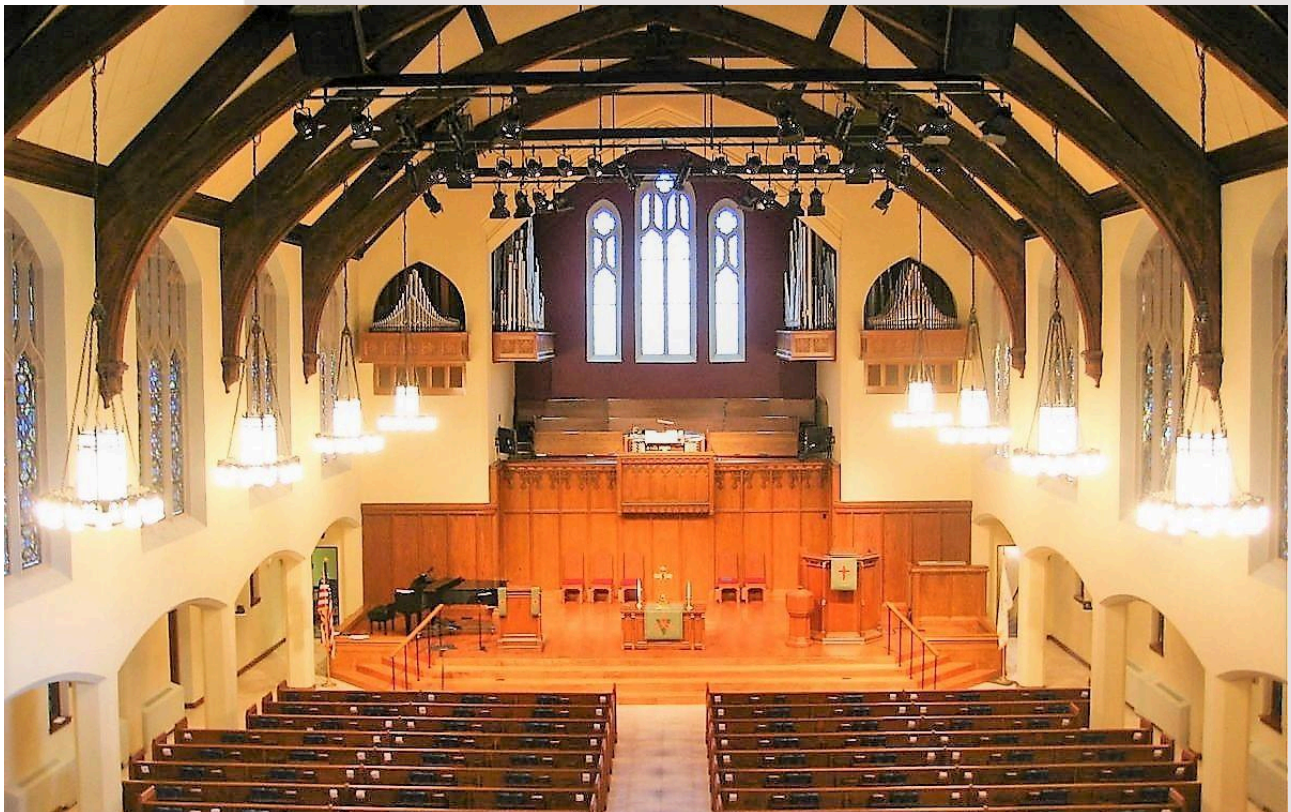


CHURCH ASSESSMENT REPORT

October 1, 2025

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Lincoln, NE



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BACKGROUND

Westminster Presbyterian Church is a PCUSA church located in a community that is home to a major university and serves as the state's capital city. The church building itself has been at its current location for about a hundred years. Historically, Westminster was known as a large congregation, sometimes locally referred to as the country club church. Church members now describe their church family as "friendly," "well-educated," and "accepting." While others described the church as "insular" and "stuck."

Westminster's congregation has about 600 members, down from a thriving period in the 2000s with multiple choirs, large children/youth ministries, multiple worship services, and numerous full-time pastoral staff. This decline has led to a decreased sense of connection among members.

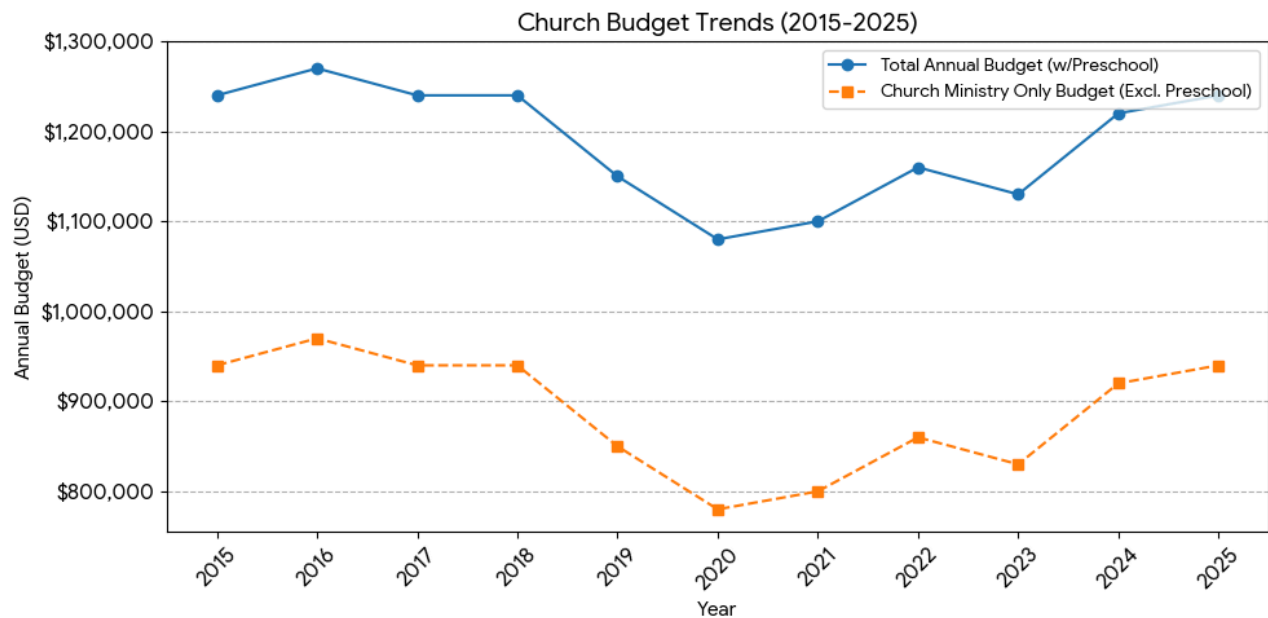
Westminster experienced internal strain from 2015-2016 due to conflict between older and younger pastors, causing staff turnover from 2017-2019. This period of conflict and turnover resulted in many former Westminster members joining other churches in the area. This history contributes to a current feeling of scarcity mindset and a desire to regain confidence in the church's future. The church currently has a membership of 607 people, with an average weekly worship attendance of 140 people onsite and approximately 49 live views for a total of around 189 people.

The church's mission and vision are currently under discernment as it seeks to answer the question, "How can we be the church God is calling us to be?" The church offers a single, traditional worship service at 10:00 AM. Additionally, there is a 12:00 PM service for the Nuer/Sudanese community.

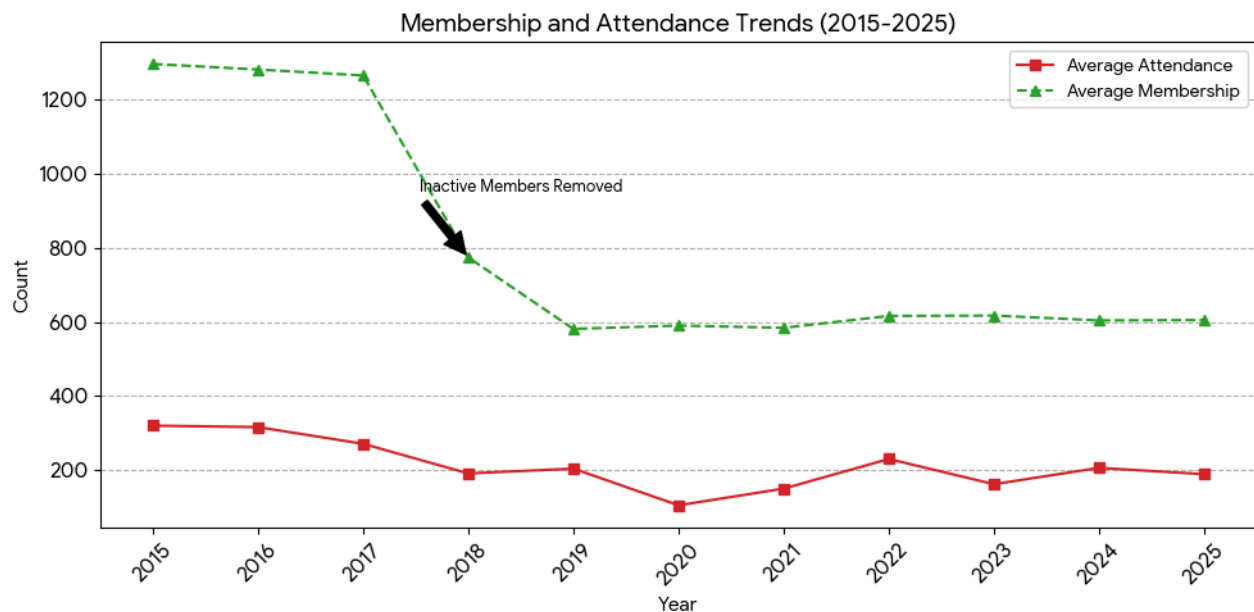
Core programmatic offerings in the church's calendar center around the traditional liturgical year, including Epiphany (Star Words), a series of Lenten services, Easter, a Creation Celebration, an Advent Workshop, and a Christmas Eve candlelight service. Non-liturgical traditions include Vacation Bible School (last summer partnered with another PCUSA church), Presbyterians in the Park (with a pot luck), a Kick-Off Sunday/Blessing of the Backpacks, and a children/youth Halloween-themed event called Spooktacular.

The leadership structure of the church relies on a mix of pastoral, program, and support staff. The church's pastoral leadership includes the Rev. Chris Peters, Pastor and Head of Staff, and the Rev. Dr. Jimmy Shelbourn, who serves as stated supply associate pastor. Program staff positions include Trish Souliere, Director of Children and Youth Ministries, Wes Hansmeyer, Music Director, John Ross, Organist, and two part-time youth directors. Support staff includes an office manager/administrative assistant, a bookkeeper, a communications and administration coordinator, and a custodian.

For 2025, the total church budget is projected at \$1.24 million. This includes the accredited preschool's operating budget of approximately \$300,000. Therefore, the actual church operating budget is approximately \$940,000. This represents an increase of approximately 1.6% compared to the total budget (including the preschool) from 2024.



The average attendance has fluctuated significantly over the last decade, with a sharp drop in 2020 and a slight recovery since, leading to the current average in-person attendance of 140. Examining budget and attendance changes over the past decade reveals a pattern of stabilization following a steep decline. The membership roll underwent a major clean-up in 2018, dropping from over 1,200 to below 800, and has since stabilized at around 600 members. This data suggests that while the church's spending power has been maintained through the stability of the foundation, the congregation's active core size has permanently shifted to a smaller baseline.



The church facility itself is a large, older historical building that is noted for its beautiful spaces. Assets within the facilities include an amazing sanctuary that is ideal for the organ and is often used for weddings, as well as an accredited preschool. There is also an exceptional space for young people known as Faith Village.

Westminster maintains core ministry areas that include: adult education (with weekday Bible study and post-worship contemporary issue-focused classes), youth ministry on Wednesday evenings, children's ministry on both Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, and various small groups such as Presbyterian women's circles, a cancer support group, a lunch bunch, and others. The church also operates a well-known food pantry mission and partners with a sister church in Germany through which many trips and experiences take place.

Ministry Architects was invited to partner with Westminster to help move the church forward from a place of decline and internal focus to a position of sustained growth and outward mission. The pastor and key stakeholders expressed a desire to be unstuck.

This process begins with an initial assessment of the church's ministries and making recommendations about how it might move forward strategically over the next eighteen months. Ministry Architects met with eight focus groups, totaling ninety-three people, and had five others fill out a survey.

THE INVISIBLE CHECKLIST

There's no such thing as a blank slate when it comes to a church; everyone carries an opinion. Sometimes it's shaped by a general impression, other times by a single interaction with a parishioner or staff member. Most often, however, a church's reputation rests on an unseen three-item checklist.

When those boxes are checked, a church enjoys the freedom to be creative, take risks, and try new ideas. When they're not, the result is often distrust, second-guessing, and discouragement. These are the three most common ways that churches secretly judge their ministries.

- ☐ **#1 Numbers:** A significant percentage of parishioners need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church, and without a critical mass, a church will often be perceived as anemic. Churches are typically judged by conflicting numerical goals because target numbers are rarely agreed upon or communicated.

This box is **unchecked**. While Westminster Presbyterian Church has stabilized its membership at around 600 people, the average weekly worship attendance of 140 represents a significant decrease from its historical highs.

- ☐ **#2 Programs:** In order to earn the right to experiment with changes, the church leadership needs to provide the congregation with a few visible, effective programs that give both parishioners and staff something to talk about. This includes events like annual picnics, outreach events, or a Christmas pageant, all of which are visible and generate buzz.

This box is only **partially checked**. Westminster has a strong foundation of traditional events and music. However, there's a consistent backward-looking theme, with discussions often referencing past programs. This creates tension as some members feel the church is already over-programmed, preventing clear alignment on essential, visible programs.

- ☐ **#3: Enthusiasm** The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the church staff, volunteers, and parishioners are essential to building trust within the church community.

In Westminster's current climate, the enthusiasm box appears to be **unchecked**. The pervasive feeling of scarcity, coupled with the lingering wounds from previous staff conflicts, has created a general feeling of anxiety rather than joyful enthusiasm. While individuals remain committed, the collective mood suggests a lack of confidence, indicating that the emotional energy needed for a major initiative is currently depleted.

CHURCH-WIDE NORMS

There are six rules of thumb – “church norms” – that Ministry Architects has researched from consulting work across the country which will be helpful to keep in mind. These are not targets for success; they are simply what an average church experiences.

When assessing a church, it is helpful to use quantitative norms for comparison. These norms do not inherently measure health or lack thereof, but rather provide a neutral, objective picture of the current reality compared to average churches across the country. By understanding where a church aligns or deviates from these national averages, the leadership can make more informed strategic decisions.

Note: Since 2020, church finances have changed drastically. COVID-19 accelerated the attendance decline some churches were already seeing, while giving often remained stable. Churches have been slow to cut staff and programs, resulting in new norms for the average church. These norms may shift again as financial realities force further reductions or new income sources beyond congregational giving are found.

Budget

Westminster Presbyterian Church has an operating budget for 2025 of approximately \$940,000 (excluding the separate preschool budget) and an average onsite attendance of 140 people in worship every week. In other words, the church spends \$6,714 per person.

The average church budget settles around \$2,500 per attendee, which means Westminster Presbyterian Church is spending significantly more than today's average church. A portion of this is most likely due to the heavy costs of maintaining a large historical building.

Staffing

Westminster Presbyterian Church has the equivalent of 6.45 full-time employees, giving time to the ministry, including the following:

- Rev. Chris Peters (40 hours/week)
- Director of Children and Youth Ministries (40 hours/week)
- Office Manager/Administrative Assistant (32 hours/week)
- Communications and Administration Coordinator (22 hours/week)

- Rev. Dr. Jimmy Shelbourn, Stated Supply Associate Pastor (19 hours/week)
- Bookkeeper (20 hours/week)
- Custodian (20 hours/week)
- Janitor (20 hours/week)
- Music Director (15 hours/week)
- Organist (10 hours/week)
- Youth Director 1 (10 hours/week)
- Youth Director 2 (10 hours/week)

With an average weekly onsite worship attendance of 140 people, the church has a staffing ratio of one full-time staff member (40 hours per week) for every 21.7 people in attendance.

This ratio is higher than the average church, which has a ratio of one full-time staff member for every 40 attenders. Keep in mind that prior to 2020, this ratio was one staff member for every 75 attenders.

Payroll

In a typical church, the percentage of the budget that goes to support the staff of the church (including salaries, continuing education, and benefits) tends to fall around 60%. Westminster Presbyterian Church has allocated \$452,700 of its \$940,000 budget to staffing. This accounts for 48.16% of the church's budget dedicated to supporting the staff of the church (including salaries and benefits).

The church spends less of its budget on staffing than the average church, which commits 60% of its total budget to staffing. Prior to 2020, this average was 45-55% and, even by those standards, Westminster Presbyterian Church would be spending right in line with the average church on its staff.

Visitor Retention

For the average church, about 10-30% of first-time visitors will turn into regular attenders. Therefore, in order to grow by 10-30 people in a single year, the church will need to see about 100 first-time guests in that year (including guests at regular services and special services like Easter Sunday).

Westminster estimates that it received approximately 180 first-time visitors over the last calendar year. If the church were to retain just one out of every ten of those visitors, the weekly worship attendance would increase by approximately eighteen people over the course of the year. This small increase could make a significant difference in attendance numbers and impact the current feeling of scarcity.

Volunteers

In an average church, 45% of the number of weekend worship attenders (adults and students, but not children) are serving regularly in a volunteer role.

Westminster has not tracked the number of weekly volunteers. Until the church is able to track the number of weekly volunteers, there will continue to be a narrative based on feelings of scarcity and insecurity rather than reality.

Due to the lack of clear tracking, it is impossible to quantitatively determine if Westminster is experiencing more, fewer, or the same number of people volunteering in ministry than the average church. Westminster will need to identify 63 people who volunteer their time weekly to meet this norm.

NOTE: Normally, this number is correlated to the amount spent on staffing; the more staff a church has, the lower the volunteer percentage becomes as more of the work is accomplished by paid workers.

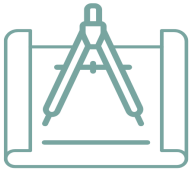
Involvement in Groups

While the data for what's normal for churches in group involvement is not available, there are some observations worth noting. It's been observed that healthy churches have at least 40-50% of their adult attendance in some form of small group. Churches that excel at connecting their people have upwards of 80% of their adults in groups.

These groups can include Sunday school classes, small groups, Bible studies, youth groups, or men's or women's groups with fewer than 25 people. Though exact numbers are not tracked by the church, it is estimated that 45 people, or 32% of the average adult in-person worship attenders, are engaged in groups regularly. This number is lower than the average for healthy churches.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE STAFF

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a single staff person, instability is a predictable result. Ministry Architects has found that the most stable approach to staffing a ministry, particularly in the early stages of a rebuild, is to build a team of three different kinds of staff and volunteers.



THE ARCHITECT

A person or group that designs the building plan and ensures the building is completed according to the agreed-upon plan.



THE GENERAL CONTRACTOR

A person or group who manages the flow and sequencing of the work and the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, ensuring the appropriate number of workers are in place for each project



THE SKILLED WORKERS

These people are charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for certain aspects of the work. A skilled worker might have particular skills in relating to a specific age group, in planning and managing events, or in teaching others.

Each of these roles is important as Westminster Presbyterian Church pursues a more sustainable model of youth ministry. As the church moves forward, the following observations will be helpful to keep in mind:

- The Senior Pastor currently fulfills all three roles: architect (vision, preaching), general contractor (ministry management), and skilled worker (administrative tasks). His focus on strategy is limited by time-consuming tasks typically handled by skilled workers.
- The current organizational structure lacks a dedicated general contractor to manage part-time staff and coordinate church logistics. Responsibilities for internal systems, staff cohesion, and clear delegation are fragmented.
- Many part-time specialists (music, communications, bookkeeping, custodial) cover specific tasks. However, the general contractor's role heavily influences a broad span of control.
- Westminster Church has a large staff for its size, with one full-time person for every 21.7 attendees. Given the pastoral overload and the organizational issues noted, it seems like the organization of staffing might not be helping them strategically or making programs more efficient.

ASSETS

STRENGTHS TO PROTECT

Quality of Traditional Worship and Music

Westminster Presbyterian Church enjoys a widely acknowledged and deeply appreciated tradition of high-quality music and worship. This is a consistent source of pride and spiritual depth for the congregation and is often cited as a reason people remain connected to the church. The commitment to strong traditional worship provides a stable, comforting, and spiritual experience for worshippers each week.

The quality is noted not only in the execution but in the historical dedication to the program. As one member noted, "There is a long history of very high-quality traditional worship and music at Westminster." Furthermore, the church's location in a university and capital city provides a consistent talent pool, supporting the high standard. This appreciation extends beyond the worship service itself, with another member stating, "We have been so blessed with music people over the years." This asset serves as a pillar of the church's identity and is a magnet for those seeking a rich, traditional worship experience.

Deep Relational Care and Connection

Westminster Presbyterian Church provides a strong community for its members, offering a powerful sense of belonging and mutual support that anchors many long-time attendees. This is reflected in the church's reputation as friendly and accepting, providing a crucial social and spiritual safety net for individuals and families during times of need. The consistent care shown to one another is repeatedly cited as a primary reason for members' sustained commitment.

The deep relational bonds and commitment to the welfare of fellow members were readily apparent in the listening groups. As one member shared, "There is deep care for each other here." This commitment to one another has created a core strength that has allowed the congregation to endure periods of conflict and decline. This sense of belonging is often the defining factor that keeps people engaged and invested in the church's future, with one participant stating simply, "The way people care for each other is why I stay here."

The church's strength is evident in its relational core and its ability to function as a supportive, familial community for its members.

Outstanding Outreach and Loved Events

Westminster Presbyterian Church maintains a consistent, visible presence both in the community through its mission work and within the lives of its members through a robust calendar of engaging events. This blend of outward service and reliable internal programming forms a critical part of the church's identity and provides familiar rhythms for the congregation.

At the core of the external focus is the food pantry, which members consistently refer to as exemplifying the heart of service for having mission impact in the community. This active commitment to justice extends to supporting Presbyterian disaster relief trips, and other initiatives like World on a Plate, and Matt Talbot Kitchen and Outreach demonstrating a strong, historical commitment to outreach.

Internally, the church benefits from established, well-loved traditions that create community and generational memories. For instance, the

annual calendar includes events like the Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday services. A successful example of building internal community is the Advent Workshop, which was described as a big event after church with activities, chili-cook-off, etc. These reliable events, coupled with mission work, ensure that the church provides a balanced offering of faith formation, spiritual discipline, and service.

Westminster Preschool

Westminster Presbyterian Church benefits significantly from hosting a high-quality, separately managed preschool on its campus. This arrangement provides the church with a consistent, positive connection to the local community, especially with young families who are the church's target demographic for growth. While organizationally separate, the preschool's reputation reflects positively on the church as a whole.

The quality of the program is widely recognized within the community. As one member noted, "We have one of the best preschools in the community." This high standard is evidenced by the fact that the program is "accredited," offering families a sense of security and professionalism. Furthermore, the pastoral staff demonstrates intentionality in connecting with the children; the Rev. Dr. Jimmy Shelbourn plays the guitar for the children regularly, and the Rev. Chris Peters participates in chapel with them.

Westminster Preschool provides a steady stream of goodwill and a visible commitment to serving the needs of young children in the neighborhood, positioning the church facility as a trusted, vital resource for the next generation of families.

Location with Family Growth Potential

Westminster Presbyterian Church benefits from a prime geographic location that positions it as an accessible resource for a densely populated,

desirable area. The church is strategically situated with the potential to re-engage the community and cultivate the next generation of attendees, possessing an asset that cannot be replicated.

The church is physically located between two neighborhoods, providing dual-frontage visibility and easier walking or driving access for residents on multiple sides of the city. This central placement offers a significant advantage for mission and outreach efforts.

Furthermore, the church is located in close proximity to three elementary schools, signifying a clear concentration of the young families the church seeks to reach. The church's location ensures that the core target demographic for future growth is geographically accessible and confirms that there is immense potential for reaching families who are nearby.

Adult Education and Small Groups

Westminster Presbyterian Church enjoys a mature, robust infrastructure for intellectual and relational faith formation among its adult members. This strength is essential for discipleship, offering regular chances for spiritual growth, learning, and close fellowship outside of the main weekly worship. By facilitating both formal education and small group meetings, the church is well-positioned to enhance the involvement of its current and future members.

The formal adult education ministry is highly valued and frequently praised by participants. As one member enthusiastically stated, "We have a very strong adult education ministry. It's incredible." The content of this education is designed to be relevant to daily life, with programs such as weekday Bible study and post-worship adult education that connect theology with current issues.

In addition to formal classes, the church maintains a foundational infrastructure of small

groups, including Presbyterian Women's circles, meal-focused groups, and cancer support groups. The existence of these established pathways for connection provides a readily available means for new and existing members to form the deep relational bonds characteristic of a healthy church.

Dedicated and Well-Loved Clergy and Staff

Westminster Presbyterian Church is blessed with a staff team and clergy who are deeply appreciated by the congregation and demonstrate high levels of capacity and passion in their specific roles. This positive staff culture and dedication provide a strong foundation of leadership and program execution that the church can rely upon as it plans for the future.

The Senior Pastor, the Rev. Chris Peters, is widely acknowledged for his gifts and commitment. He is cited by the congregation as a great preacher whose passion for the church's future is evident. Furthermore, the pastor's own commitment to the future is high. As one member noted, "He is energized, hopeful, and open to the Spirit's movement."

Beyond the clergy, the talent and dedication of the program and administrative staff are recognized. One participant expressed, "We have great staff." Similarly, a staff member stated, "That's one of the things that works really well here. We all work really well together." This appreciation for the staff's professionalism and care is a powerful source of congregational morale and loyalty.

Facilities

Westminster's facility is a valuable asset. Despite size and maintenance challenges, its beautiful, functional, and high-quality construction offers significant potential for internal ministries and external partnerships.

At the heart of the facility is the worship space, with one member noting, "We have an amazing sanctuary." The church's beautiful and high-quality spaces, ideal for the organ and frequently used for weddings, create a strong first impression and offer significant potential for special event and rental revenue.

The building's significant size offers ample unused space, presenting an opportunity for community engagement. Its scale and location make it a major resource for hosting various local organizations and ministries.

Clarity of Need

A crucial asset for Westminster Presbyterian Church is the widespread and collective understanding among its members that the status quo is unsustainable and that significant strategic change is required. This clarity of need is a prerequisite for any major transition, as it minimizes internal resistance and maximizes the effectiveness of the consulting process. The congregation is largely on the same page regarding the necessity to make some strategic changes.

Members repeatedly articulated a desire to break the cycle of internal deliberations. One person noted, "We really want an outside look. We've done a lot of internal looking," indicating a trust in external expertise. This sentiment is amplified by an open acknowledgment that past methods are no longer effective, with another participant stating, "We have to rethink the way we've been doing things. What worked before is not."

The ultimate goal of this shared clarity is momentum, as evidenced by this expression by one member: "We need to find a way to get unstuck." This unified recognition that the church is stalled, coupled with a genuine desire to try something new, is a powerful asset that the leadership can leverage to ensure high engagement and commitment to future changes.

CHALLENGES

OBSTACLES TO MOVING FORWARD STRATEGICALLY

Scarcity-Driven Mission

For many years, the church has identified a need to grow. Specifically, since COVID-19, the church has experienced a notable loss of children and young people.

As the church expresses a strong desire to reach new people, there lies a deeper question underneath: Why? Many of the outreach conversations appear driven less by a passion for the needs of the community and more by an urgency to sustain existing programs and traditions.

The collective anxiety over what the church lacks—people, money, and momentum—is preventing the congregation from understanding its assets as a strong foundation for a new chapter of ministry. As one person put it, "This is a church with a scarcity mindset. We believe we just don't have enough." This fear is the primary emotional energy driving the current strategic conversation.

This anxiety is driving a misunderstanding of the church's mission. Rather than having a missional and spiritual impact, the church simply desires to grow. Instead of outreach being driven by a clear mission for the community's needs, growth conversations are often rooted in an urgency to sustain existing programs and traditions.

One member shared, "We just need to get them to come here," and another observed that growth conversations are focused on filling internal gaps: "We don't have people, but I'd like to see us reach out and find ways to get other people to show up."

There's an alternative approach to church growth. Churches often fail when their primary goal is "we need to grow." However, those that focus on "this is who we are, and this is who we care about" often achieve significant impact. As one member reflected, "Maybe we're supposed to be a helping church and not a big church."

Until the motivation for reaching people prioritizes care, compassion, and calling over mere survival, efforts to grow will likely feel disconnected from the very individuals the church aims to serve.

Unclear Discipleship Pathway

Westminster Presbyterian Church currently lacks a clear, articulated discipleship pathway that guides new and existing members on how to grow in their faith, connect with the church, and move toward serving. While the church offers a variety of programs, they function as disconnected offerings rather than a cohesive sequence of next steps. This ambiguity means that involvement is often left to individual initiative, making it difficult for new people to integrate fully and for leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of their spiritual formation efforts.

This challenge is most visibly evidenced by the lack of clear expectations for personal faith development. The congregation's desire to be inclusive and welcoming is strong, but the invitation to spiritual transformation is unclear. Some participants believe that the church does not equip its people for deep, personal spiritual engagement. As one person noted, "I don't think that this congregation is encouraged to read the Bible." Others have noted, "The opportunities for learning are great, but there isn't a lot to deepen my discipleship."

Furthermore, the many programs the church does offer are viewed as disconnected offerings, not a cohesive journey. Without a clear pathway, the church struggles to define what successful spiritual growth looks like.

This lack of focus on foundational spiritual formation is a significant roadblock. Until Westminster develops a strategy that simplifies the path to engagement and elevates the priority of spiritual depth, the congregation will lack the inner resilience needed to overcome the scarcity mindset and the historical wounds it carries. The church must translate its welcoming culture into an intentional strategy for transformation.

Inclusive But Not Inviting

Westminster is truly a warm and inclusive place. But here's the tough part: that warm welcome isn't turning into a lasting connection because the church has a systemic failure to invite and follow up. The open-hearted culture is beautiful, but it's being let down by a lack of intentional design.

This creates a kind of "leaky front door." When a new person visits, they feel accepted and welcomed, but there's no clear, organized next step. You're relying on individuals to do the work of the institution. As one member shared, "We are really good about saying we are inclusive, but actually inviting someone in doesn't happen here." Someone else noted, "We rely on a culture of welcoming, not a system of helping people connect."

The absence of a system means that the hard work of being welcoming on Sunday morning is wasted by Tuesday. All the energy spent generating those initial visits is lost because the church doesn't have a reliable, delegated plan to reach back out, guide the guest, or incorporate them into a group.

While an organic culture of acceptance is an asset to the church, this does not necessarily translate into an explicit strategy of next steps toward discipleship and belonging.

Missing Tracking Numbers

Numbers matter because people matter. However, when asked for specific numbers of people involved in groups, or regular volunteers, Westminster Presbyterian Church was unable to provide clear data.

This absence of crucial data prevents staff and leadership from celebrating engagement, identifying areas of overload, or measuring the effectiveness of their connection strategies. When leaders cannot definitively state how many people are serving or connecting, the obvious default is to "not enough," hindering recruitment and causing anxiety. Without proper volunteer tracking, the church cannot accurately determine whether its staffing is supporting or hindering volunteer efforts.

A church cannot manage what it does not measure. Without a system to track involvement, Westminster will continue to make decisions based on anecdotal evidence and emotion rather than factual data.

Woundedness, Conflict, and Culture

Westminster continues to deal with some lingering wounds amongst its long-time members.

Previous staff conflict, turnover, and the leaving of some members have resulted in a sense of trauma from the past, creating a significant barrier to embracing change.

As one participant noted, "At Westminster, there are still folks who still have wounds from previous staffing conflicts." Another listening group attendee mentioned, "Nearly every Presbyterian church in the area has members who are former Westminster people." Though

these conflicts have taken place many years ago, yet for many, the wounds still feel fresh.

Additionally, Westminster, like many churches today, is grappling with a common cultural challenge: a perceived increase in judgment and a yearning for lost unity among its members.

While not widespread, some within the congregation are deeply troubled by disagreements and differing viewpoints on social issues. This challenge largely stems from the current climate of cultural and political polarization, manifesting in real-time relationships within Westminster. This division is preventing some from finding a common path forward together.

One person noted this desire to overcome conflict and find unity by stating, "I don't know if it can be found in today's tribalism." Another person observed, "I think we're judging each other so much."

Though the church is largely unified in its current identity, there are some who are deeply mourning a church family to which they once felt significant belonging.

Whether the lingering emotions are grief, betrayal, feelings of inadequacy, or resentment, many are still holding their hurt. Until church members find a way to acknowledge its past without being held hostage by its pain, the future will remain unclear.

Over-Reliance on the Senior Pastor

Westminster Presbyterian has developed an organizational habit of over-relying on the senior pastor to function as the primary general contractor (systems manager). As noted in the staffing section, the senior pastor is not only tasked with the vision and strategic leadership (architect) but also must manage the systems, administration, communication, and execution

of programs. This over-concentration of administrative responsibility on one individual creates a single point of failure and severely limits the church's capacity for growth.

The current staffing structure, with many part-time skilled workers but few managerial roles, ensures that the senior pastor is constantly pulled into day-to-day operations and problem-solving.

One church member mentioned, "The follow-up system seems to mostly revolve around Chris telling others if someone is new," and another looked at what happens in the church and reflected, "Often the only way stuff happens is if Pastor Chris owns it."

In fact, it seems like Pastor Chris is the one who must update the website, follow up with guests, preach, do funerals, lead the staff, and more. One person worried, "Chris is gonna get exhausted if we don't get him a helper."

The solution is not merely hiring an associate pastor, but to design a system of leadership in the church that assigns the work to the appropriate skilled workers, general contractors, and architects.

Facility Challenges

With an extensive, older, well-maintained facility, a significant portion of the church's energy, budget, and volunteer time is dedicated to the upkeep of the physical plant. This necessary maintenance work, while honoring the church's heritage, often consumes resources that could otherwise be directed toward outward-facing ministry and growth initiatives.

This imbalance is a common challenge for churches with large, historic campuses and a smaller active membership. The sheer size of the building, which is only operating at around 47% capacity during worship, demands

constant attention and funding. The church needs to discern how to steward its physical assets without allowing them to overshadow its primary spiritual mission.

One listening group member made it clear by saying, "I have a lot of concerns about the size of our building and how we make better use of it." Another mentioned, "We need to find ways to utilize our space more than what we're doing right now."

The church must determine how to turn its facility from a costly maintenance responsibility into a mission-aligned asset. This could result in better partnerships with local organizations or agencies, or just a reenvisioned plan to open the doors for use by the community. Until a clear facility usage strategy is developed, the church will continue to feel the drag of maintenance.

Nostalgia as a Strategy

At Westminster, the memory of past successful programs and higher numbers functions as the primary roadmap for the future. This challenge is not simply a fondness for tradition, but a barrier to innovation, as conversations frequently revert to discussions about "what used to be," preventing the congregation from fully embracing who it currently is or designing a genuinely new, forward-looking vision.

When asked about next steps for guests, most of the responses included references to programs that no longer exist, such as the large brunch that "used to be" held.

In addition, the consultants heard many comments like:

- "We used to have a softball team."
- "We used to have choirs."
- "We used to have a great education ministry."
- "We used to have more than one choir."

While honoring the past is important, it can't come at the expense of moving forward. The church's reflections on the past are often interpreted as a desire to return to a previous state, rather than a desire to forge a new path.

Nostalgia is never a good roadmap for the future. Until Westminster can honor its history without being governed by it, every proposed solution for the future will be rejected if it does not match a successful model from the past.

One person summed up this need to move forward succinctly by stating, "We can't go back to those years. Those years are gone. What are the ways in 2025 that this church can reach people?"

Volunteer Crisis

Westminster is experiencing a tension with its most dedicated volunteers. The church relies on a small, dedicated core to fill the majority of roles, leading to a feeling of over-commitment, depletion, and an organizational culture where serving feels like an obligation rather than a joy.

This challenge is rooted in the lack of a system to distribute work widely. Instead, the same individuals are rotated through all leadership and service roles. As one member lamented, "It's the same people over and over on all the committees and it's burning people out."

This culture of perpetual asking creates resentment and fatigue, leading to a high barrier for new volunteers who are quickly overwhelmed, as evidenced by the observation, "You join our church and we immediately put you to work." For those who remain, the work can feel isolating and burdensome. As someone said, "Sometimes it feels like you're an employee of the church."

Every new vision will be met with the immediate, exhausting question of who will lead it until the church transitions to a systemic

model that intentionally recruits new volunteers and safeguards the capacity of its current, fatigued core.

Vision Vacuum

The church seems to be lacking clear direction and vision. While the congregation upholds admirable values such as being "mission-friendly" and a place of "belonging" and "inclusivity," there doesn't seem to be a clear understanding of what it means for Westminster to be a healthy church other than simply having more people.

The energy and commitment for a new direction are clearly present, but they lack a clear channel. Members openly acknowledge this need for clarity, with one stating, "I would like us to find a direction; we have not had one since the pandemic."

This sentiment of being lost is compounded by a history of failed planning efforts. As one person remarked, "This is the fourth meeting in the last 15 years I've been to to figure out where we're going." Furthermore, the current ambiguity has created a dependency, with a significant portion of the church waiting to be directed instead of leading together. One person said, "We are waiting for our pastor to tell us what our mission is."

Until the church defines its vision, accepts its current reality, and defines what healthy ministry looks like for Westminster, it will never get the traction it desires.

Financial Unsustainability

One of the core issues in Westminster's ministry is that the church's spending model is no longer supported by its current giving base. This is leading to an over-reliance on its foundation and a constant state of anxiety about the future.

The congregation is acutely aware that the current financial model is broken. One participant plainly stated, "The math does not work here anymore. It's just that simple." Another person shared, "I'm terribly worried about our finances." The reliance on the foundation, as one person observed, means "We are heavily funded by the foundation to meet our budget and we aren't planning well."

The long-term fear is compounded by historical concerns about transparency, with one note indicating that "this church has a history of being not very transparent with the finances". This legacy of opacity, combined with the current unsustainable model, means that every conversation about new ministry is overshadowed by financial anxiety and skepticism. Until Westminster develops a clear and achievable plan to match its operating costs with its annual giving, the structural flaw will continue to cripple the church's ability to act on its new vision.

Children's Ministry Struggles

One of the most obvious challenges for the church is that the children's ministry is currently averaging only three children weekly, a number that creates a sense of concern for the church's vitality.

While the staff are diligent in their efforts, the results have been inconsistent. One participant said, "I hate that we don't offer something for the kids in the summer and just say 'see ya next fall.'" Furthermore, the basic foundation of trust is compromised by the instability in the nursery. One person highlighted, "We don't have consistency in the nursery and are not building relationships with families." This forces committed families into isolation, as evidenced by one member noting, "For the last few years, my kid was the only one in Sunday School."

Children's ministry serves as a crucial front door for new families, and the perception of a

dwindling, sporadic program deters parents who might otherwise consider joining.

Inefficient Staff Structure

Westminster has a top-heavy staff structure that is misaligned with the church's current size and strategic needs. While the church is technically overstaffed compared to the average church (a ratio of 1 full-time staff member for every 21.7 attenders, compared to the norm of 1:40), this surplus capacity is largely immobilized due to the configuration of the roles. The overall structure and number of specialized positions (e.g., Supply Associate Pastor, two Youth Directors, Organist, Music Director, Communications Coordinator) reflect the staffing chart of a much larger church, creating a mismatch between perception and reality.

The problem lies in the distribution of labor across the Ministry Architects model: The vast majority of positions (nine out of eleven) are part-time, functioning as skilled workers focused on narrow execution tasks. This specialization,

while effective for specific programs, means these staff members have minimal capacity or authorization to manage large systems or coordinate across ministries.

This configuration creates a disconnect where the senior pastor (the sole architect) is left with no internal support in the crucial general contractor (ministry systems management) role. Even with a high number of total staff, the full burden of administrative oversight, project management, communications flow, and guest follow-up is placed on the senior pastor's plate, resulting in high risk for burnout and a single point of failure for all new initiatives.

Without an infrastructure to coordinate, empower, and align the many part-time specialists and volunteers, the investment in staff will fail to realize its benefit. Without a strategic and intentional staffing pathway, the church risks future challenges stemming from haphazard hiring.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the church's current assets and challenges, a number of solutions and initiatives might bear fruit in the ministry. These have been formed into two lists that include what's important to accomplish now and what will be important to accomplish next.

What's Important Now: Recommendations that Westminster should consider implementing in the next three months. These are the steps that will relieve the immediate pressure points and gain momentum quickly, setting the church up with a strong foundation before moving forward.

What's Important Next: Recommendations that will begin the work of the next chapter. These can begin once the immediate needs have been addressed.

The NOW List

- **Reframe the Next 18 Months** as a time of building infrastructure for the next chapter of the ministry. This reframing, from crisis management to strategic design, will help the congregation channel its current anxiety and desire for renewal into focused, creative work.
- **Establish a Prayer Team** to undergird this implementation process.
- **Present this Report to the Session**, requesting that they endorse an 18-month strategic design process.
- **Establish an Implementation Team**, who report regularly to the Session of the church and the pastor. The team is made up of three to four volunteers. These non-anxious, goal-oriented people will free up the staff to focus on exceptional day-to-day ministry, while the Implementation Team ensures that the outcomes of this assessment are achieved. They will be coached and supported by Ministry Architects.
- **Host a “Quick Start” Orientation:** Invite the Implementation Team, staff to participate in a Quick Start Summit in which the implementation process is launched and the recommendations outlined in the assessment report are prioritized. The summit tackles the items that need to be done first and builds momentum for the implementation process.
- **Implement a Simple, Measurable System for Tracking Involvement.** Develop and launch a simple, agreed-upon method to consistently track participation in groups and volunteer roles.
- **Conduct a Simple, Church-Wide Volunteer Audit (Relief Effort).** Implement a two-week effort to get a baseline count of all current regular volunteers and small group participants. This should identify clearly everyone who is involved, but also list every role requiring a volunteer in the church for the existing ministry.

- **Launch the Property Discernment Process:** Recruit a small team of people to address the facility challenges and work through the steps of the "Property Discernment Accelerator" tool. This will help align the physical plant to the vision of the church and explore creative ways to maximize its use. Ministry Architects will provide three onsite events and twelve group coaching sessions to launch, continue, and conclude the work of this team.
- **Establish the Children & Youth Implementation Team:** Form a dedicated, small team (separate from the main church-wide Implementation Team) to serve as the steering committee for all rebuilding the church's impact with local children. This team will engage in the following work:
 - **Conduct a Virtual Assessment and Create a Strategy Design:** This team will work with Ministry Architects to conduct a virtual assessment of the current children and youth ministry environments, culminating in the design of a clear next generation strategy. This strategy should include a plan for program consistency (including summer), meeting the needs of families in the community, stable nursery staffing, and intentional relational touchpoints that create trust with young families.
 - **Children's Ministry Recommendations:** This team will work to implement the specific recommendations from the assessment.
 - **Implement a Bridge Strategy from Preschool to Ministry:** The strategy should include clear, intentional pathways, events, and communication efforts to transition families from the successful community preschool into the congregational ministry.
- **Create Space for Grief & Renewal:** The church's past wounds continue to shape its present. To move forward, the congregation should acknowledge its pain, grieve together, and begin telling new stories of renewal.

This process is not about forgetting the past—it is about naming it, grieving it, and releasing its hold on the church's future. As the congregation shifts from telling old stories of loss to new stories of transformation, it will create the space necessary to step into a renewed and hopeful vision. Consider the following ideas:

- **Host a Church-Wide Sacred Conversation on Healing**
 - Facilitate a safe and structured dialogue where members can name their grief and share their experiences in a guided, non-reactive setting.
 - Bring in a trained facilitator or counselor to help navigate the conversation with care.
 - Allow space for lament, honesty, and listening, without rushing toward resolution.
- **Plan a Service of Healing & Renewal**
 - Hold a special worship service dedicated to acknowledging the pain of the past while pointing toward hope and transformation.
 - Incorporate symbolic actions (e.g., lighting candles for those who left, writing burdens to be placed on the altar, anointing for healing).
 - Use scripture, prayer, and storytelling to shift the church's focus from loss to the new life that is possible ahead.
- **Start a New Stories Initiative** to intentionally shift the church's collective narrative by highlighting stories of transformation and hope rather than only revisiting past pain. Be sure that this strategy gives the church new language to move from hurt to hope.

The NEXT List

Vision & Direction

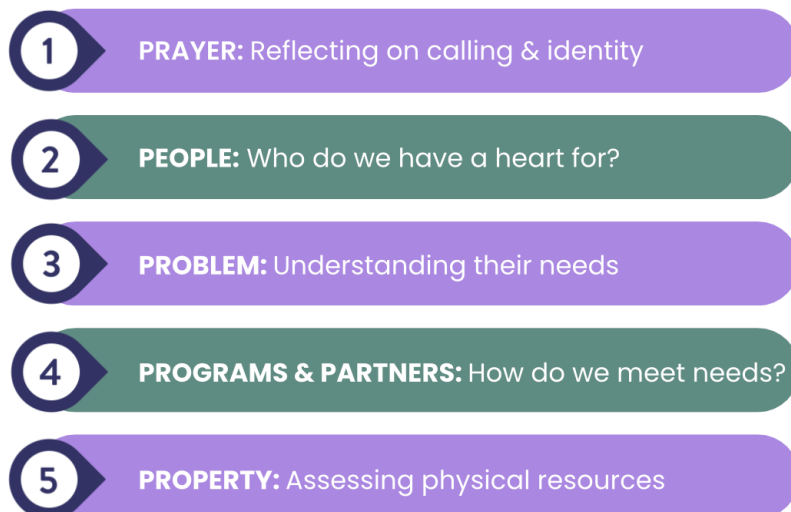
Healthy churches have a clear identity and calling. In order to move Westminster to a healthy vision, we recommend the following items:

- **Host a Vision Summit to Define Missional Identity:** Conduct a multi-session event with members of the church to solidify the church's unique identity and include:
 - **A Clear Statement of the Church's Identity**, which will guide the church's next chapter. This will provide an anchor that guides the use of resources, rather than letting the resources drive the mission.
 - **Explicit Core Mission Values** that will help the church identify how the church chooses its partnerships and priorities in the future.
 - **Benchmarks for Healthy Ministry** that define the goals of healthy ministry, rather than simply aiming at growth in numbers.

This experience should help the church move forward in the following process:

- **Prayer:** Starting the journey in thoughtful listening, reflection, and engagement with God around what He may be inviting the church to. Prayerfully uncover what Westminster has to uniquely offer the world.
- **People:** Develop a clear understanding of who God is calling this church to impact.
- **Problem:** After identifying who God is drawing the church toward, develop a robust understanding of their needs, hopes, and dreams. Rather than solving the church's desires for them, get to know the specific problems they need help with.
- **Programs & Partners:** Develop strategies of ministry that might align Westminster's unique gifts with the specific problems of those the church feels led to reach.
- **Property:** Consider what physical resources are needed to meet the needs of those the church is reaching through its programming strategies.

RECOMMENDED PROCESS



- **Develop a Strategy to Cultivate Grace and Unity:** Introduce and model spiritual practices or congregational teachings focused on non-judgment and charitable interpretation, providing the congregation with the tools to navigate cultural differences. Consider working with the [Colossian Forum](#) on how to implement wayfinder strategies of dealing with conflict in the church.

Building Infrastructure and Stability

In building a ministry, there are key pieces to creating a solid foundation. Those key pieces to building infrastructure and stability are the following items:

- **Create a Missions & Outreach Calendar:** Develop a plan for service and outreach events for 2026 that will engage the church in outward-facing events and without overtaxing the existing research.
- **Review and Revise Communication Strategies** to ensure that all congregants, regardless of age or technological proficiency, feel informed, and that the messaging speaks to those outside the church with clarity. Utilize as many forms of communication as possible, including updating the church's website, brochures, social media, mass texting, mail, e-mail, etc.
- **Establish a Financial Sustainability Plan:** Develop a clear plan to match the annual operating budget with annual giving, systematically reducing the current over-reliance on the foundation without compromising new mission initiatives. This plan should also include an intentional generosity strategy focused on teaching the spiritual discipline of generosity.
- **Design a Clear Enfolding and Follow-Up System:** Formalize the process for moving a guest from a first visit to integration into a small group or service team. This system should be delegated to a team of lay leaders, ensuring that enfolding is relational but not dependent solely on the senior pastor or staff.
- **Develop a Facility Usage Strategy:** Create a plan that aligns building use with the church's new mission and priorities. This plan should evaluate how unused spaces can best support ministry, outreach, or new revenue generation for mission.
- **Establish Centralized Tracking for Volunteers and Groups:** Finalize the system started in the Now List to systematically track volunteer roles and small group participation.

Developing and Nurturing Staff and Volunteers

As the foundation is built, the church will need to assess the staffing structure (paid and volunteer) that will best serve the ministry as it moves forward. The church will also need to ensure it is engaging and equipping the leadership.

- **Develop a sustainable long-term staffing strategy:** The Implementation Team, working with the session, should undertake a formal review and restructuring of the staffing strategy. The long-term strategy is not simply about filling roles, but ensuring that the roles themselves are aligned to the current size and future vision of the church.

- **Establish a Dedicated General Contractor Function:** Formally delegate and resource the general contractor role (managing ministry systems, internal communications flow, project tracking, and coordination across all part-time ministries). This may involve elevating an existing staff member, restructuring a current part-time position, or creating a new administrative/operations position. Consider beginning this as an interim, volunteer role before determining the staffing needs.
- **Protect the Architect:** Codify the senior pastor's primary function as the architect (vision, strategy, preaching, external presence). Their job description might be rewritten to exclude the day-to-day administrative tasks currently consuming their time.
- **Align Skilled Worker Roles to Ministry Needs:** Review all specialized, part-time positions (e.g., youth directors, music associate) to ensure their job descriptions focus on core results that directly support the new discipleship pathway and the church's missional identity by replacing roles that fit a "much larger church" with focused roles aligned with the church's current reality.
- **Integrate Volunteerism as an FTE Multiplier:** The staffing strategy must explicitly account for lay leadership. The staff organization chart should show where each staff member connects directly with volunteer teams. This formal integration should clarify that the staff's role is to recruit, equip, and empower volunteers, not to do all the work themselves.
- **Host a Volunteer Development Summit:** Conduct a two-day onsite summit to capture all volunteer roles in the church, build an organizational chart, create the job descriptions, and establish the recruitment plan necessary to build a right-sized volunteer structure.

Clear Strategies and New Initiatives

Once the foundation is being laid and volunteers are engaged and clear on their roles, the church will then need to shift its focus to establishing clear strategies and developing new initiatives such as:

- **MIA Follow-Up:** Determine the approach to follow up with people who are missing in action or have left the church. Create a list to track who has gone missing, the reasons they have gone, and who followed up with them. Create a culture of care for MIA church members and a spirit of humility to learn from their departures.
- **Launch a Discipleship Task Force:** Create a temporary task force to simplify and streamline the church's spiritual formation offerings. This group will develop a clear, compelling discipleship pathway that articulates simple steps for new and existing members to take in their journey of faith. The goal is to prioritize depth over breadth, helping participants know exactly how to take next steps in their faith journey as well as clearly communicating these opportunities to the church.
- **Simplify and Streamline the Discipleship Pathway:** Finalize the work of the Discipleship Task Force to establish a simple, sequential, and highly promoted set of next steps (e.g., Wworship, Cconnect/Ggroup, Sserve). This new pathway must intentionally elevate the priority of personal and communal spiritual growth.

- **Launch a Unified Generosity and Volunteer Stewardship Campaign:** Develop and launch an annual, integrated stewardship campaign that links the giving of financial resources with the giving of time and talent. This moves the church beyond a transactional plea for money and into a discipleship message about whole-life investment. Elevate this campaign by using it as an annual visioning season for the church.
 - **Design a "Commitment to Calling" Campaign:** Shift the focus from "covering the budget" to "funding the mission." The campaign could emphasize the church's new core identity and include a dual commitment card: one section for financial pledging and a second for a clear, short-term commitment to a specific volunteer role identified by the Volunteer Development Summit.
 - **Increase Financial and Volunteer Transparency:** Use the data from the new tracking systems (volunteer hours and group participation) and the new financial sustainability plan (budget matching annual giving) to show the congregation the impact of their generosity in both money and time.
 - **Connect Giving to Discipleship:** Ensure all campaign messaging is woven into the new discipleship pathway. Giving money and time should be framed as a step on the spiritual growth path, demonstrating that commitment is the natural outgrowth of spiritual maturity.

MINISTRY ARCHITECTS

Ministry Architects has been hired to ensure the following tasks are completed:

- A 3-day, onsite assessment of the church's ministry with two consultants.
- Chair the Implementation Team meetings for eighteen months to ensure recommendations from the assessment report have been addressed.
- A 2-day onsite Quick Start Summit to launch the newly formed Implementation Team into their new role, identify the pressure points that need to be addressed first, and to begin addressing the pressure points through a sustainable agile project management system.
- A virtual assessment and report of the children and youth ministry, including an online survey and listening groups. This report identifies assets and challenges of the ministry, provides context for the church compared to churches across the nation, names best practices in ministry, and provides recommendations for a 12-month implementation process to put the recommendations into practice.
- Coaching for the children and youth ministry Implementation Team, ensuring that the team is resourced and equipped to address all of the recommendations in the assessment report.
- Twelve coaching sessions for the children and youth ministry director to ensure continued implementation of healthy systems.
- Three 1.5-day onsite events to launch, continue, and conclude the "Property Discernment Accelerator" tool. Westminster Presbyterian Church will identify a team to regularly meet and work through the steps of the process. Twelve group coaching sessions for the accelerator team. This will allow the team to begin establishing an implementation plan after the accelerator process is completed.
- A facilities usage plan that ensures the maintenance and appropriate use of church facilities while providing a means to assess and prioritize usage, informed by alignment with the church's mission, vision, and goals.
- A robust missional outreach strategy designed to assess the needs in the surrounding community in order to develop and facilitate outreach plans on an annual basis to connect the ministry to the city.
- A 2-day, onsite Volunteer Development Summit designed to capture all the volunteer roles in the church and build an org chart. Includes job descriptions, org chart, and how best to recruit, train, and align all the teams in the church.
- Project management support from Ministry Architects that empowers the key stakeholders to navigate the complexities of launching new initiatives of this magnitude, harnessing momentum, and ensuring results.
- A 2-day, onsite Next Steps visit at the completion of the process to clarify the 5-year strategy and goals for the church. This next steps game plan will identify the next steps as a result of the congregational work throughout the process, as well as goals for maintaining sustainability and engagement.



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Scott has also served as an executive pastor, designing systems of ministry for church multiplication, and as a campus pastor where he developed a growing campus of 18- to 25-year-olds and ministry to local college students. Prior to his work at Harbor Churches, Scott held a number of positions with Young Life and worked as a youth pastor with three churches in the Midwest. Scott is also the author of [*Sustainable Young Adult Ministry: Making it Work, Making it Last*](#), and he lives in the suburbs of Grand Rapids, MI.



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Jeff Dunn-Rankin is a veteran of youth and family ministry, starting at Christ United Methodist Church in Venice, Florida, in 1999. As executive vice president of Ministry Architects, he has consulted with large and small youth and children's ministries from California to Florida and is a frequent speaker at youth and children's conferences. Jeff co-wrote three books with Mark DeVries: *Before You Hire a Youth Pastor*, *The Indispensable Youth Pastor*, and *Training on the Go* (volume 2) (Group Publishing). Before beginning church ministry, Jeff was managing editor of the Charlotte Sun newspaper. Jeff is a graduate of the Sewanee: The University of the South and has a Master's in Business Administration from Vanderbilt University. He lives in Venice, Florida, with his wife, Mary Lou, and they have two grown children.