



## **CHURCH-WIDE MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT**

*Healthy Systems. Innovative Change. For the Future of the Church.*

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### **BACKGROUND**

St. Thomas Presbyterian Church is a friendly and welcoming neighborhood church of the PC(USA) denomination located in Houston, Texas. Houston is the largest city in Texas, the fourth-largest in America, and according to the Visitors' Bureau, is "brimming with opportunity, excitement, culture, and history." Within the context it calls home, St. Thomas is a smaller church, brimming with opportunity, and with a history of service to others that rivals much larger congregations.

Houston is not a city lacking for churches, and the area of Houston surrounding St. Thomas is no exception. Amid a sea of larger churches, St. Thomas sees itself as an alternative to the large church feel, offering a place where people will not be overlooked as they seek a more relational and affirming church experience. The surrounding area, having been hit hard during Hurricane Harvey, also lives within the confines of changing demographics. While formerly a neighborhood church, over time, St. Thomas has increasingly seen people from outside its immediate neighborhoods.

Members see themselves as a family gathered together around the light of Christ in worship, service, and fellowship as they find ways to grow in faith alongside one another. Church members describe their church family as "warm," "accepting," and "mature." While nostalgia for the days of greater numbers may be present, it serves more as a source of hope than as a source of grief. The high percentage of participation in this assessment process was immediate evidence of that invested hopefulness.

The membership of the church is around 210 and on an average week, 100 people attend the church's worship service at 11 AM. The worship service is described as "engaging", "spirit-filled" and "uplifting". Special mention of the music ministry in worship, with its rare talent of blending the traditional and the contemporary, should be noted.

St. Thomas offers congregants a host of opportunities to serve in the church and in the community. Over the years, the church has connected financial and volunteer support with a variety of community organizations. The church leases a plot of its property to the Outreach Center at a steep discount (\$1/year). The church helped to build the Outreach Center but only a few church members remain involved in the ministries that happen there.

The church has a 2018 budget of \$493,760 which is a slight decrease from the previous annual budget. The church facilities and grounds are impressive for a church of this size. Recent capital improvements in air conditioning and flooring have been made. The church continues to find ways to open its doors to outside groups to utilize these resources beyond the internal ministries of the church.

## **Youth Ministry**

Currently, there are 23 sixth through twelfth graders on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, eight of them participate in either Sunday school, worship, special trips, Confirmation, or one of the youth programs. Teens gather on Sunday morning for Sunday school at 9:30 AM. About six youth attend and they are currently discussing faith and science. Youth are also involved in the leadership of the church's worship service every third Sunday of the month. Confirmation is offered for youth, eighth grade and above. Confirmation class meets twice a month, beginning in October and going until the Easter vigil service when the youth are confirmed. Church members serve as mentors each year to the Confirmands. Tentative numbers for this year's class are nine students.

This fall the youth ministry made a programmatic change by eliminating the Sunday evening, twice-a-month, youth group gatherings. In place of that, St. Thomas youth will gather 3-4 times this year with youth from other area Presbyterian churches for a lock-in that will include elements of service, fellowship, and learning. Through Presbytery youth events, the young people at St. Thomas have built strong relationships with youth from these other churches.

Finally, the youth participate in summer trips which, in the past, have included a mission trip to Heifer International and a pilgrimage with a civil rights focus. Retreats and trips to Mo Ranch are also regularly scheduled.

The youth ministry is led by the Associate Pastor, Jonathan Britt, who has been at the church since 2015. There is no active youth committee at this time. There are about three adult volunteers who help with the youth programs and others help out at special events or behind the scenes throughout the year.

The church has a 2018 budget of \$493,760 of which \$40,205 is dedicated to the youth ministry. This includes the program expenses as well as half of the salary and benefits for the associate pastor.

The youth have two designated rooms in the Christian education building. One room is set up for a discussion-oriented environment and it connects to the other room with an inner door. The second room has a ping pong table and hang-out space for the youth with bean bags and couches.

A connection was made with Ministry Architects through a coaching relationship with the associate pastor and Staff Consultant, Aly Eaton, through the Princeton Theological Seminary Youth Ministry Certificate program. Through those conversations, it became clear how Ministry Architects could

partner with St. Thomas to address its current challenges. Aly met with the session, staff, and the finance and stewardship committee in April 2018 to present how Ministry Architects could partner with St. Thomas for a two-year period to build sustainable practices to support a growing church.

Ministry Architects was invited to do an initial assessment of the church and youth ministry and to make recommendations about how St. Thomas might move strategically forward. Ministry Architects met with 57 individuals in 11 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. In addition, seven parents and youth filled out online surveys bringing participants in this process to 64. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

## MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

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. Those 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, in and of themselves, do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff, and the congregation at large.

**Rent #1: NUMBERS**—A significant percentage of people 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 the 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.

While the consensus is that this rent is being paid in the youth ministry, it’s only partially being paid at the church level. Although the youth program has consistent and active youth, overall church attendance has been in a slow decline prompting concern.

**Rent #2: PROGRAMS**—In order to “earn the right” to experiment with changes, the leadership needs to provide the church with a few visible, effective programs that give people “something to talk about.”

This rent is paid in full across the church. The youth program has a strong structure and the church supports the mission work of the teens. St. Thomas has many service projects that reach out to the community, including a strong adult Sunday school class and Coffee Connections on Sunday mornings.

**Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM**—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the staff, volunteers, and the congregation themselves are essential to building trust in the church.

While young people and their parents are extremely happy with what St. Thomas offers for youth, this rent is only partially paid for the church. While some are happy with what is happening at St. Thomas, others are deeply dissatisfied causing a strain on enthusiasm in the church.

As the leadership of the church develops its long-range vision, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, the ministry faces parallel challenges.

Ministry Architects pictures the parallel challenge this way:



Laying the Foundation: Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the youth ministry’s *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,

Continuing to Do Ministry: Maintaining the *current* youth ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of youth, their families, the staff and the church at large.

## Church-wide Norms

As the church leadership steps into this parallel process, seven rules of thumb – “church norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind. These are not necessarily targets for success; they are simply what an average church typically experiences:

**1) 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%. St. Thomas’ church’s operating budget in 2018 of \$493,760 has \$317,700 dedicated to the staff of the church, about 64%. The staffing to budget percentage is above what churches usually spend on staffing.

Note: this number may vary due to cost of living differences across the country.

**2) Staffing**—Ministry Architects has found that most churches have the equivalent of 1 full time staff member (40 hours per week) for every 75 people in average total worship attendance.

Considering the average worship attendance of 100 and all the positions giving time to the church’s ministry, including:

- Full-time senior pastor (40 hours)
- Full-time associate pastor (40 hours)
- Part-time director of music (20 hours)
- Part-time administrative manager (30 hours)
- Part-time organist (10 hours)

St. Thomas has the equivalent of 3.5 full time staff or 1 staff person for every 26 attenders. According to this rule of thumb, St. Thomas has the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 262 worship attenders on a weekly basis. The current staff configuration allows room for significant numerical growth. Keep in mind that churches that are in an active growth season are typically staffed in the range of 86-100 average worship attendance per full time employee.

**3) Budget** —The average church budget settles around \$1400 per attender. With a budget of \$493,760 (including program budget, staff salaries and benefits), St. Thomas has the capacity to effectively reach and maintain a weekly total worship attendance level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 350 attenders. With 100 currently attending every week, the ministry is experiencing the generosity of its congregation above most other churches of this size.

**4) 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 **six parking spaces for every ten attenders** and **100 spaces per acre** of parking lot in a single worship service. With about one acre of parking and 85 spaces available, the church has a capacity of 142 worship attenders in a single service.
- **Seating Capacity:** Most churches will simply stop growing once the worship center is 80% filled on a regular basis. With 200 seats available, the church has an attendance capacity of 160 people in a single service.

Given these norms, St. Thomas can expect to reach its capacity in the current structure at 142 people in weekend worship.

One way to continue to add capacity is to add additional worship services prior to making any physical changes to the campus. As a church adds services it’s also important to keep in mind that a 2<sup>nd</sup> service

will typically reach 80% of the amount of the first service and a third service will typically reach 60% of the first service.

**5) Visitors Retention**—For the average church, about 10-30% of first-time visitors will turn into regular attenders. Therefore, in order to grow by, say 100 people in a single year, the church will need to see about 400 first time guests in that year (including guests at regular services and special services like Easter Sunday.) In the past year, St. Thomas saw an estimated 93 first time visitors and could expect to see their church add 10-28 regular attenders in the coming year.

**6) Volunteers**—In an average church, 45% of the amount of weekend worship attenders (adults and students, but not children) are serving regularly in a volunteer role. With 75 total regular volunteers in the church and an average worship attendance of 100, St. Thomas estimates that 75% of its weekend worship attenders are serving regularly. This number is above average for what normal churches experience.

**7) Involvement in Groups**— While data for what's *normal* for churches in group involvement, 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.

## Youth Ministry Norms

As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, four rules of thumb –“youth ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind. These are not necessarily targets for success; they are simply what an average church typically experiences:

**1) 10% of the Worshipping Congregation:** In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshipping congregation. A church with an average worship attendance of 100 could expect an average weekly attendance of around 10 youth per week. The current weekly attendance of eight youth is slightly below what could be expected from the ministry.

**2) \$1,500 per Youth:** With a budget of \$40,205 (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits) dedicated to the youth ministry, St. Thomas has the capacity to effectively reach and maintain a weekly participation level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 26 youth in some aspect of the church's life. With eight currently participating every week, the ministry is well-funded for continued growth.

**3) 1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth:** Considering the number of hours the associate pastor is giving to the youth ministry, St. Thomas has the equivalent of  $\frac{1}{2}$  of a full time staff person. According to this rule of thumb, St. Thomas has the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 25 youth on a weekly basis. The current staff configuration allows room for significant numerical growth.

**4) 1 Adult for Every 5 Youth:** Ministry Architects likes to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church's Christian nurture of more than about five youth on an ongoing basis. With three regular volunteers, St. Thomas is currently at a ratio of 1 adult leader to every 2.5 youth, giving the ministry a capacity for 15 youth weekly. This ministry is well-supported by volunteers and poised for sustained growth in the future.

## BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE STAFF

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a pastor or 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 staff of three *different* kinds of people:

- **The Architect:** A person or group that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan.
- **The General Contractor:** A person or team who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project.
- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. In youth ministry, a laborer might have particular skills in relating to youth, in planning and managing events, or in teaching.

Each of these roles is important as St. Thomas 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. A ministry simply moves from one event to the next without a clear vision or stated outcomes. At St. Thomas, the architect’s role is currently not being fulfilled.
- The staff is often expected to serve in all three of these roles. This is a recipe for congregational dissatisfaction and staff burnout. The staff will need to adjust their operating style to move more into the general contractor role and delegate tasks to church volunteers.

## **ASSETS**

### ***Strengths to protect in the current ministry***

#### **Committed Core**

St. Thomas is marked by the incredible energy and commitment of a core group of volunteers and stakeholders investing relationally in others and encouraging their growth and faith in Jesus Christ. When asked about the roles individuals' play in ministry, participants in listening groups repeatedly shared a laundry list of ways in which they serve. The church has so many ways to serve inside and outside the walls of the church. There are volunteers who serve on Christ Care teams, as choir members, those who are Kitchen Angels, those who mentor Confirmants or serve the youth of the church, those whose passion for outreach leads them to serve via the Outreach Center or to volunteer with Rebuilding Together Houston, those who greet newcomers and "old-timers", still others who teach Sunday school classes, and finally, those who jump in to do all the rest and just about anything they are asked to do! The list goes on and on.

The simple fact that nearly 60 individuals showed up to participate in a listening session to share their heart for St. Thomas is telling of the commitment level in this wonderful church. Although there is a desire and a need for more volunteers in various passion projects and ministries, the current crew is mighty and faithful. Volunteers are a gift!

#### **Resources**

Blessed by the resources of spacious facilities, parking, and a convenient, visible location, St. Thomas can celebrate what many long for in churches. There is a capacity for more. With a beautiful sanctuary, a large fellowship hall, abundant classrooms, a dedicated youth space, an inviting playground, and the adjacent Outreach Center, there is a plethora of gathering spaces for just about any ministry need. These "good bones" in the sheer variety of rooms and storage spaces, can open up endless possibilities for productive use.

As the space lends itself to a multitude of ministry options, creativity can be explored as St. Thomas dreams of the ways in which it can be the hands and feet of our Christ to each other and to the surrounding world. Abundant church facilities lend themselves to meeting both inward and outward needs and St. Thomas can celebrate that it does not simply support its facilities for their own personal use, they are living into a missional vision to support the community via the good stewardship of these resources.

#### **Church as Home**

People at St. Thomas believe that this church is not just a place they attend, but truly a place where they belong. Newcomers as well as those who have been part of St. Thomas for decades appreciate the hospitable, welcoming, friendly nature of individuals within the church and place high value on the welcoming nature of the congregation being open to all people. One focus group participant shared, "I've been at this church nearly my entire life." Others shared that they had been attending St. Thomas from 20 to 50 years. When we asked the focus groups, both adult and youth, to use adjectives to describe their church, "welcoming," "a family," "loving," and "warm" all made the list. Many spoke of why they joined St. Thomas and each said it "felt like home."

#### **Engaging Worship and Music Ministry**

The people of St. Thomas have confidence that guests and visitors will receive a great worship experience any Sunday they attend. The compliments kept on rolling through several listening sessions. We heard that participants "felt more connected to one another and to God" through the "excellent blended worship" experience. "I love the sermons...we always tell stories that I can relate to"



one person shared. The choir and “joy-filled music” was another high note. In fact, one person shared “The choir has become my family.” It seems this same sentiment is shared by many. With stories of praise, an overwhelming sense of enthusiasm, excellence in music, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the sanctuary, Sunday mornings serve as shining examples of engaging visitors and members alike in their journey to place Christ at the center of their lives.

### **Heart for Service**

With the Outreach Center literally sitting adjacent to St. Thomas, and the near reality of Harbor School being under its roof, it is abundantly clear that key stakeholders place a high value on outreach and service at St. Thomas. Possessing a wonderful enthusiasm for mission outreach to the local and regional community, again and again participants in focus groups agreed that serving others, the “hands on” approach, was a core value held at St. Thomas. Geared towards all ages at the church, program favorites were shared by both youth and adults alike in various listening sessions. What is abundantly clear is that the youth, parents, volunteers, and staff all place a high value on mission, outreach, and service.

### **Youth Program**

In a world where instant gratification has become the norm and where youth seem to only want to have fun, St. Thomas has a core group of committed teens who are showing up for week-long mission trips, to participate in faith formation activities and retreats, and to engage in fellowship opportunities while asking the “big questions” with other youth groups, all in a safe and loving environment. Further, the ministry counts nearly 25 youth on its “active” list. It’s clearly important to invest in the youth and their families for the long-term “survival” of St. Thomas.

The associate pastor and director of youth ministries seems to hold rock star status here! “Jonathan is really good listener. He listens loudly. There are no barriers.” Another participant shared, “If the youth have issues, they don’t seem to hesitate going to Jonathan.” A parent applauded, “This is the area where we do communication really well in our church - to both kids *and* their parents.” The Confirmation process was also highlighted as “excellent” and “a means to working towards a more sticky faith.” Further, we heard about the depth of commitment to youth as a parent shared, “Confirmation is awesome. We have a mentor for each kid who gets to walk alongside them and take them deeper in their faith.” Flipping the coin, two adult mentors shared powerful stories as well, suggesting “I got more out of this than my mentee did, I’m sure.” The people we spoke with are right on target with recognizing how a healthy ministry to youth and their families is critical to a church’s current and future vitality.

### **Generosity**

A participant shared, “I have been amazed at all the ways that this church supports ministry. We have never asked for anything that hasn’t been given to us. If there’s a need and we ask people to place whatever it is on {this} table, the table is overflowing.” Serving the community and fellow members with time, talents, and treasure is clearly part of the congregation’s DNA. Nearly every listening group participant mentioned wearing multiple hats leading ministry teams and pitching in. One participant noted, “I’m amazed that a church of this size and membership has the diversity and enthusiasm for so many things.” A joyful responsibility to give back, to “do whatever it takes”, to serve, and to love our neighbors as ourselves was refreshingly celebrated in several listening groups.

### **Willingness to step up to the plate**

What is profusely clear is that the willing spirit of St. Thomas, contributes to a climate that boldly proclaims that if the church has a challenge to face, more than one person is always willing to step up to the plate! Participants shared lovely stories of meeting fellowship needs and congregational care through Kitchen Angels and the Coffee Connection. With the addition of the Harbor School, St. Thomas

will be meeting a community need. Youth, who might not have the chance to experience a faith-changing, life affirming retreat, were sponsored to attend one. And while Hurricane Harvey may have devastated many of the homes and the region, there are reminders at St. Thomas what true compassion looks like and what it means to love our neighbor as yourself. Naturally, the aforementioned passion for our all of our neighbors, in the true (infinite) biblical sense, also interweaves with the congregation's support of a multitude of "causes" and "hurts" as we live in to ministry together.

### **Clarity of Need**

Great passion, hopefulness, and expectancy were prevalent in each focus group. There seemed to be an across-the-board consensus that St. Thomas has great potential, but the church is not all that the youth, their parents, the volunteers, and the staff would like it to be. Hopeful dissatisfaction and a shared understanding that the church is not all that it could be an extremely important component to the ongoing pursuit of a more sustainable and healthier ministry climate.

Though the theories as to the causes of this situation vary, there was little disagreement in listening groups that "...we're a group that shares a commitment to one another, to this church, to God, and to embracing the things that are going well while finding ways to work with it if it's not." Recognizing that it takes a collaborative approach to move to the next level, participants echoed that they longed for ways to effectively engage the various demographics in the life and vision of St. Thomas. This type of hopeful dissatisfaction can best be described as an eagerness for truly living into the God's potential for this congregation.

## **CHALLENGES**

### ***Obstacles to moving the current ministry strategically forward***

#### **Trench Warfare**

The clearest and biggest roadblock St. Thomas faces is the toxic cloud of distrust that overshadows the leadership between the pastors and church leaders. Each side has an idea of how things should be done and how decisions should be made. Both parties feel so passionate and care so much, but they are not on the same page. This division has become so big that each side has dug their trench and is living in their trench unwilling to budge. It has become a picture of trench warfare.

The most well-known example of this in history is the Western Front in World War I. Trench warfare has “become a byword for stalemate, attrition, sieges, and futility in conflict”

([https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trench\\_warfare](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trench_warfare)).

These are words that could be used to describe St. Thomas’ current climate. Leadership is at a place where neither side can win and no action can be taken together. A few people have left the church. Both sides are grasping for control in order to make some headway. The church leadership and staff are incapable, without active collaboration, to make any strategic decisions for the future of the church. At the heart of this matter is the fact that all parties have the best of intentions in mind for the church. But until this stalemate is dealt with in a loving and healthy manner, St. Thomas will not be able to move forward with the recommendations in this report.

#### **Communications**

Listening groups shared that there is an overall need for better communication at St. Thomas. This was named as a challenge in numerous listening groups and has many layers to it.

The first is tied to the level of distrust between the pastors and church leadership. The right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. A recent example that was shared multiple times was the “air conditioning issue,” named this way by many listening group participants. When the air conditioning unit died, communication between the pastors and session members seemed to be met with confusion on both sides. Each side seemed to have “pieces” of the information needed to make decisions. However, not all information was shared and confusion ensued. The replacement of the air conditioning unit became a convoluted mess with both sides angry at each other. The result was a delayed replacement and frustration in how it was all handled.

The next layer of communication has to do with HOW you communicate. Communication is received best when it is timely, consistent, and correct. There is also a balancing act when communicating – not too much and not too little. In the age of being easily distracted, communication has to arrive in multiple forms to catch a person’s attention--email, bulletin, church website, social media, texts, etc.

Consistency and timeliness are essential for effective communication. St. Thomas has a fabulous and updated website. But a clear plan or process for how communication happens in the rest of the church is simply missing.

Finally, communication is not just about sharing where and when ministry happens. It is also about sharing the stories of the ministries with the whole congregation. All the amazing ministries at St. Thomas would be even more visible to the whole church if the successes of the ministries and stories of personal transformation were being told. Celebrating this transformation changes the culture of a church in a way that more and more people want to be a part of something that is exciting and making a difference.

#### **Property Problems**

While the buildings and property were named as an asset above, there are some challenges that come with them. One of them is extra stuff cluttered around the church so that usage of the space is inhibited. An example is the infant nursery. The room is divided in half with furniture with one side as the space for infants and the other side as storage for a pile of “stuff.” If a new family visited St. Thomas and wanted to drop off their child in the infant nursery, they might be put off by the set-up of the room and all the stuff that doesn’t belong in a nursery. Secondly, all the stuff stored there is a safety hazard for young children. Just like we want to make sure babies and toddlers have age-appropriate toys, the environment for the age of children also needs to be appropriately designed and decorated, not cluttered with boxes full of things that young children should not be able to get into.

The second property concern challenging the church is the Annexes. The two trailers are in poor shape, may pose some safety hazards, and are not attractive.

Third, a listening group participant put it boldly, “Our church is mooning Memorial Drive.” The back of the sanctuary faces Memorial Drive, a heavily trafficked road in Houston. As people drive by, they see an unattractive view of the church. There is no curb appeal and therefore, does not foster a spirit of “I want to go to that church.”

### **Fuzzy Vision**

In 2007 St. Thomas spent a lot of time and energy to create a vision that has carried them to today. The church named five-year goals that they re-evaluated in 2012. But since that time, no progress has been made. No action steps were named or acted upon and when asked why, listening group participants shared that no one took ownership of moving forward. Fast forward to 2018 and the vision is pretty fuzzy.

Without a common vision, direction for how the church can move forward goes unmet. It’s like going on a road trip with no destination and no map guiding the journey. Without clear direction, the drive is aimless and the final destination goes unreached.

When a ministry lacks a clearly stated vision, anxiousness and aimlessness is often a predictable result. The ministries move from event to event with no purpose or goal. In order to move St. Thomas forward, everyone needs to be on the same page with a shared vision and healthy habits of communication regarding how that vision should be formed.

### **Cracks in the Foundation**

St. Thomas has some foundation documents and processes in place like a database, youth directory, and compliance documents. But the following components are currently missing or not being best utilized at St. Thomas:

- Results-based volunteer job descriptions that are clear, current, and concise
- Standard attendance tracking and recording procedures
- Major event notebooks
- Children’s and youth ministry manuals
- First-timers’ follow-up processes
- Missing-in-action plan or other church-wide children and youth contact plans

Until St. Thomas shores up its foundation by fixing the cracks it will be unable to operate sustainably.

### **Committee Conundrum**

Several listening group participants admitted that the committee structure at St. Thomas has been lacking. It’s not clear if session members fully understand their role in chairing a committee. For some ministries, there is a sort of loosely-defined succession plan in place for leadership but most do not

have a plan. One committee admitted, “When we asked the group if someone would be the moderator, no one stepped up.”

Committees have not been functioning at their best. With little guidance from laid-out structures or job descriptions, some committees flounder. One group admitted, “We’ve been asleep at the wheel. We could have caught some things if we had been paying attention.”

### **Where are the Children?**

The largest demographic missing at St. Thomas is the youngest members - the children. There used to be part-time staff member who oversaw the children’s ministry but since she left, the children’s ministry is almost non-existent. Sunday school is offered on Sunday morning at 9:30 am but oftentimes, not enough children are there. It’s difficult to recruit teachers when there’s only a handful of children to teach. Some days there are no children present when the teachers have spent time and energy preparing a lesson. This can be very discouraging to those who teach. Unfortunately, not much else is offered specifically for children at St. Thomas.

This is a classic case of “which comes first, the chicken or the egg.” Does the church wait for children to join the church and then create programs for those children? Or does the church build a program for children and then wait for them to show up? This dilemma has St. Thomas stuck in the vicious cycle that it is in now.

### **No Discipleship Plan**

Without an overarching Christian discipleship plan for what the church wants their members to know, feel, and do with their Christian faith, they run the great risk of a hit or miss approach rather than giving their church members all that God intends for them to have. In regard to adults at St. Thomas, there are a handful of discipleship opportunities but they seem to be isolated and not part of a bigger picture or plan. There is no cohesive plan for meeting the spiritual and developmental needs of adults at different stages in life.

In regard to children and youth, without a clearly expressed, well-known set of spiritual developmental milestones and an understanding of when the children and youth will reach those markers, the possibility strongly exists that they could miss the significance of key points within their Christian education. Fortunately, Confirmation is one of those milestones or faith-steps that the church is doing well for their youth. But overall there is no scope or sequence in place to guide the progression of faith development in children and youth. The result is a piece-meal program that is disjointed and without purpose.

### **Volunteers**

The volunteer challenges that St. Thomas faces are not uncommon. In our busy and over-scheduled culture, time is precious. The same core group of people at St. Thomas has been doing the majority of the work. And volunteers are tired. Volunteers are REALLY tired and burned out.

The second challenge related to volunteers is there is no formal recruitment process. Church members are constantly asked to help with a tone of desperation. One church member shared, “Sunday morning is my worship time. I don’t want to be asked to do one more thing.” The suggestion was made that members should be prohibited from conducting church business so that the focus can be on building meaningful relationships. Without an intentional recruitment process, recruitment becomes haphazard. It often becomes a last minute plea or a race to sign up the newest members of the church. A newer member of the church shared, “The day I became a member, I was invited to a committee meeting after worship. I walked out of that meeting with the responsibility of being in charge of a major event.”

In addition, it seems that there is no onboarding process or ongoing training and support for volunteers once they step into a role. There is no succession plan in place in order to develop leaders. There are no term limits for service. The absence of these crucial pieces contributes to burnout.

### **A Culture of Scarcity vs. a Culture of Abundance**

Rather than seeing the abundant facilities, the capacity for more, and celebrating the sheer number of life-giving ministries at St. Thomas, many people in the church seem to function under the cloud of a scarcity mentality. Several focus group members seemed overly anxious to compare St. Thomas to either "larger," or "younger," or "richer" churches. Many lamented about how "behind" (financially) the church is while just as many others seemed to celebrate the fact that when St. Thomas has a (big or small) need or "ask", financially or materially, people have always stepped up to the plate. Avoiding the church comparison trap while moving toward being the best version of the church God intended St. Thomas to be can turn into the diligence necessary to fuel adaptive change.

When resources such as money or opportunities are perceived to be limited, paranoia, fear, and internal strife can set in. In this environment, people become nervous and afraid to make mistakes. And as a result, creativity, innovation, and teamwork can suffer. For many, flipping the script might mean coming up with a good plan and following through. For others, when faced with an obstacle they choose to cultivate abundance and to see options and the opportunity. Fear, if not contained, grows and gives way to ineffectiveness. When channeled properly, it can provide the fuel needed to build more effective systems and processes.

### **Connecting the Dots...of Stewardship**

When asking listening groups about "the intentional stewardship strategy here at St. Thomas" or diving deeper into how we're *intentional* in teaching people what stewardship and giving means in this congregation, you might have noticed crickets in the meeting room! Several participants shared, "We've gotten better about weaving these topics into the service occasionally" and "Sometimes we might note this in the bulletin."

The sad truth is for many churches, St. Thomas included, is that "stewardship" feels like a black hole. It is often a once-a-year "season" that usually happens in the fall and is designed to solicit pledges from the congregation to fund the church operating budget for the upcoming calendar year. Every year it may feel like this "process" takes increasing amounts of effort and pressure to convince donors to give more and more to meet the increasing needs of the facilities.

### **Long-Term Financial Sustainability**

Typical churches with about 100 in attendance have average operating budgets of around \$140,000, depending on the area of the country they reside. With a 2018 operating budget near \$500,000, and the ability to meet that operating budget with net assets currently in hand, St. Thomas is in rare company in terms of their church-wide financial capabilities. But if you begin to dive deeper, you will see where the financial health troubles can begin in aging congregations: giving in churches comes disproportionately from members who are aged 65 and up. Those who want to follow this math will see the trouble on the horizon 5-10 years from now with a status quo approach. Without healthy transparency, the celebration of a shared vision, looking creatively at ways to fund the mission and ministries of the church, *and* engaging the generosity of the coming generations, the church may be poised for tougher times ahead.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reframe the next 24 months as a time of building long-term infrastructure for the ministry. Name September 2020 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 session requesting that they endorse a 24-month strategic design process.
3. Invite a church prayer team to pray for this time of strategic development and share this timeline with them.
4. Establish a Strategic Renovation Team, who report regularly to session and the pastor, 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. This team will develop implementation and resource plans and lead the process to secure session and congregational support for the new model of ministry at St. Thomas Presbyterian Church.

## PRESSURE POINTS

In order to create a healthy climate conducive to change, Ministry Architects suggests addressing the most pressing needs in the first four to six months of the timeline. Pressure Points are the issues that, unless addressed, could very well keep the church “stuck.”

### CLIMATE

*In order to enhance congregational vitality, St. Thomas must cultivate a climate of trust, reconciliation, and celebration. Past wounds and tensions must be faced in ways that foster healing and conflict transformation. Current tensions and questions must be faced in ways that foster trust and healing. The congregation must also find ways of fostering positive and highly-anticipated memory-making opportunities.*

- **Call in a Christian Mediator:** To help heal from the number of congregational wounds the church has endured within the last fifteen years, work with a local certified Christian mediator in order to help facilitate conflict transformation through a process of peace and reconciliation. Consider forming a book study to read together *Healthy Congregations* by Peter L. Steinke.
- **Establish a Climate of Respect and Cooperation:** Create a game plan to develop more positive means of collaborating. The game plan should include lines of discipline, accountability, and communication so that a person who feels bullied (staff or congregant) has a channel of advocacy and support.
- **Exhibit Transparency:** Develop a written game plan that outlines the way decisions are made and communicated in relationship to programming, staffing, building and grounds, and budgeting.
- **Us versus Them:** Create an intentional campaign to foster team relationships between members of the church staff, members of Session and members of the related committees. Utilize events that provide a fun environment and opportunity for deepening relationships. Promote dialog appropriate for staff / volunteer leader interaction.
- **Create a Forum Process:** Develop a written process that outlines how congregation members can bring concerns to church leadership, how concerns are evaluated, and whether or not concerns merit a whole-congregation forum.

- **Celebrate Resolution:** Create a written process which outlines how the church celebrates when forums reach resolution.
- **Intentional Growth:** Create multi-layered systems for growing the church's membership including initiatives to:
  - Increase the number of visitors to the church's website and the building.
  - Share the good news of the good work that is happening through the church and its members to an audience much larger than the church's membership
  - Invite neighbors and friends into a mission event that positively impacts the community
  - Create a magnetic, comfortable, welcoming experiences for newcomers on Sunday mornings. Follow up winsomely and regularly with all guests.



## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations in this report fall into five main categories:

- **Building Systems and Infrastructure**
- **Volunteer Leadership Development**
- **Vision, Values, and Goals**
- **Stewardship and Finance**
- **Discipleship**

A brief summary of the needs in each category is contained below with more detailed recommendations named in the following section of the report.

### **BUILDING SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

*Square the corners of the ministries of the church so that the church is able to count on success for the coming years both programmatically and financially. Develop systems and processes that support and sustain the ministry of St. Thomas. Give special attention to the need to transfer principles of generosity in the upcoming generation.*

### **VOLUNTEER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

*To develop strong teams of volunteers, the church will need to turn its thinking about recruitment upside down. A typical church begs and cajoles 20% of the congregation to fill empty spots on its organizational chart. A more successful model is to believe that every single person is great at something and has been called to accomplish something in God's grand plan. This model requires a process of getting to know each person as an individual and helping them find their unique position on the team – a position that they will find fruitful and fulfilling because it is what they were designed to do. It requires the church's lay leaders to also think of themselves as multipliers and team builders. This process takes longer, but it bears more fruit and is more sustainable.*

### **VISION, VALUES, AND GOALS**

*Everybody has an idea – and most of them are quite good. Consequently, the church will need to make some tough decisions about what it will do together – and what will have to wait (perhaps forever). Involve all willing participants from the congregation to rework its current vision and mission statements into a single mission statement, a statement of defined core values, and a list of goals. The congregation also needs an evaluation and reworking of its organizational model in a way that reflects and facilitates its shared vision and mission.*

### **STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE**

*Create a process for communicating an effective year-round stewardship plan to spread out the congregational discussion of finances over the whole calendar year. Evaluate how the budget is created so that a few agreed upon ministries of the church receive designated funding to focus on doing a few things in an excellent way. Communicate effectively with the congregation the current financial situation of the congregation. Explore legacy giving and creative ways to fund the ministries of the church.*

### **DISCIPLESHIP**

*The church as a whole is lacking a clear faith formation pathway and needs written game plans for nurturing and forming the faith of all congregants. From nursery to nursing home, the church bears the great responsibility of investing in the intentional faith formation of each person involved. In order to cultivate an environment that nurtures one in his or her walk as a disciple, St. Thomas will want to have strategies for the following five areas: worship, service, education, fellowship, evangelism.*

## STRATEGIC RENOVATION TEAM TASKS:

*These specific initiatives will enable the church to develop the five categories summarized above.*

### BUILDING SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- **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.
- **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, etc.). Consider the following:
  - Church Signage
  - Upgrading the website with an engaging section just for newcomers
  - Identifying communication channels for reaching out to those outside the church family--flyers and mailers, posters, the NextDoor app, etc.
  - Identifying target programs for inviting newcomers.
  - Designing a database growth process.
  - Communicating regularly with tenants and others in the building.
- **Internal Communications:** Create a protocol by which all decisions and important information are shared throughout the whole church community, insuring that the church is not just communicating information, but that people are actually receiving it.
- **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.)
- **Attendance:** Continue to 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 MIAs.
- **Leadership Directory:** Develop a yearly leadership directory that lists all ministry teams and leaders for all committees and groups (Session, PW, Small Groups, Community Care Deacons, etc.).
- **Ministry Manual:** Develop a 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.
- **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 as you determine who is active. We recommend using categories that indicate the level of involvement of each young person. For example: active, member inactive, visitor active, visitor inactive, first timers.

- **Visitor Follow-up:** Carefully develop a game plan for welcoming visitors who visit the church. Craft a plan for following up with adults and families that have become loosely connected to the church. Ensure the database is regularly updated with information from visitors.
- **MIA Follow-up:** Determine the approach to follow-up with people who are MIA. Create a database to track who has gone missing, the reasons they have gone, and who followed up with them on staff. Create a culture of care for MIA church members.
- **Connections Brochure** – Create a clear list of the various opportunities for people to connect with each other at AUMC. Include the UMW, Dinner for Eight, Sunday school classes and all other opportunities. Give a clear explanation of each, so that a person can make an informed choice about whether that group is a good fit. Include meeting times and contact information with a name and phone and/or email. Make this information available in a brochure and on the web site. Make sure that this brochure is easy to edit and update as the times and locations of events will change from season to season.
- **Calendar Evaluation:** Carefully review the special events of the church. Decide the purpose of each event and whether or not it meets the needs of the church. Look at the current calendar for offerings to church groups and community groups. Evaluate seasonal offerings versus year-round offerings. Create a process for outside groups to be able to use the church facilities. Also explore fee structures for groups who use the buildings.
- **Personnel Policy:** Revise the existing personnel policy to include new job descriptions, set a mutually understood level of accountability between those in leadership and the staff, and address any changes in the staffing practices.
- **Affirm Staff:** Continue to ensure all staff members have been affirmed and encouraged in their role by hosting an annual staff appreciation event.
- **Leadership Evaluation:** Provide mechanisms for ongoing evaluation for all church staff members. The process should include space for self-reflection, supervisor feedback, and requests from the employee about how the church can help him or her succeed. It should be done in a way that leaves leaders feeling supported, encouraged, and positively challenged.
- **Develop Multipliers:** Train every staff member – from pastor to office staff – on how to develop a team of volunteers who share their ministry with them. Two possible resources are
  - *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter* by Liz Wiseman
  - *Doing Church as a Team* by Wayne Cordeiro
- **Committees at Large:** Write out job descriptions for the chairs and committee members for every committee at large. Include the committees in the overall structure of the organizational chart. Make sure each committee has a unique and distinct function in the organizational structure of the church.
- **Nimble Committee Structure:** Annually evaluate and adjust the committee structure in the church to ensure that it aligns with the strategic and operational needs of the church for the upcoming year.

## **VOLUNTEER AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

- **Host a “Quick Start” Summit:** Invite the Renovation 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 the Assessment Report are addressed. The Summit tackles the items that need to be done first and builds momentum for the church’s renovation process (typically items in the first few months of the timeline).
- **Volunteer Leadership Clarity:** Draft and/or update written job descriptions for all volunteer roles in the church. Work with leaders to ensure the job descriptions accurately match the work being done, clarify to whom each volunteer is accountable.
- **Volunteer Development:** Provide sufficient training and development opportunities for all volunteers in a way that leaves the inspired to serve again rather than exhausted.
- **Volunteer Recruitment:** Create a master list of ministry opportunities in every area of the church, from weekly to monthly to annual opportunities. Once all volunteer opportunities in the church have been identified, begin the recruitment process to ensure that all positions are filled by August 1 of each year. Develop a yearly leadership directory that lists all committees and leaders for all committees and groups (Session, Committee Chairpersons, etc.).
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training and vision-casting event for all volunteers at the beginning of each year.
- **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. They accomplish the tasks listed below. *The Equipping Church* by Sue Mallory is a great guide to this process.
- **Recruit an Equipping Coordinator/Director/Team Leader to support the Equipping Team:** This part-time staff (or volunteer) role would lead the work of the lay team.
- **Charge the Equipping Team with the following Tasks:**
  - **Identify Volunteer Ministry Positions:** Work with staff and the church leadership to create a complete list of ministry opportunities in every department, from weekly to monthly to annual opportunities.
  - **Develop a Tracking Process** for recording who is serving in which ministries. There are several off-the-shelf options including PowerChurch, ChurchTeams, and Members To Action.
  - **Identify a Discovery Tool** that helps individuals explore how they are wired for ministry. There are several available, including SHAPE to DESIGN.
  - **Develop a matching and placement process** that gracefully takes advantage of the Tracking process and Discovery tool while still making the process inviting and personal. This will likely include several points of entry, from easy-to-use brochures and volunteer catalogs to a higher-commitment, higher-impact class. There will also likely be a coaching/interview process to facilitate the right match.
  - **Develop follow-up and re-direct processes** that ensure that the match was successful or helps the person find a new match.
- **Volunteer Alignment:** Do an audit of all volunteer teams and roles in the church and clarify their unique contribution to the church. Build a clear organizational chart for all volunteer teams and roles in the church and determine how best to align them for maximum impact in growing

the church. Consider Ed Stetzer's research on churches who break the 200 barrier in worship attendance as a guideline for developing the right structure of volunteerism.

## **VISION, VALUES, AND GOALS**

- **Visioning:** Invite leaders to participate in a multi-session, on-campus process of envisioning the future with Ministry Architects, resulting in the following documents which will direct the ministries and support the church's vision:
  - A Mission Statement
  - Defined Core Values
  - A Set of Three-Year Revolving Goals with One-Year Benchmarks
  - An Organizational Chart

Vision Summits work best with a group representing pastors, staff, session/council/leadership teams and other key ministry leaders. Sometimes it may be helpful to include an open invitation to the congregation.

- **Establish a Vision Team:** Upon completion of the church-wide visioning process, create a team that will help carry the vision forward and keep the congregation on task for meeting the benchmarks and goals.
- **Sharing the Vision:** Upon completion of the long-term vision and goal-setting process, create a game plan that will outline the best ways to communicate the vision, values, and goals of the church's ministry (sermon series, guidebooks, small group curriculum, etc.)
- **Evaluate Current Programs:** Evaluate the current programming with an eye toward retiring or combining the programs that inadequately reflect the current focus of the church.
- **Develop a Clear Mission Strategy:** After engaging in strategic visioning, develop a game plan that will clarify the ways in which the church will joyfully engage in outreach. Include ways the church will build relationships with the neighborhoods it serves. At the same time, create awareness and education opportunities among the congregation.

## **STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE**

- **Fiscal Responsibility and Transparency**

- Create, modify, and/or implement financial guidelines to clarify roles and help establish procedures that will meet the financial objectives of the congregation.
  - Clarify and adopt current job descriptions for the financial roles (both paid and volunteer) within the church).
  - Create, update, and/or adopt a congregational Financial Policies and Procedures document.
  - Create, update, and/or adopt an Investment Policy Guidelines document.
  - Complete an internal audit, led by at least three knowledgeable individuals without a conflict of interest (or pay an outside firm), to review all financial activity from the previous year. Perform this audit annually with a report of the findings delivered to pastoral and lay leadership, and subsequently shared with the congregation at large.
  - Complete a banking and investment account analysis annually.
  - Determine the realm and frequency of communication that will be used to inform members as to the financial state of the church.
  - Educate members of the church on opportunities, the value of, and the impact of planned giving on the church's mission and ministries.

- **Stewardship and the Culture of Abundance:**

- Breed generosity by inviting the entire congregation to join in a shared vision and ministry priorities with their time, talents, and treasure.
  - Strengthen the church's year-round financial stewardship plan by evaluating what is currently in place and designing a multi-pronged strategy for creating teaching moments in worship and curriculum that highlight the desired congregational outcomes for stewardship.
  - Prepare and share a Narrative Ministry Budget showcasing the church's vision and ministry priorities while challenging members to increase their giving.
  - Consider offering basic financial literacy classes at the church and/or "money management for kids" seminars to both the congregation and the greater community at large.
  - Consider a strategy for highlighting the beautiful mission and ministry celebrations or "transformations" that occur in the life of the congregation and community during an "Offertory Moment" at every service.
  - Gather volunteers for vision casting and appreciation regularly. They can be your biggest cheerleaders!

- **Long-Term Financial Sustainability:**

- Lay the groundwork for achieving a solid future by adopting more effective practices to accomplish the work of the church.

- Evaluate the current process for creating, approving, and sharing the budget with the congregation. Do the (even harder) work of evaluating the budget within the context of income (from all sources), expenses, ministry priorities, and vision casting.
- Create a task-force to investigate building and grounds options as well as to investigate alternative sources of one-time and ongoing supplemental revenue (income) streams. Be creative!
- Create a plan to address any deferred maintenance. Identify the needs of the campus, provide estimates and timelines of projected costs, and allocate needed expenses in the coming months/years.



## **DISCIPLESHIP**

- **Adult Education:** Review current adult education programming (book studies, bible study, etc.) and create a game plan to ensure adequate programming is offered for adult Christian education in keeping with the aforementioned discipleship pathway. Maintain a 12-month written out curriculum plan for adult education classes and studies, as well.
- **Discipleship Committee:** Consider revamping the current Discipleship Committee to give oversight to Christian discipleship for all ages.
- **Discipleship Summit:** Gather a group of stakeholders for a Discipleship Summit to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum.
  - Evaluate the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
  - Develop a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the children's and youth ministry programming.
  - Assess the need for youth group to use an integrated curriculum plan that is coordinated with the Sunday school classes.
  - Determine how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
  - Decide what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- **Rites of Passage:** Though there are some Rites of Passage present, small churches are well poised to partner with their members in even more meaningful ways than larger churches. Develop Rites of Passage that stretch from birth to confirmation and beyond retirement. These rites of passage should mark significant moments in the lives of congregants and leave them feeling known and cared for. Some possible rites of passage could include:
  - Baptism
  - First steps
  - First lost tooth celebration
  - Kindergarten transition
  - Entry into middle school
  - Confirmation
  - Entry into high school
  - Getting a driver's license
  - High school graduation
  - College graduation
  - First full-time job
  - Marriage
  - Birth of children
  - Vocation transition
  - Beginning and completion of graduate school
  - Empty nesting
  - Retirement
  - Death of a spouse

## **Timeline Implementation**

### **PHASE #1: October - December 2018**

#### **Focus: Starting Right and Creating Climate Change**

##### **Outcomes:**

- This report has been presented to the session for the strategic renovation of the ministry and the session has given full support of this plan.
- The Strategic Renovation Team (SRT) has been recruited and begun their work.
- A Quick Start Summit has taken place in which the SRT, key volunteers, and church staff participated and launched the renovation process.
- A prayer team has been recruited and charged with praying for the renovation process. They have received a copy of this report and timeline.
- A local certified Christian mediator has been invited to spend time with the congregation in order to help facilitate conflict transformation through a process of peace and reconciliation.
- A book study has been formed to read *Healthy Congregations* by Peter L. Steinke together.
- A game plan has been created in order to develop more positive means of collaborating between and amongst the staff and the congregation. The game plan includes lines of discipline, accountability, and communication so that a person who feels bullied (staff or congregant) has a channel of advocacy and support.
- A written game plan has been developed that outlines the way decisions are made and communicated in relationship to programming, staffing, building and grounds, and budgeting.
- An intentional campaign has been created to foster team relationships between members of the church staff, members of Session and members of the related committees.
- A written process that outlines how congregation members can bring concerns to church leadership, how concerns are evaluated, and whether or not concerns merit a whole-congregation forum has been developed.
- A written process has been created that outlines how the church celebrates when forums reach resolution.
- A multi-layered system for growing the church's membership has been created.

### **PHASE #2: January - September 2019**

#### **Focus: Building Infrastructure and Developing Leaders**

##### **Outcomes:**

- Job descriptions for all volunteer roles in the church have been written and match the work being done, clarifying to whom each volunteer is accountable.
- Sufficient training and development opportunities for all volunteers have been provided.
- A master list of weekly, monthly, and annual ministry opportunities in every area of the church has been created,
- The recruitment process has been implemented to ensure that all positions are filled by August 1 of each year.
- A yearly leadership directory that lists all committees and leaders for all committees and groups has been created.

- An inspiring leadership-training and vision-casting event for all volunteers has occurred at the beginning of each program year.
- An Equipping Team has been established and has led the way for the culture shift toward helping each individual discover his or her unique role in the church.
- An Equipping Coordinator/Director/Team Leader has been designated.
- A Tracking Process for recording who is serving in which ministries has been developed.
- A Discovery Tool that helps individuals explore how they are wired for ministry has been selected and utilized.
- A matching and placement process has been created that gracefully takes advantage of the Tracking process and Discovery tool while still making the process inviting and personal. A follow-up and re-direct processes has been developed that ensures that the match was successful or helps the person find a new match.
- An audit of all volunteer teams and roles in the church has been conducted.
- A clear organizational chart for all volunteer teams and roles in the church has been created.
- Communication, Marketing, and Branding practices have been created and implemented.
- A protocol has been established by which all decisions and important information are shared throughout the whole church community.
- A 12-month calendar, create major event notebooks, and a preventative maintenance calendar have been created
- Attendance for all programs has been taken and a written game plan to track attendance in a consistent way in order to identify MIAs has been created.
- A Ministry Manual has been created that includes 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.
- An Operations Manual is in place and updated annually.
- A database of all of the people who are connected to your congregation has been maintained and updated annually.
- A game plan for welcoming visitors who visit the church has been established and implemented.
- The approach to follow-up with people who are MIA has been determined. Track who has gone missing, the reasons they have gone, and who followed up with them on staff.
- A list of the various opportunities for people to connect with each other has been created that includes explanations of each opportunity, meeting times, and contact information with a name and phone and/or email.
- An audit of the special events at the church has taken place with each event given a clear purpose and an effectiveness rating on how well it achieves its goals. Consideration has been given to focusing the calendar on the most effective events for the church.
- A process has been created/evaluated for outside groups using the church facilities and updated to ensure clear guidelines and fee structures.
- The existing personnel policy has been revised to include new job descriptions, set a mutually understood level of accountability between those in leadership and the staff, and address any changes in staffing practices.

- An annual staff appreciation event has taken place where all staff have been affirmed and encouraged in their role
- Mechanisms for ongoing evaluation for all church staff members that include space for self-reflection, supervisor feedback, and requests from the employee about how the church can help him or her succeed has been implemented.
- Staff duties/responsibilities (both documented and undocumented in job descriptions) have been reviewed in order to identify tasks that can be handled by trained volunteers.
- Volunteer job descriptions have been written to reflect the duties and responsibilities that will facilitate the staff living into being multipliers.
- Staff job descriptions have been updated appropriately to reflect staff members moving from being the genius in the room to that of multiplier. Instead of being the doer, the staff manages, guides, and leads volunteers and volunteer teams to accomplish appropriate tasks.
- Job descriptions for the chairs and committee members for every committee at large have been written in a fashion that ensures each committee has a unique and distinct function in the organizational structure of the church.  
Chairs and committee members have been empowered and equipped to live into their new job descriptions.
- A process has been put in place to annually evaluate and adjust the committee structure in the church to ensure that it aligns with the strategic and operational needs of the church for the upcoming year.

### **PHASE #3: May 2019 - February 2020**

#### **Focus: Vision, Stewardship, and Finance**

##### **Outcomes:**

- A Visioning Summit has occurred resulting in the following documents which will direct the ministries and support the church's vision:
  - Mission statement
  - Defined core values
  - A set of three-year revolving goals with one-year benchmarks
  - An organizational chart
- A job description has been created for a vision team that will help guide the vision process moving forward and recruitment for this team has begun.
- A Vision Team has been recruited to carry forward the goals and benchmarks of the Visioning Summit.
- A game plan that will outline the best ways to communicate the vision, values, and goals of the church's ministry has been created and implemented.
- A prioritized list of all ministry programs at the church, along with the named target audience, has been created. It has been determined how best to retire programs near the bottom of the priority list.
- An Outreach/Mission Strategy has been created that will help the church engaged the community around them and be "good news" to their neighbors.
- Job descriptions have been created for the financial roles within the church.

- The congregational Financial Policies and Procedures document has been reviewed and updated by the Finance Committee.
- The leadership body of the church has adopted an updated version of the Financial Policies and Procedures document.
- The congregational Investment Policy Guidelines document has been reviewed and updated by the Finance Committee.
- The leadership body of the church has adopted an updated version of the Investment Policy Guidelines document.
- An internal audit team has been recruited and given instructions to carry forward the annual review of all financial activity from the previous year.
- The findings and recommendations of the internal audit have been shared with pastoral and lay leadership, and subsequently, with the congregation at large ensuring that the prior year's financial activity has been properly recorded in accordance with the policies and procedures established by the congregation.
- The recommendations that resulted from the audit committee have been implemented.
- The finance committee has determined that the congregation is in the right place with both their banking and investment firm relationships.
- A strategy has been created to celebrate the financial vision of the church and to narrate the financial realities of that vision.
- The financial vision of the church has been shared at the agreed upon realm and frequency.
- An expert has been invited to discuss planned giving with the congregation in the greater context of the annual stewardship ministry.
- An effective Stewardship Committee has been recruited and given instructions to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of what is currently in place within the historical context of this ministry.
- After reviewing the church's current year-round financial stewardship plan, the Stewardship Committee has drafted a robust, year-round stewardship strategy to be implemented the following cycle.
- The Finance Committee has prepared a Narrative Ministry Budget to showcase the priorities of the congregation and narrate the financial vision of the congregation.
- A game plan for staffing the vision of the church has been created. It has included a part-time children's ministry position.
- A financial vision casting event has taken place.
- The Finance Committee has evaluated and made recommendations regarding the current process for creating, approving, and sharing the budget with the congregation.
- The current ministry programming has been evaluated with an eye toward retiring or combining programs that inadequately reflect the current priorities of the church.
- The task force has been assembled and has scheduled a usage study of the buildings and property (including the Annex, storage, and curb appeal).
- The results of the usage study, as well as feedback regarding creative and new ways to leverage this valuable resource for the common good have been shared with the congregation.
- In consultation with the Buildings and Grounds Committee, work has begun to identify the upcoming needs of the church campus including estimates of project costs.

- Deferred maintenance estimates and timelines have been drafted and communicated with the Finance Committee to budget for accordingly.

#### **PHASE #4: March - Sept 2020**

##### **Focus: Discipleship and Sustainability**

##### **Outcomes:**

- Current adult education programming (book studies, bible study, etc.) have been reviewed and evaluated.
- A game plan has been created to ensure that adequate programming is offered for adult Christian education in keeping with an intentional discipleship pathway.
- The Discipleship Committee has been evaluated and a new role description has been created to help the team give oversight to Christian formation for all ages.
- A group of stakeholders has met for a Christian Formation Retreat to discuss the learning objectives of each age level and how these might be accomplished utilizing available curriculum. At this retreat, the following objectives were met:
  - Evaluate the upcoming curriculum to ensure its effectiveness.
  - Develop a long-range scope and sequence as well as a set of core competencies for the children's and youth ministry programming.
  - Assess the need for youth group to use an integrated curriculum plan that is coordinated with the Sunday school classes.
  - Determine how the curriculum selected will be communicated to volunteers.
  - Decide what level of training will be required prior to full implementation.
- A Rites of Passage Game Plan has been created to mark significant moments in the lives of congregants and leave them feeling known and cared for. Some possible rites of passage could include:
  - Baptism
  - First steps
  - First lost tooth celebration
  - Kindergarten transition
  - Entry into middle school
  - Confirmation
  - Entry into high school
  - Getting a driver's license
  - High school graduation
  - College graduation
  - First full-time job
  - Marriage
  - Birth of children
  - Vocation transition
  - Beginning and completion of graduate school
  - Empty nesting
  - Retirement
  - Death of a spouse
- A review of the renovation process has been completed.

- Current pressure points have been named.
- A timeline for the next 12 months has been created that included game plans for the current pressure points and items from the online diagnostic.
- Ongoing coaching has been secured and a sustainability plan has been put in place.
- The staff and SRT have celebrated what God has done with their 18-month investment.
- The SRT has transitioned their role to providing support and accountability to the church and focused on strategic issues such as three-year goals and one-year benchmarks, calendars, and volunteer recruitment.

## The **Ministry Architects** Team Serving St. Thomas Presbyterian Church – Houston, Texas



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Sara is a life-long Episcopalian having grown up in Memphis, Tennessee, the land of Elvis. She has been in professional youth ministry since 1993 serving Episcopal churches in Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. While no longer in full-time paid ministry, she serves the children and youth at her own congregation in Louisville, KY where she currently resides. She's been part of the Ministry Architects team since 2006 as a Lead Consultant

and the Search Manager.

Sara's husband Geoff works at the University of Louisville (go Cards!) and they have a teen daughter as well as two dogs. Butterflies are a significant symbol of her faith journey – you'll find them everywhere in her home. Anyone who guesses correctly how many there are gets a prize!



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With a background in the non-profit, education, and financial management fields, Aly joins her colleagues at Ministry Architects with a unique blend of skills. Her time as an AmeriCorps inner-city teacher, along with travels around the globe, ignited a passion for larger than life ideas and took her faith journey to new heights. She carried this enthusiasm to a boutique wealth management firm and, after more than a decade of "success," decided it was high time to listen to God's gentle calling and jumped into ministry work full-time. She's been serving churches on staff as a Teacher, as the Director of Children's, Youth and Family Ministries, and as a Development Director ever since!

Aly completed her Bachelor of Arts degree from Fairfield University and her Master in Education from the University of Virginia. She's loved using her expertise to help ministry partners tackle audacious challenges through a multi-industry lens. Her latest passion project involves social enterprise and ending human trafficking in her city. (All in a day's work!) The mom to three fabulous daughters, Aly and her husband love this wondrously messy, grace-filled journey.



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Bryant began working in youth ministry in 1996 in the United Methodist Church. He has been worship speaker for summer camps, taught seminars for youth workers, and written curriculum for the Florida United Methodist Camping programs.

Bryant graduated from Florida Southern College with a Bachelor of Science in Sociology. In his free time Bryant enjoys all things technology, exercise, good movies, and blogs at [thepostlu.de](http://thepostlu.de). He and his wife, Tonya, live in Kernersville, NC.