom are moving to New York City as empty nesters. There is a good mix of females and males, single and married individuals, and families.

As mentioned previously, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church underwent a major \$37 million renovation and expansion project in 2004 – the first project of its kind since the church house was built in 1925. We were truly bursting at the seams. More than five years of prayerful study brought forth a comprehensive plan for construction, renovation, and mission, including a new Christian Education Center carved out of Manhattan bedrock below the sanctuary; complete renovation of the 10-story church house; long-needed air-conditioning and fireproofing systems; upgraded mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems; handicapped accessibility; communication, lighting and acoustical systems. A portion of the funds raised during the capital campaign were set aside for mission. With our construction and renovation project now complete and more than 3000 square feet added, we have the facilities to achieve our call to service in the 21st century.

Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church is blessed with a significant investment portfolio, and we could not support our activities at anywhere near their current level without it. Income from our investments funds more than half of our operating budget. Our constant goal is to increase pledging to reduce our draw on the investments – to ensure that we are able to keep our church thriving for future generations. All investment decisions are weighed against a strong understanding that FAPC is called to reach out to a world in need, and this consideration is part of all budget conversations. Remarkably, in 2007, pledging shows a significant upward trend over 2006 (Figure 2).

Over the last two years, following the departure of our senior pastor, FAPC's dedicated elders, deacons, trustees and staff have worked tirelessly to make the appropriate changes necessary to move forward. In the midst of this period of transition, several programs continue to thrive within our newly expanded facilities. Under the leadership of Associate Pastor Paul T. Rock, the young adult ministry has grown over the last three years from a single fellowship group, known as FOCUS, to multiple programs targeted to people in their twenties and thirties. Under the umbrella of NEXT ministries, these additional programs include a 20s/30s small group ministry, a young married couples ministry, a New to NY orientation program, and a young professionals group called UP@7. Other age-specific groups for people 30-50 and 50-65 years of age provide additional opportunities for fellowship and service.

Rev. Rock also oversees FAPC's family ministries, which has blossomed in the meeting space provided by the new LaDane Williamson Christian Education Center. In fact, there were so many families interested in attending Sunday School that the church started offering dual Sunday School classes on Sunday mornings concurrent with the two worship services.

At FAPC, we welcome newcomers with open arms and invite each one to find a place to call "home," within the warm embrace of our church family. New members are received into the congregation after completion of the new member orientation program, "What We Believe," overseen by Associate Pastor Randy Weber. New members are also assigned a New Member Angel who reaches out to the new members, hosting them on the morning they join and helping them to engage in programs of interest.

Members believe that music is a vitally important part of the service – it supports and prompts us in worship, praise and contemplation. In addition to our sanctuary choir, made up of professionals and volunteers, our children's choir offers an outlet for young students to express their love of God through song. An important dividend of all of our choirs is the fellowship and joy that members

experience from coming together to sing and live out what they are learning. With that said, our music program has lacked direction and is an area of great potential for the future.

Our church's long-standing commitment to outreach continues to be central to who we are. Current programs geared toward reducing homelessness and creating housing include the Bowery Mission, our Shelter for the Homeless which hosts 12 men in our basement 365 days every year, our Homeless on the Steps ministry, Habitat for Humanity, and the Low Income Housing Commission. Hunger programs with which we partner include Meals on Heals, Project Find, and Crop Walk. The outreach at FAPC, however, extends beyond the areas of homelessness and hunger. The Employment Advisory Committee presents lectures and workshops for those seeking employment or new career options. Also, as a member of the world community, the church serves internationally primarily through its mission trips and the Advocates for Peace and Justice. In addition, our Benevolence Committee contributes funds to many organizations in the U.S. and abroad. In 2006, \$203,890 was distributed.

Our deacons host two very special programs every year for underprivileged children, Project Angel Tree and Operation Campfire. In addition, Stephen Ministry is a very special way that members of our faith community love one another through one-on-one caring relationships. Stephen Ministers make an initial two-year commitment, the first part of which involves 50 hours of training with our Temporary Supply for Pastoral Care, the Rev. Kate Dunn, and Emily Dunlap, our Church Social Worker. We currently have 14 active Stephen Ministers who are assigned to confidential caring relationships. They also volunteer to pray with others on Sunday mornings as well as support the pastoral staff in hospital calling.

An energetic weekly "No Excuses" Lenten study series served as an outreach to the neighboring business community in the recent past. However, for the last several years this has been replaced by a mid-week worship service. In addition, the Center for Christian Studies continues to engage members and friends in a life-long process of learning. Currently, CCS is operating at a reduced capacity with enrollment just over 1000 students.

The first pastoral guidance that the pastors of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church offer new members is that they find a way, in addition to the worship services, to "experience God's love." We have an extensive and growing network of Small Groups that meet in members' homes or at the church for Bible study and fellowship. Within these groups, deep bonds of friendship have formed, with members offering support and encouragement to one another during times of personal crisis. In addition to the programs highlighted above, our Women's Association, Scottish Dancers, Theatre Fellowship, Couples Club, and Hiking and Outing Club allow for unique opportunities to both inhale and exhale God's love.

## **Where We're Going**

As we approach our bicentennial year, we are optimistic that the difficulties experienced over the past year and a half are being resolved. The Session and Board of Trustees of Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church have taken steps to deal with the budgetary problems that resulted from the \$8 million in debt remaining after the Crossroads Capital Campaign and from the recent decline in attendance and giving. We see hopeful signs that our committed core of members has increased

its efforts to see the church through this difficult period. Our most recent pledge campaign recorded an increase in the size of the average pledge, as well as the number of pledges, and all the church's programs and committees have continued to function, albeit with some drop in participation. One in four respondents to a recent survey reported being engaged in church activities for more than 6 hours per week, further evidence that our most faithful members have resolved to support the church through this protracted interim period. The congregation is anxious to move forward with our ministries and regain our lost momentum.

In February and March 2007 we conducted a survey of our congregation, and a surprisingly large number of members responded (366; >10%). In addition, four open forums were held to solicit additional input from the congregation, and an email address was created to facilitate further communication. The overarching sentiment in all the responses we received was the desire to call a new senior pastor and restore stability to our staff. Although there are still issues to address, we are confident we can meet the challenges that remain. The survey responses were very helpful in developing the statements below.

#### What We Value

- The congregation overwhelmingly reaffirmed our long-standing commitment to preaching of the highest caliber. For 200 years, preaching has been our strongest evangelistic tool. The sermon forms the core of our vibrant worship in which we celebrate our conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. All other aspects of congregational life – pastoral, fellowship, nurture, education and outreach – flow from worship.

- A feeling of fellowship and community are also highly valued by all segments of our membership. People want and expect to find a warm and supportive Christian family at FAPC. Thus, it is critical that we remain vigilant in helping people find their niche in a large congregation that can seem overwhelming and impenetrable to newcomers.

#### Our Aspirations for the Future

##### •Pastoral Leadership

A major challenge to the next Pastor Nominating Committee will be crafting the job description of the senior pastor. FAPC is a large and complex organization that places extraordinary demands on its staff, especially the senior pastor. The job description of the next senior pastor must be flexible enough to allow that individual to exercise prophetic leadership, while not placing unreasonable and unsustainable demands on his/her time and energy. It will be critical to delineate clearly the responsibilities of the senior pastor vis-à-vis the other pastors, senior program staff, church administrator and lay leadership. Equally important will be shaping the congregation's expectations of our new leader. It is imperative that we reach a consensus about his/her duties that is clearly communicated to all constituencies within the church.

Our survey indicated that the styles of ministry preferred by most congregants is that of a pastor who influences by virtue of his/her spiritual and moral gifts and of a visionary who inspires the congregation to strive toward a future of promise. Less popular styles were that of a director who supervises the activities of the church and a facilitator who forges collaborations to help fulfill the mission of the church.

- Strengthening our sense of community and making all our members feel valued should continue to be a high priority. We must be generous in extending hospitality both to visitors and to members who may still be looking for their niche in the congregation. Helping members find meaningful ways to engage in service or fellowship activities is important for fostering the sense of family we enjoy at FAPC. We should continue monitoring the need for age- or interest-specific fellowship groups on an ongoing basis.

- The respondents to our congregational survey strongly endorsed the outreach ministry of the church and expressed a desire to enhance our ability to serve those in need. However, the finding that three fourths of survey respondents spend fewer than 6 hours per week in church activities suggests that new opportunities for involvement in mission and new approaches to engaging these individuals may be needed. We must also remain vigilant and open to new concerns that God lays on our hearts.

- Music has always been a vital element of our worship, but, sadly, this program does not have permanent staff leadership at this time. Priority should be given to re-establishing and expanding this ministry to provide more opportunities for volunteers of all ages to participate in choral and even instrumental groups. We should also explore the potential for public musical performances, possibly self-funding or even revenue generating. Our location, proximity to public transportation and the success of similar church music programs in the neighborhood suggest that such a program could be successful.

- Better communication between the officers and the congregation is needed. We need to find ways to disseminate information so that members feel their concerns are being heard and officers are responsive to all segments of the congregation.

- Although we have seen significant improvements in stewardship recently, it is disappointing that only half our members pledge. We should continue working to increase the percentage of pledging members, thereby decreasing our dependence on investment income. We should also make it a priority to restore the funds cut from our benevolence and general mission budgets in 2006.

- With the recent enhancements to our facilities, further efforts should be made to determine whether it is possible to use our facilities to generate revenue without interfering with congregational functions or overtaxing the maintenance staff. Several worthwhile proposals have been advanced, including rental of space for meetings, banquets, concerts, receptions and child care, and should be given careful consideration.

Although there are still challenges that must be met, our congregation is ready to move forward in hope and anticipation. Words spoken by the Rev. Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell at the beginning of his pastorate in 1935 are a continuing source of inspiration to us. He said, "I ask you, while we remember with gratitude our proud heritage, to turn your faces to the future and believe with me that under God the best days of The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church are yet to be."

Figure 1. Weekly worship attendance.

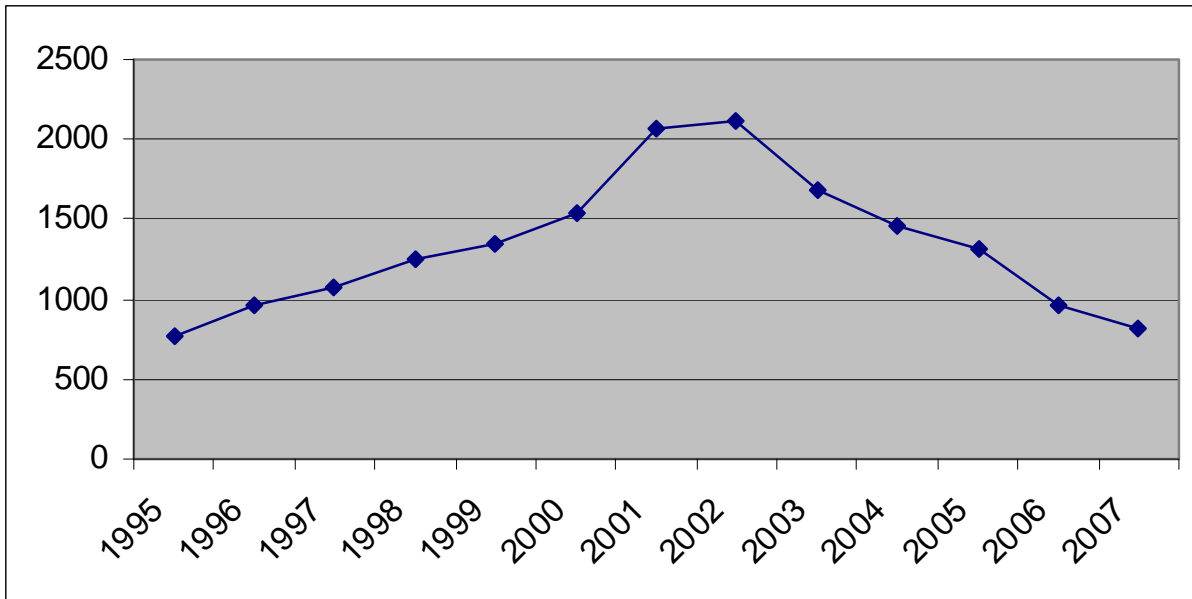


Figure 2. Pledge revenue.

