



firstmethodist
HOUSTON

CHURCH-WIDE
ASSESSMENT REPORT

OCT. 2022

M MINISTRY
ARCHITECTS

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BACKGROUND

First United Methodist Church is a pillar of ministry to the Houston metropolitan area. With a campus downtown and one on the west side, First Methodist's reach with the love of Christ is widespread. Church members describe their church family as "loving," "missional," and "supportive." Conversely, other descriptive words used were "overwhelming," "struggling," and even "hemorrhaging."

The church's history goes all the way back to 1835, with the first service being held at what ultimately became the Downtown Campus in 1839. The West Campus began services in 1993 to better serve growth moving toward the west part of the area and beyond. For a fascinating read, check out these [Historic Snapshots of First Methodist Church](#).

The membership of the church is 2,785, and in an average week, 509 people attend one of the church's four in-person worshipping communities:

- one traditional service at the Downtown Campus
- three services at the West Campus
- online worship
- live TV worship

The style of these services include contemporary and traditional worship, as well as an African service with French and Swahili. Each service is also live-streamed as part of the church's digital presence.

The church continues its work with the United Methodist mission of "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." To put hands and feet to this, First Methodist has a big menu of ministry program offerings such as the Main Street Indoor Play Park, Lifeline, Fall sewing classes, First Students Fall Retreat, First Kids Sundays, W.O.W. (Women of the Word), and more.

Key figures	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Budget (\$M)	3.36	5.00	5.07	5.07	4.81	5.16	5.26	5.63	4.93	4.73
Avg. Weekly Attendance	1956	1880	2269	2083	1154	1018	1070	869	790	384
Membership	6381	6147	5839	5535	5242	3526	3467	3467	3352	2770

Rev. Lance Richards was appointed to serve First Methodist in July 2022. Rev. Amanda Davis serves as the executive pastor. Ken Coneby is a teaching pastor. Rev. Sylvia Kiboko pastors the Altar Umoja congregation. Rev. Ann Spears began serving in 1997.

The church has a 2022 budget of \$5,833,099 which is an increase over the previous annual budget. (NOTE: The budget amount listed here is still being configured.) The budget and operating expenses are a deep concern to all as the church struggles to get upright in its financial in/out flow. With two campuses, one with a sanctuary that seats 2,000 and the other with a seating capacity of 2,250, but only 509 attending in person, it follows that expenses outweigh the giving. Still, it must be said that both campuses are beautiful with the hope of ideas past and dreams for the future ahead.

Ministry Architects was invited to conduct a church-wide consultation as part of “remembering the future:” discovering what lessons can be learned from transitions and culture shifts, coming out of a pandemic and looking ahead.

This process includes providing an initial assessment of the church’s ministries and making recommendations about how it might move forward strategically over the next 24 months. Ministry Architects met with 20 focus groups, with a total of 117 people giving input.

RENTS

One lens Ministry Architects likes to use for understanding ministry is the idea of the “three rents.”

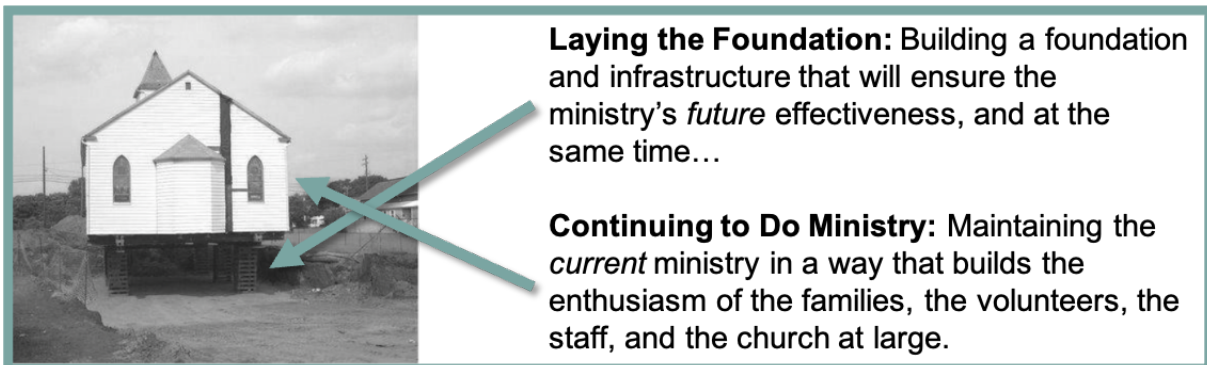
Churches that “pay these rents” with their ministry tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. Churches that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing, and discouragement.

It has been Ministry Architects’ experience that though these three rents do not always ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by staff, lay leaders, and the congregation at large.

Rent #1: NUMBERS

A significant percentage of congregants need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church’s ministry. It is important for this target number to be clearly agreed on by the church leaders and staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, the ministry is typically more likely to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established.

For First Methodist Houston, our consensus is that this rent is not being paid because numbers have significantly declined and are also difficult to accurately track. In addition, target numbers (one measurement of success) have not been set.



Rent #2: PROGRAMS

In order to earn the right to experiment with change, church leadership needs to provide at least a few visible, effective programs that give people something to talk about.

At First Methodist, this rent appears to be paid as there are several successful programs creating buzz — though some might think this is unpaid due to conversations about how good things used to be.

Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM

The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of a church's staff, volunteers, and congregation are essential to building trust. Sadly, this is a rent that's past due at First Methodist. Although love abounds, at this juncture, worry and concern are shouting over any enthusiastic cheerleading.

As the leadership of the church develops its long-range vision, it will need to remain attentive to these three rents.

CHURCH-WIDE NORMS

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

Budget

The average church budget settles around \$1,400 per attendee. First Methodist has a budget of approximately \$5,833,000 (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits), and an average Sunday attendance of about 509 between all its services. The church’s revenue in recent years comes from a combination of giving, income from assets, rental partnerships, and borrowing. The diversity of the church’s variety of income sources makes naming the amount of giving per attendee a complex task. Still, it is safe to assert that First Methodist is clearly experiencing the generosity of its congregation above most other churches of this size.

Staffing

Ministry Architects has found that most churches have the equivalent of one full-time staff member (40 hours per week) for every 75 people in average total worship attendance.

Considering the average worship attendance of 509 and the 30 full-time positions (plus numerous part-time positions), First Methodist has the equivalent of one full-time staff for every 17 attendees. According to this rule of thumb, the church has the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 2200 worship attendees on a weekly basis. The current staff configuration allows room for significant numerical growth.

Payroll Percentage

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 in the range of 45-55%. First Methodist’s operating budget of \$5,833,000 has \$3,207,996 dedicated to the staff of the church, or about 55%. This staffing to budget ratio is at the top of what churches usually spend on staffing.

Facilities

A church’s ministry is also impacted by the physical layout of its campus and the constraints it may contain. Typically, parking and seating become constraints for churches who are looking to see growth. Consider the following norms:

- **Parking Spaces:** Most churches need three parking spaces for every five attendees. With 100 downtown spaces available (plus more free spaces on Sundays in nearby lots) and a weekly average of 273 attending, plus 595 West Campus spaces available with a weekly average of 236 attending, the church has plenty of capacity

for both services to grow and accommodate attenders in a single service at each campus. However, during the week, parking downtown is at a premium and is a hindrance to developing weekday ministry.

- **Seating Capacity:** Most churches will simply stop growing once the worship center is 80% filled on a regular basis. With 2,000 total seats at the Downtown Campus available and 2,250 seats in the worship center on the West Campus, the church has plenty of seating available for current attendance and growth.

Visitor Retention

For the average church, about 10-30% of first-time visitors will turn into regular attenders. For example, in order to grow by 10-30 people in a single year, the church would need to see about 100 first-time guests in that year (including guests at regular services and special services like Easter Sunday). In the past year, First Methodist saw an estimated 42 first-time visitors and could expect to add 5-12 regular attenders in the coming year with healthy guest enrolling systems and opportunities.

Volunteers

In an average church, 45% of weekend worship attenders (adults and students, but not children) are serving regularly in a volunteer role. With 267 total regular volunteers in the church and an average worship attendance of 509, FMH estimates that 52% of its worship attenders are serving regularly.

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 data for a normal range of group involvement among churches is not available, there are some targets worth noting. It's been observed that healthy churches have at least 40-50% of their adult attendance in some form of small group. Great churches 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. First Methodist estimates that 200 people (about 40%) attend their many small groups/short-term and long-term classes.

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

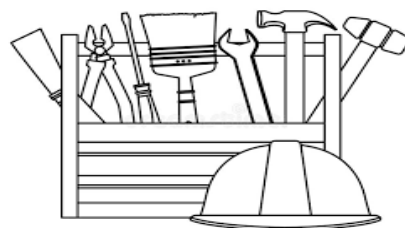
A person who designs the building plan and ensures that the construction is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan.

The General Contractor

A person who manages the flow and sequencing of the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of skilled workers is in place for each stage of the project.

The Skilled Workers

These people are charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. For example, a worker might have particular skills in relating to youth, in planning and managing events, or in teaching.



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

- In many churches, there is no person or group playing the role of the architect. The ministry simply moves from one event to the next without a clear vision or stated outcomes. For the short-term, the process with Ministry Architects will serve as a blueprint.
- Sometimes paid staff are not given the time or training to do their important work as the “general contractor” of a complex ministry.
- Staff are often expected to serve in all three of these roles. This is a recipe for congregational dissatisfaction and staff burnout.
- Some churches hire a skilled worker who is great at leading worship, building relationships or teaching a Bible study. These laborers often mature into an architect or a general contractor, but only if they are given permission, time, and training. Clarity in job roles would need to happen first before this type of development at First Methodist can happen.

When it comes to sustainable ministries that will endure and thrive, it's important to keep two concepts in mind:

Architecture

The hard systems like control documents, volunteer recruitment processes, program plans, and strategies for implementation.

Atmosphere

The soft attitudes, culture, vision, and perceptions.

Any attempt to architect the hard structures of any ministry without tending to the atmosphere that lies beneath those structures will produce little lasting change.

ASSETS

STRENGTHS TO PROTECT

A Heart for Missions

Serving the communities around the church's campuses has always been a part of First Methodist's DNA. The missional outreach stretches far and wide in several forms and functions; here is a list of the missions, although not exhaustive:

- Neighbors in Action
- LifeLine Street Ministry
- The Quillian Center
- Refugees
- Food Pantry
- Local school partnership

...and so many more locally, nationally, and globally. Well done, good and faithful servants.

Clergy That Cares

It was frequently shared that the pastoral staffing transition has been too frequent, leaving church members questioning in whom to place their trust as a leader. However, in the 3.5 months that Pastor Lance has been under appointment to shepherd First Methodist, his caring, listening style has already gone a long way to chip away at the mistrust. One participant said, "He says the same thing in multiple places. His story can be trusted to be the same wherever shared." Another person said, "I hadn't felt valued and cared for, and that's changing already since Lance came. Making everyone feel included again is just around the corner."

Tradition and History

If someone were a history buff, First Methodist would be a gold mine of Texas past. The church is the reason Methodism came to southeast Texas. The annals of Civil War history mention Col. William B. Travis and First Methodist. After the devastating 1900 Hurricane, First Methodist helped families and communities from Houston south to Galveston. In 1919, the church founded the Houston Methodist Hospital system. Generations of families have been baptized, married, and celebrated into Forever through the richness of First Methodist.

Music Ministry

Praises rang for the music provided by the choir, instrumentalists, and the staff leading this important worship ministry. Many comments were shared about the downtown choir and the church members who help populate it.



Facilities and Resource Rich

First Methodist's two campuses are very different from one another physically, yet each is amazing in its own way. The Downtown Campus celebrates the rich Texas history that can be seen around every corner and draws people from all over the city. The building exudes a traditional and rich feel, and the Main Street Indoor Park is wonderfully themed. The West Campus has a tremendous array of buildings and facilities that could be utilized for a variety of activities, including multiple worship venues, an education building, a pool, a recreation center, and ball fields. In addition, the church is full of people with connections to a variety of resources across Houston and around the region.

Diversity

"The reason we came to this church was when we first walked in, we thought, 'This looks like the family of God.'" Many people named the church's diversity of ethnicity, economic status, Downtown and Westchase, and so on as a strength of the church.

Houston

The city is alive with joy, and First Methodist is right in the middle of it all! Minute Maid Park and the Toyota Center are just a few blocks away from the Downtown Campus, and NRG Stadium is just a few miles down the road. High rise offices, apartments, restaurants, and the Theater District all lead to a city that is right there for the people of God to share God's love with so many others.

Additionally, the West Campus attracts those from the west side of the region, which was once the booming growth edge of Houston. The Westchase area is now a highly commercial district with a large international population in close proximity to the Westchase campus, which provides First Methodist with unique ministry opportunities.

Legacy Leavers

The church is rich in history and tradition; because of those two things, it is also rich in legacy leavers. These are the people who bring wisdom and a wealth of knowledge to the Table of God. Although it's not healthy to live in the past, it is wise to remember where we've been as we move into the future. First Methodist has a treasure trove of those who have built this strong foundation as a legacy for those who come after to carry it onward.

Clarity of Need

No one thinks "We're OK"...and this is a good thing! Every listening group shared their immense love for First Methodist, as well as their deep concern over the current state of First Methodist's organizational, structural, and financial issues. While the church is looking for commonality in purpose, it can start with the fact that everyone is in agreement that the church isn't where and what it needs to be. Praise God!

This Hope Will Never Disappoint Us

In Romans 5:3-5, the apostle Paul writes: *"we also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope. And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. He gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us."*

CHALLENGES

OBSTACLES TO MOVING STRATEGICALLY FORWARD

Vision Vortex

When listening group participants were asked about the vision and mission of the church, the most common response was that they didn't exist. One person said, "The church as a whole does not have a clear vision and direction from the top." Another said, "We're rudderless for where we are now, so we're just following the vision of what the church used to be, and that time will never return."

Missing is clarity on the exact mission for where First Methodist is today and where it wants to head for these new times in church culture. In addition to that missing vision and mission, the church needs a clearly defined set of values, which will become the congregation's covenant of conduct.

Divisions and Disconnects

Across the various listening groups people spoke of divisions within the church, saying the following:

- "We are a divided church."
- "It doesn't seem that it functions as one church."
- "The various worshipping communities and campuses don't know each other that well."
- "Our church is deeply factionalized. You have these cross fissures on almost any issue."
- "As a church, we are incredibly disconnected."

No division or disconnection was mentioned more often or more passionately than the gap between the people who worship at the West Campus and the people who worship at the Downtown Campus. One person stated succinctly, "There is a disconnect between West Campus and Downtown." "We are never together," noted someone else. Other comments show the depth of the divide:

- "It feels like there is a lot of animosity and anger."
- "I've heard people say that they would never step foot on the West Campus. And that hurts."
- "You have a power struggle: vying for the pastor's attention and trying to pull the church in the direction they want it to go."
- "We have two very different churches."

The Old Guard

Many members shared that they've been a member for 40 or 50+ years. It's a thing to celebrate!

However, some younger members mentioned that they feel like they can't break into leadership because of the tenure of longer-term members. Here are comments shared:

- "It's hard to break into the Old Guard."

- “I’ve been a member for 10 years and am constantly asked if I’m new here just because I’m young.”
- “There’s a noticeable group of people who have been members for 40, 50, even 60 years and they can be cliquish.”

It will be important for First Methodist to make sure it’s making room for people of all ages and not just doing things because that’s the way they’ve always been done (and by the people who have always done them).

Dwindling Participation

First Methodist will have to come to terms with statistics that show fewer people are attending church in person on Sundays. In 2000, the National Council of Churches showed that 42% of Americans were present in their place of worship in a week. As of 2020, that number has decreased to 17%.

First Methodist can see that same trend in its own attendance, which dropped from nearly 2,000 attendees in 2012 to just over 500 in 2022.

To add to that challenge, many parishioners expect the same programs and services as when the church was four times larger.

Dire Financial Straits

First Methodist finds itself in an extremely challenging financial position. The church lacks the operating budget to meet payroll, and the pastors have had to make calls soliciting the generosity of the congregation in order for the church to pay its employees. Additionally, the church has maxed out its line of credit and is carrying over \$3 million in debt. This financial crisis came about gradually, but very few people in the congregation were aware of the severity of the church’s financial woes until the past few weeks.

However, the congregation is now aware and concerned. “My main concern is the budget, and that keeps me up at night,” shared a listening group participant. Another admitted, “We have to look reality in the face.” One person observed, “We are too dependent on the giving of the few.” And someone else said, “We’ve bitten off so much, it’s hard to pay for it all.”

West Campus Purpose

The West Campus of First Methodist was launched and built with a vision that it would become a flagship campus on the west side of Houston. With that vision in mind, a large facility was constructed with a 2,250-seat auditorium, an expansive education building, and a multi-faceted recreation facility. However, the West Campus never fully developed into that flagship identity, even in past years when weekly participation was higher than its current levels. A listening group participant shared candidly, “Undoubtedly, we have not been as successful as everyone hoped in growing and maintaining attendance at the West Campus.” The reality of this campus not fully reaching its initially intended vision leaves First Methodist in a situation where they must determine what the purpose of the West Campus will be as it moves forward.

Children’s/Youth Ministry

At both campuses, church members expressed concern about what appears to be a diminishing ministry. One person shared, “We want young families, yet we don’t seem to

place a high value on our children and youth.” Others echoed the sentiment. A parent said, “My child just won’t come. Ministry to his age feels like a box to check, an afterthought.”

When several listening sessions were asked to name the church’s top three challenges, ministry to children and youth was named each time.

Lazy Assets

The church has a variety of physical assets, such as buildings, parking lots, and recreational fields and structures. There is a feeling among some in the congregation that these assets could be better utilized, either to produce revenue or to carry out ministry. “We are cash poor because we have not used our physical assets well,” asserted a listening group participant. Another participant shared, “It has been clear for many years that we needed to be much better stewards and that we should be utilizing our assets in a better manner.” “We need to keep thinking about creative ways to utilize our assets,” encouraged another lay leader.

Structure/Organization

Many listening group participants, including staff and lay persons, commented on how the church’s organizational structure and ways of operating fail to maximize the skills and talents that are present in the church. There is a common feeling that a lack of leadership has stifled people from reaching their potential and hindered the church’s efficiency and efficacy. “There is not an overarching strategy for the church that is shared amongst departments,” said a lay person. Another person observed of the staff, “They have not been given direction or structure.” Yet another person lamented, “It has been an ongoing practice for many years that staff job descriptions are not well-defined, therefore you do not get some of the quality output that you need.” One comment sums it all up: “It seems very disorganized, on every level.”

Volunteer Void

Beyond limiting the performance of the staff, the lack of structure and organization is also affecting lay leadership. A listening group participant declared, “Our congregation is very diverse, and it is also quite talented. They have not been tapped into because of how we were structured and leadership was pretty much consolidated into a small group.” “We need to involve our laity more in every ministry,” said another person. Two different people’s comments hit at the heart of the situation: “We have a number of people with skill sets, but they are not asked very often to help out,” and “We have a great amount of talent in the congregation, we just need to tap into it.”

Additionally, there is very little training for those who do serve. “We could use training on what all of our responsibilities are,” admitted one volunteer. Another mused, “We haven’t had a teacher training in years.” A lay leader’s comment captures the gravity of the training situation: “We don’t train them, we just throw them in there. It is not fair to them or the people that they are supposed to minister to.”

Missing Systems

There are several very important systems and processes that are missing or in disrepair at First Methodist. As a listening group participant observed, “The structures of the church have fallen into collapse.” Churches struggle to grow when an adequate infrastructure has not been provided to support the ministries. The following items and systems are currently missing or in need of renovation:

- Discipleship path
- Congregational care plan
- Accurate and comprehensive attendance tracking
- Visitor welcome and follow-up plan
- Contact and connection plan
- Organizational chart
- Staff and volunteer job descriptions

Communication

Across the various listening groups there was great dissatisfaction with the level to which First Methodist communicates with the congregation. When asked, “How is the communication at First Methodist?” several listening group participants simply laughed.

Others made the following comments:

- “There is none.”
- “It’s bad.”
- “If you don’t hear about it by word of mouth, you don’t hear it.”
- “I don’t think there is a process [for communication].”
- “There is not a lot of communication.”
- “We have no transparent communication currently.”
- “Until the [recent State of the Church] meeting, I didn’t know what was going on.”
- “The communication is sloppy.”
- “There is a real lack of communication here, and everybody knows it.”

Trust

Much of the dissatisfaction around the church’s communication centers on a perceived lack of transparency from the leadership of the church over the past several years. A person admitted, “There is a basic sense of distrust with leadership.” People feel as though they have very little exposure to major decisions made in the church. A church member shared their frustration, “There are a lot of moves being made in the background, and then they will make an announcement that seems out of the blue. We never know what’s happening, and then it just happens.” Another person described their experience: “The leadership doesn’t really share what is going on with us: finances, what is talked about in leadership sessions, when meetings are, etc.” The lack of communication and transparency, especially around major decisions and important developments, has caused many in the congregation to assume a posture of distrust and skepticism about the church leadership.

A Good Guy, But Not Jesus

Pastor Lance’s arrival and first few months of leadership have brought a great amount of hope to many in the congregation. However, it will be important to recognize that Lance Richards and Jesus are two different people, and only one of them is a bona fide savior.

There is already a lot of pressure on Lance simply because of the situation that the church finds itself in. “I feel a little bit sorry for the situation he has inherited,” someone confessed. Another person admitted, “There is an incredible amount of pressure on Lance.”

As the church puts a great deal of trust in Lance’s leadership, it will be important for everyone to give him a great deal of support as well. One person stated it well, “Shouldn’t there be a lot of pressure on us too, to help him?”

External Pressures

On top of the challenges that have developed within First Methodist itself, the church must deal with two outside pressures as well. First, the United Methodist Church is experiencing a prolonged season of discord and upheaval, including the disaffiliation of some United Methodist Churches. This development has been even more accelerated in the Texas Conference of the UMC. There is some pressure on First Methodist to identify exclusively with one of the current movements within Methodism.

Second, a variety of research is showing that mainline churches in the United States are generally experiencing declining participation, especially among younger adults. In order to overcome this trend, First Methodist will have to consider ways of reimagining ministry in the 2020s.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reframe the next 24 months as a time of building long-term infrastructure for the ministry. Name September 2024 as the target date for ministries that have sufficient infrastructure and support to provide long-term stability, while enjoying incremental successes along the way.
2. Present this report to the Strategic Mapping Team and Administrative Board, requesting that they affirm the 24-month strategic implementation process.
3. Invite the Strategic Mapping Team to recruit and commission a team to pray for this time of strategic development and share this report with them.
4. Charge the Strategic Mapping Team, who report regularly to the senior pastor and Administrative Board, to focus on the recommendations below. These non-anxious, goal-oriented people will free up the staff to focus on providing day-to-day ministry.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The remaining recommendations in this report fall into five main categories. A brief summary of the needs in each category is contained below with more detailed recommendations named in the following section of the report.

Triage - *Take immediate steps to ease the financial stress on the church and quickly begin moving toward church health.*

November 2022 - January 2023

Clarify - *Engage staff, leaders, and the whole congregation in processes that will create greater clarity about the church's current condition and its direction for the future.*

November 2022 - April 2023

Stabilize - *Capitalize on the increased clarity to implement basic systems and structures that will stabilize the church's resources and ministries and also move the church toward its newly clarified direction.*

January 2023 - August 2023

Innovate - *Embrace disruptive innovation and creativity to develop and test new ways to reach people and leverage the church's substantial physical resources.*

March 2023 - March 2024

Cultivate & Sustain - *Continue to create and strengthen systems that will support the church for years to come, including a system for innovation that allows the church to continue to creatively adapt to changing needs and context.*

January 2023 - January 2024

TRIAGE

November 2022 - January 2023

- **Prepare for Frustration:** Assume a posture of accepting inconvenience and/or disappointment for the next six months. In order for First Methodist to make ends meet for the next several months, individuals and groups will have to make adjustments they do not like. These adjustments are necessary and are only for a season.
- **Identify Quick Measures to Reduce Spending:** At this point, every dollar shaved from operating expenses matters. Identify some more steps that can be taken to reduce spending quickly. Consider the following:
 - Eliminate or reduce roles that are currently paid but could be done by volunteers.
 - Require approved event requests, including a budget, before any event is communicated to the congregation.
 - Evaluate the utility expenses of all gatherings, including worship, classes, and children's and youth ministries, on both campuses and temporarily relocate to more cost effective spaces where possible.
- **Minimum Viable Product:** Assume a posture of being okay with a few B+ products for the next few months. First Methodist is used to the highest level of excellence in many arenas. Don't settle for poorly done, but brainstorm a list of 10-plus areas where money can be saved by going with very good instead of perfect for a season. Commit to implementing the required changes in order to balance the budget.
- **MIA Follow-up:** Determine an approach to follow-up with MIA people. Create a database to track who has gone missing, the reasons they have gone, and which staff followed up with them. Create a culture of care for MIA church members.
- **PAUSE Denominational Conversations:** Commit to Postpone Action Until Serenity (*aka the peace of the Holy Spirit*) Emerges, delaying the congregation's process of discernment and decision whether or not to disaffiliate for approximately two years.
- **Define the Relationship With Quillian and Neighbors in Action:** Evaluate and restructure, if needed, the structural and financial relationship between these two non-profit organizations in the church.
- **Host a "Quick Start" Summit:** Invite the Strategic Mapping Team, key volunteers, and church staff to participate in a Quick Start Summit in which the renovation process is launched and the tasks outlined in this Assessment Report are addressed.
- **Establish Prayer Ministry for the Pastors, Staff, and Key Leadership:** Establish a small prayer team to pray regularly specifically for the pastors, staff, and key leadership at First Methodist. Charge the SPRC with this responsibility.
- **2023 Balanced Budget Based on 2022 Revenues**
- **Congregational Care Plan:** Create a process for ensuring that the needs of persons in the congregation are known by the leadership of the church and meaningful responses are made in a timely manner. Consider utilizing resources available through Methodist hospital.

CLARIFY

November 2022 - April 2023

- **Visioning:** Invite church members from both campuses and across all worshiping communities to participate in a multi-session, on-campus process of envisioning the future with Ministry Architects, resulting in a mission field analysis and statement of mission and core values for the whole church that can be immediately communicated and implemented by the senior pastor, staff, and Administrative Board.
- **Focus:** Through the visioning process, explore the target groups for ministry. Instead of “being all things to all people,” establish priorities for discipleship, mission, outreach, and evangelism.
- **Staffing Map:** Gather feedback from staff members on their current jobs in order to design an overall staffing strategy that leverages current staff and identifies any holes that need to be filled.
 - **Leadership Evaluation:** Provide mechanisms for evaluation for all church staff members, including space for self-reflection, supervisor feedback, and suggestions from the employee on how the church can help them succeed.
 - **Leadership Clarity:** Write or review written job descriptions for all paid staff positions in the church. Work with staff to ensure the job descriptions accurately match the work being done.
- **Children’s and Youth Ministry Assessment:** Invite Ministry Architects to conduct an onsite assessment of the children’s and youth ministries at both campuses, identifying assets, challenges, and recommendations.
- **Investment & Impact Summit:** Gather key leaders and staff for a multi-session workshop with Ministry Architects in order to clearly identify and prioritize ministries based on the investment (volunteers and finances) given to a ministry and the relative impact (outside and inside of the church) of that ministry. This will aid the key leaders and staff as they discern how best to focus the efforts of the church.
- **Introduction to Church Size Theory:** Familiarize the lay leadership and executive staff with the research and resources regarding Church Size Theory. *The Episcopal Church has done great work on this topic.*
- **Volunteer Alignment:** Conduct an audit of all volunteer teams and roles in the church and clarify their unique contribution to the church.
- **Attendance:** Record attendance for all programs (worship, Sunday school, Bible studies, book studies, special events, etc.) and develop a written game plan to track attendance in a consistent way in order to identify attendance trends and reach out to MIAs.
- **Clarify Missions Strategy and Alignment:** Evaluate, clearly articulate, and define parameters of the missions ministry in relation to the rest of the church, especially financial, communication, and decision-making structures.

STABILIZE

January 2023 - August 2023

- **Continue With Greater Transparency:** Create a protocol by which all decisions and important information are shared throughout the whole church community, ensuring that the church is not just communicating information, but that people are actually receiving it.
- **Right-size Plan:** Based on church size dynamics, create a game plan for gradually transitioning First Methodist to the right-sized infrastructure and congregational expectations.
- **Re-structuring:** Invite members of the staff and key leaders to participate in a facilitated process of evaluating the current organizational structure for the church and clarifying the function and purpose of all church committees, staff positions, and teams. Write out a current organizational chart. Create the ideal organization chart for continued growth. Upon examination of the current structure, restructure the organization in a strategic way in order for the church to be poised for success.
- **Programming Prioritization:** Following up on the Investment & Impact Summit, begin a season of ministry focus by identifying the top ministry themes that the church should align its resources toward. Then, determine how best to resource those themes and in what order.
- **Sharing the Vision:** After developing the mission statement and core values, create a game plan that will outline the best ways to communicate the mission and values of the church (sermon series, guidebooks, small group curriculum, etc.)
- **Hospitality Game Plan:** Build a hospitality strategy that will ensure a warm and engaging culture on Sunday mornings for guests and regular attenders that will ensure a strong relational connection with anyone who attends.
- **Volunteer Leadership Clarity:** Draft and/or update written job descriptions for all volunteer roles in the church.
- **Volunteer Development:** Provide sufficient training and development opportunities for all volunteers that leaves them inspired to serve again rather than exhausted.
- **Database:** Numbers matter because people matter. Create a database of all of the people who are connected to your congregation. This database will be an important tool as you communicate and determine who is active.
- **State of the Church:** In 2023, hold quarterly state of the church meetings, following up on the October 2022 state of the church meeting. Use these meetings to update the church on progress that has been made, significant decisions that are being considered, and the overall state of the church.
- **Worship Together:** Hold at least one combined worship service, consisting of all the worshiping communities of First Methodist. Consider holding this service at neither the West or Downtown campuses, but a neutral venue.

- **Budget Creation Process:** Evaluate the current process for creating, approving, and sharing the budget with leadership and the congregation. Determine the annual process and communicate it with the committees and congregation.
- **Address the Debt:** Develop and begin to implement a plan to pay down the debt.
- **Sustainable Financial System:** Develop a complete set of procedures for planning, approving, recording, and tracking revenue and expenses in a way that creates accuracy, timeliness, and transparency regarding the church's finances.

INNOVATE

March 2023 - March 2024

- **Putting Assets to Work:** Develop game plans for leveraging each of the church's property/facility assets in a way that is either aligned with the mission of the church or provides revenue to fund the church and its mission.
- **Develop a Culture of Innovation and Creativity:** Consider gathering key leaders and staff for a Hatchathon, facilitated by Ministry Incubators, where they will be guided through Ideation and Design Thinking with the outcome of having several plans to iterate and test.
- **Marketing and Branding:** Create a written game plan that will address how to introduce the church to the community around it in an inviting and welcoming way. Create an intentional strategy in order to be consistent with your marketing approaches (logos, graphics, signage, etc.), including an overhaul of the current website.
- **Congregational Care Plan 2.0:** Revisit the congregational care plan from the triage phase and make adjustments and enhancements as needed, specifically keeping an eye to empowering lay people to serve meaningful roles in congregational care.
- **Strategic Staffing:** Develop a sustainable staffing model for the church that aligns with the church's current and anticipated resources.
- **Volunteer Accelerator:** Design and implement a customized Discovery Tool powered by the Ministry Architects Volunteer Accelerator which will help match the specific volunteer opportunities at First Methodist with each person's skills, passions, and talents.
- **Develop a Clear Outreach Strategy:** After engaging in strategic visioning, develop a game plan that will clarify the ways in which the church will joyfully engage in outreach.
- **Discipleship Path:** Create and implement a deliberate plan that considers the faith formation needs of children, youth, and adults, and intentionally provides appropriate programs, ministries, special events, and content in a sequenced manner.
- **Create an Equipping Team:** This team will lead the way for the culture shift toward helping each individual discover his or her unique role in the church.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership training and vision-casting event for all volunteers at the beginning of each year.

CULTIVATE & SUSTAIN

January 2023 - January 2024

- **Communication:** Review and revise current church communication practices to ensure that all congregants, regardless of age or technological proficiency, feel informed. Utilize as many forms of communication as possible including updating the church's website, brochures, social media, mass texting, mail, e-mail, etc.
- **Celebrate the Wins:** Create a written game plan that will address how the church will celebrate the good work God is doing within and beyond its walls. Create an intentional strategy that celebrates the successes with the entire congregation on a regular basis while maintaining a fresh and exciting presentation.
- **Visioning Part 2:** Invite church members to participate in a multi-session, on-campus process of envisioning the future with Ministry Architects, resulting in a set of three-year goals for the church with one-year benchmarks.
- **Personal Connection Plan:** Develop a system for ensuring that every family in the current membership directory is contacted personally to make a connection, offer and express support, and share the vision of the church.
- **Membership Onramp:** Explore new ways to engage newcomers and new members into a deeper relationship with God and the church. Develop a game plan that names the process from first-time visitor to becoming a member of the church.
- **Stabilizing Document Development:** Maintain and publish a 12-month calendar, create major event notebooks to help event planners succeed, and generate a preventative maintenance calendar that schedules behind-the-scenes activities for each month. (Example: October - Order candles for the Advent Wreath.)
- **Ministry Manual:** Develop an online Ministry Manual, including the most recent directories, a 12-month calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar, and notes for every major church event.
- **Compliance System and Management:** Ensure an Operations Manual is in place and updated annually. The manual should include all legal documentation needed for the ministry including background checks, financial documents, licenses, child protection policy, facility use policies, etc.



Mike Crain, Lead Consultant

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Mike began serving in children's and youth ministries in 2001. He has worked in camp and para-church ministry, as well as serving in local congregations for many years. From 2008–2014, Mike was the children's and youth pastor at a multi-site church in Western Arkansas. Most recently, Mike served on staff at a church plant in the Palm Springs area as the Next Gen Pastor and a member of the executive team. Mike graduated from Abilene Christian University with a Bachelors Degree in Youth and Family Ministry and continued his education with a Masters of Divinity from Bethel Seminary. Mike and his family live in San Diego, California. Mike enjoys sports, history, interesting documentaries, and grilling.



Stephanie Caro, Senior Consultant

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Stephanie Caro has been involved in ministry to children, youth, and adults in the local church (both large and small) since...a long time ago. Her humorous, straightforward style keeps her busy presenting and coaching at conferences, training events, camps, mission trips, retreats, churches, etc. She is now Senior Consultant for Ministry Architects, which allows her to help churches assess, vision, and formulate their ministry game plans. Her books, *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches* and *99 Thoughts for the Smaller Church Youth Worker*, were published by Group. Her book, *Smaller Church Youth Ministry: No Staff, No Money, No Problem*, was published by United Methodist Publishing House. Her next book, *Ten Solutions for Smaller Churches*, comes out soon. Stephanie is also a contributing author to many ministry printed and digital resources. Stephanie and her husband, Steve, live in Katy, TX. Their 7 children are all grown!



Eugene Lee, Staff Consultant

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Eugene has served churches in Boston and the San Francisco Bay Area as a church planter and executive pastor of a multi-site church. He received his M.Div and Th.M at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and is ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church. He is married to Esther and they have 3 boys, Nathan, Jacob, and Max. In his free time, Eugene loves learning new recipes, traveling, riding his bike, and exploring the surrounding beauty of Northern California with his family.



Jeff Dunn-Rankin, Executive Vice-President

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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 Masters in Business Administration from Vanderbilt University. He lives in Venice, Florida, with his wife Mary Lou, and they have two grown children.