

As Presbyterians, we believe we discover more of God’s will for God’s church when we discuss, pray, and vote. The Session will be seeking your insights and feelings at the Annual Meeting on May 5, after the 10am worship, approximately 10:50, in Meisenheimer Hall. Plan on this meeting to last about two hours as Session wants to listen to everyone. In this document is preparation work Session is asking you to do before the meeting. Please review the answers to the “Questions of the Week”, meeting agenda, and the April 28 sermon from Pastor James prior to the Annual Meeting.

Session has been prayerfully discussing the future of North Presbyterian Church, reading books, working with consultants, examining statistics, analyzing trends, seeking wisdom from Presbytery, examining other churches, listening to members, processing feelings, and discerning God’s direction. A critical input into Session’s decisions are your insights, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of where God is leading us. We are each at a different point on our faith journey. We each have a different perspective. At the Annual Meeting, Session hopes to learn from each other in exploring the most excellent way of love for our North Presbyterian family of faith. Session will consider all of this information as they make decisions about our future.

Preparation for the Annual Meeting

- Pray for God’s will to be revealed to you and our church.
- Pray for session.
- Reflect on your experiences at North Presbyterian Church, your perceptions of church participation trends, the answers to the “Questions of the Week” and scripture. Come prepared to share: “What you notice.” (I am excited about... I am concerned about... I am curious about...) And “What is next.” (I hope...)
- Be curious about your feelings. Typically, liminal seasons of rapid change and loss give rise to anxiety and grief. Acknowledge your emotions. Include your emotions in: “What you notice.”
- Be curious about your feelings for the future. How is nostalgia coloring your perceptions? Liminal seasons of rapid change also present abundant opportunities. How can we honor our past, boldly follow God into the future and celebrate the present? Include your hopes and feelings in: “What is next.”
- You will be sharing your insights in small groups of three and writing them down on a paper for session to review. Optional is to bring your written insights. Session will read all of these insights. Your insights will be an input into future session discussions and decisions.

“Question of the Week” Answers

Why do you attend North Presbyterian Church?
Because of the friends I have here
Because I find peace, love, and kindness here. The people are welcoming and peace reigns.
To know more God. To close [to more?] God. Love more God.
To worship the glory of God. To participate in singing in the choir and get lifted up by other music provided. A social gathering to meet with friends and find new friends by visiting strangers.
Praise God within a community of believers. I enjoy P. James’ sermons and Roderick’s prayers (and visa-versa), bells and music. The congregation is comprised of people that I have known for years and care about. My support is needed and appreciated. I honor and feel connected to my parents who are in heaven and raised me in this church.
Because it’s the closest Presbyterian Church.
I appreciate in-person worship over watching online. I find a great sense of peace here at North Church when being with other members during worship. I have been a member for a very long time, and I can’t imagine being a member of another church – it is “home” for me.
Commitment to my family history of attending since I was 5 years old. I like the smaller church. I like the ability to watch online should I choose to not attend in person. Great sermons. Connection with God through members, sermons, music.
I came to North many years ago because it was much like the church I grew up in. I’ve become involved in session, deacons, and other activities and have formed many friendships as well as deepened my own faith. There is a great sense of community here.
It’s a community of faith taking care of one another.

Feel welcome. The church community. The spiritual nourishment from sermons. Being together.
I'd like to be inspired and uplifted. Music. Fellowship. Emphasis on mission.
I attend North Presbyterian Church because I feel so much love and acceptance. The love and welcoming spirit you receive every Sunday is worth coming back. Thank everyone for the love and support.
Faith formation and development. Faith encouragement. Learning about Bible scripture. Collaborative community service. Community and friendships. Music enjoyment and encouragement. Serve members and community. Friends and fellowship. Faith inspiration. Appreciate the needed education of youth and youth activities.
The people are friendly and accepting. The church is accepting of everybody.
To praise God for all my blessing.
The joy of worshipping with friends and family. Opportunities to serve God within the church. Opportunities to serve God through mission. Fellowship with friends and family. Singing in choir. Playing bells. Making music with friends. Deepening my relationship with Jesus!
Be with friendly parishioners.
I find the 10:00 service a calming place. Traditional. Accepting. Leaving world problems outside and concentrate on the soul.
The people. Traditional service – sermon, music, opportunity to usher, serve as worship leader. Hands on mission. Great place to work together with a diverse group of members (color, culture, political beliefs, ages).
Because I am a Christian and I want to worship here with my fellow Christians.
To worship God. A way to start a week remembering to be aware of God's will. A time to remember God's love. To be part of a Christian community. Pray for other people. Scripture. Sermons. Time to explore other thoughts. Be open-minded.
Because it's the best and only community that I can praise God with my full heart with the people that do the same.
I enjoy singing in the choir.
It is a welcoming space with wonderful people.
North Church has short services. The time of service also permits me to attend. It's a community, family and welcoming.
I have always had a "church family". When we moved to the North St. Paul area, we chose North Church because of the friendly, caring congregation; education for our children; and the opportunity to serve in so many ways, physically and spiritually.
Fellowship. Family has been with church for 20+ years. Faith – I feel God's grace at North. Inspiration for the week to come.
Part tradition and habit; I grew up attending and active in church; it's comfortable. North church for the people here. Because every week I receive some message, idea, or thought-provoking inspiration that feeds me spiritually and helps me grow as a person and in my relationship with God.
Friendly people. I like how the [?] church is organized. I like the 6 p.m. service. I like the support for mission. People support each other. All are welcome! I like our minister and New Life minister.
Good fellowship/worship. Like the uplifting messages. James is a good spiritual advisor – strong beliefs. Helps us to question what is God doing in our lives. And how are we living like he wants us to.
Greeting to everyone. Thanks. I have no questions for now.
Because it is home to me. I know and care about everyone and feel comfortable and very happy and grateful to attend worship with them, the clergy, musicians and all those willing to lead.
I attend North because Christ's all-encompassing Love and Grace are preached at North. We have a welcoming congregation and I enjoy visiting with many friends.
North is close to my home, is friendly, and usually fits my prayer style.
I cherish the connections I have with so many good people. It is a wonderful church family/community we have.
I grew up in this church, and it has had a large influence on my life and relationship with God. I still enjoy attending worship and events and congregation full of wonderful people who care about me.
Always have

I attend N. Presbyterian Church because I love to worship God and enjoy being with others who also love God.
To worship God with a family of faith that shares similar values and expectations for worship. To be a part of a diverse caring community. To have the support of skilled staff who add to the worship service. I have a group of leaders who carry out the work of the church and support to others. To be a part of a church that gives to others in the community through multiple avenues that include Hands on Mission, holding regular blood drives, and to support the community food shelf as examples of mission.
I was searching for a church that had a traditional service. I had friends that attended North at the time and was especially impressed by the active youth involvement and the choir. I like the Christian fellowship I find among the congregation.
Long time member with faith community. Pres. Church belief that all stand in the grace and forgiveness of our God.
To hear the word of God, enjoy participating or listening to the beautiful music throughout the service, socialize with persons in the congregation
I grew up in the church. I'm out of town most of the year but when I can I attend.
I don't attend much anymore. I live farther away. However, the seasons worship service has given me new reason to attend. I love it. I like that it is in the evening, that it is interactive and the praise band music.
Other members. Loved 10:45 contemporary service. Don't go as often now that that's gone.
For pastor James and church family
North is my church home. I have been going here for a long time.
Attending church is a habit - it doesn't seem like Sunday if you don't attend church. Attend North Church because it feels like family
Church of family - past and present
It makes me feel comfortable.
I attend North Presbyterian Church for the inclusive sermons and for a feeling of community.
It's a smaller sized church. Women are in leadership roles. It's an open and affirming congregation. In fact, I'd like more emphasis placed on that to the community outside of church.
I have attended North Presbyterian for over 60 years, but I have not been a consistent member. I am not in town very often, but when I am I feel at home at North.

<p>Given that almost all guests come to church through a personal invitation, how can we help you invite people to church?</p> <p>What makes you hesitate to invite a guest?</p>
People can come to church when there are activities, like picnics, volunteer opportunities.
A guest should feel welcome by the congregation, not just the invitee. Having greeters and name tags available is a great step forward. Just be welcoming and have an interesting agenda (ex: mission activities, Seasons, choir, hand bells, etc.).
We don't have a car which makes it difficult to invite people to go to North Presbyterian Church (our children take us to church).
I appreciate North Church for its homeness.
I hesitate after one or two invitations because I can be perceived as too pushy. But I try to compensate by trying to stay open and available.
Greeters at the door. Name tags, for guests. Adult education opportunities. Small "get to know you" groups.
I feel that those people who want a church home are already attending one. Given that membership and attendance in churches have fallen so dramatically, what is it about "church" that isn't working anymore for people?
Start by inviting close friends, people you feel comfortable with. Then reach out to people you may come in contact with during the week. If they don't have a church home, invite them to ours. Too many people aren't interested in any church commitment.
The length of the sermons and service. They are too long.

Just reminders/encouragement/ideas. Events with broad interest. Will we look at how to better invite the community?
I will make an effort to invite many to church.
Each and everyone should make an effort to invite people to church. Lack of invitation awareness is the problem.
Charging for coffee hour is not welcoming. Lack of visitation from pastor and personal contact. Need more age appropriate study groups and activities. Lack of clear communication. No local advertising to draw in people. I would like to see a list of staff members in the bulletin, especially for visitors. Staff is not listed on the website either.
Most (all) of my current friends I met at North. I still meet with those friends on a regular basis. My circle outside of current church members is small. I feel we need a special noteworthy theme – invite others for that special purpose – without “it” we are just another church. North Church is special because... Be good at helping small groups form [such as] food pantry, photography, cooking, world travel, scrapbooking, walking, book club, etc.
<u>Help</u> : special events/speakers, initiatives like Seasons. <u>Hesitate</u> : I’m still not sure our church family feels as welcoming as they could to people who have different life experiences. I feel like we still have some community-building to do, and some work on signaling our openness/welcoming environment.
Share invitation cards to give guests as invites to come to church. I am hesitant when people don’t come when I do invite them. Moreover most people around me already are members of other churches.
Like politics, I have difficulties talking about religion outside the family.
Many of my friends have a church home of their own that they attend regularly. Sometimes it feels like we don’t have as much to offer as bigger churches as far as programming. It works for me but not for everyone.
I suggest the next time we have Hands on Mission, we send out invitations into the community to come “help put care packages together for the homeless and stay for coffee”. Some people might come and then decide to join.
I am probably not unlike other Presbyterians – not especially vocal or “pushy” when it comes to my faith. I have invited others from time to time (and a few that visited). I haven’t had confidence that we offer what families today are looking for. We don’t have a robust youth program/classes/etc. Also, it’s been disheartening that our contemporary Sunday service disintegrated, largely due to uninspiring music. (I hesitate to say more about this as I don’t want to come across as unkind.)
Most of my contacts are already churched. A few have no interest.
Maybe less organ music at traditional service...my personal preference.
I have tried to invite friends to church with limited success. Most people my age including the majority of my friends think that church is a waste of time (even if they would never say this to me, I can tell), and they would rather just be somewhere else. This makes the first invitation difficult, and the second one even harder.
Most of my friends and associates are already connected to a church of their choice. Unless others show an interest in my church activities when they come up in discussions I would not go any farther.
We need to organize special events that can serve as vehicles to invite people to attend. The preaching should be tailored to people real life situations. Lack of exciting activities like exciting singing.
My friends already have a church, or aren’t interested. I’ve asked in the past with limited success unfortunately. Maybe hosting more community welcoming (fun) events – an easier invitation than to a service.
We are hesitant due to not many kids involvement
North does not feel "alive". It feels blah and routine. I wish we had other groups that people could get involved in. A "Welcome" packet of some kind would be nice to give to a Guest.
I'd probably bring a guest to one of our special services or events. A persons faith is private.
Maybe some sort of handout with inform about our church would be helpful. Do the cities have a welcome package it could be part of?
I would be a distraction.
Events like the Festival of Cultures makes it really easy to invite others. I hesitate inviting people to church for a regular Sunday because we seem to have some division going on in our church (versus healthy diversity of viewpoints). I hope we can work on building community within the church and then let that spill outward.

I have invited people to worship when there's a special event such as the "festival of cultures" and when the choir does their Christmas service. It's easier to invite people when there's a special event.

How do we minimize our budget deficit?

If we do fundraisers, they need to be focused on funds for outside the church body. Sharing staff and resources with other churches makes sense. Campaign to increase member pledging. Campaign to increase membership. Not at all in favor of selling the building. Find additional organizations to use our space.

I would like to use the following: fundraisers, sharing staff, money from Endowment. Maybe also a fundraising campaign with a challenging goal. Also grants from Presbytery.

1. Fundraiser – it will be 2. not a good idea 3. we are bare bones now 5. yes if it keeps us together 6. not if it breaks up our congregation 7. I believe if we have money in that fund use it to help our church.

Where does the money go when I see the parking lot full of vehicles and the lawn full of children??

Don't undertake any activities that are not necessary – only those things that need to be taken care of. Don't spend money on luxury items that we can do without. NO!!! [to selling our building]. [Merge with another church if] they merge with us! Dream on [hope for a significant memorial gift].

All of those circled above however only limited amount from Endowment as cannot wholesale change the bylaws. Nonetheless some additional funds from Endowment can be used if needs are not included in the operating budget.

Sharing staff with other churches. Fundraisers. Merge with another church might work but that can be a real challenge. That would be my last choice.

Sharing staff. Selling our building and renting back. Try to get new members.

Form 'work groups' to assist members with tasks they need help with. The person needing help could give a donation to our church (painting, cleaning out a garage, minor repairs, yardwork, Spring cleaning, etc.).

1. Sharing staff with another church. 2. Money from Endowment. 3. Fundraisers.

Invite smaller church congregations to use our church (rent). Share staff with other churches.

No [staff cuts]. No [hope for a significant memorial gift]. Endowment proceeds...yes. Community use/events at church. Hopeful for nursery/daycare! The "one time" call for additional contributions in late 2023 was a great special offering.

Fundraisers. Staff sharing. Merge with another church. Money from Endowment.

[Selling our building and renting back worship space] last resort maybe? If have to sell could El Shadai [trade?]

Money from Endowment. Merge with another church.

[Money from Endowment was circled] What happens when the church isn't here anymore?

NOTE: three additional cards were submitted without comments:

- One had fundraisers, sharing staff with another church, and money from Endowment circled.
- One had money from Endowment circled.
- One had written [no?] next to money from Endowment.

Additional incomes stream, merge with another church.

Sharing staff – renting out any of the church space for events?

Cooperation/merger with another church (s) seems to be the most logical way to reduce declining attendance.

Selling the building should be a last resort. If we have to tighten our wallet for this season of drought in order to ensure we are still around 10,50,100 years from now during future seasons of abundance, then so be it. Fundraising and/or cutting ministries to adjust for a smaller congregation will be necessary. Funding the operating budget from endowment defeats the purpose of having an endowment, so that should only be a last resort as well.

Fundraisers, sharing staff, possibly merging with another church nearby. Another idea: board off the back hall and find a permanent renter/business - they would have their own entrance. A church our size does not need all that space.

<p>We may minimize the budget deficit by working directly with members of our congregation to pledge to the church as well as to have robust efforts to bring in new members. I do not believe that endowment money is intended for reducing the annual operating deficit or directly funding the annual budget. I suggest that we look at the cost benefit of sharing administrative services with another church as well as to determine with another church the opportunities for sharing ministerial staff as it relates to worship leadership and direct caring for members of the church. Fundraisers may be fun, however, is there a true benefit for having fundraisers? What is the expectation for fundraising? Most fundraisers do not generate the income that is required to offset the costs and amount of time and energy spent on the event. Renting the church spaces should be continued with a concentrated effort on costing out the rental space and allowing for real income to benefit the annual church budget. Unless there are significant plans for increasing the church membership, merging with another congregation may be in the future of NPC.</p>
<p>share staff, merge w/another church, sell and rent back or find new location with a merge</p>
<p>Definitely not selling our building and renting back space. Sharing staff or merging should be considered, although merging churches could potentially make some members leave and that would not be good. Not knowing how much is in the Endowment fund, perhaps it should be considered. But would that be a one-time amount or an on-going process?</p>
<p>I do not think we should sell the building but renting it out to be used by others would provide a steady income that we could count on as we do with then El Shadai.</p>
<p>I genuinely do not know what to suggest. The ideas of staff-sharing, cutting staff, selling the building, and merging with another church feel very drastic but may be the reality. I'm not too familiar with the Endowment Fund rules, but I guess I'd rather try to use that before doing the other options.</p>
<p>Fundraisers, Sharing staff with another church, Merge with another church, Hope for a significant memorial gift</p>
<p>Different kinds of Fundraisers to see how people respond. Selling the building is not my favorite idea, but if we think about how much space we actually use in comparison to how much space El Shaddi uses, it could make better financial sense. Or, we see about raising the rent charged to the outside organizations that do rent from us now. How much money is in the Endowment Fund? Is that enough to bridge the gap for this year to give us time to research other options?</p>
<p>I would not want to sell our building and renting back worship space.</p>
<p>I have tithed for a long time and have added \$5 a week for misc church giving. This comes to \$260 a year. If 5 households did this, it would be \$1300 a year that could decrease deficit.</p>
<p>We shouldn't cut staff, they stood with us through lean times and we can't abandon them now. I don't know if we have enough dedicated people for fundraising (MN Gophers). I don't think we can count on a significant memorial in the near future. Some additional income streams would be welcome. I would like to see money from the endowment used. No good to have all that money there if we fold. I guess my preference if push came to shove, we sell the building and find a new place to rent for our services, or sell the building and rent back the space maybe along with El Shadai.</p>
<p>I am very sure we have talked about this in the past. Anything would help.</p>
<p>I think we should merge with another church.</p>
<p>Using the endowment funds seems to make the most sense but having very specific goals as to how the money might be used.</p>

How do you feel about our relationship with New Life, Trinity, Church of the Way, and other churches? Would you like to enhance and expand our relationships? If yes, with what church(es) and how?

Ultimately we need to join together with other congregations to survive as a vibrant congregation. Shared programs, services and staff.

I love to see us enhance our relationship with New Life. It has been great worshipping with them.

They don't attend services and come to our functions (ex: Agape meal). I don't see what more we can do to get them here and support us another Presbyterian church.

<p>Feel most comfortable with New Life as have gotten to know Pastor Riz; worked with New Life members at [State] Fair parking and pumpkin patch and participated in joint meetings with the session of New Life. Share staff, when appropriate, with any of the churches.</p>
<p>We should merge or come together for the sake of God's work in fellowship with one another. No need to refuse to merge and close down and what suffers is God's work. We have a problem and a solution. If we do not take this solution as God's word commands, then where are we going? Let's show Christ!</p>
<p>We would be smart to align ourselves with any and all churches. We have to grow the church! It's time to grow the church!</p>
<p>If it would benefit the combined churches. I would be in favor of joining with either New Life or Woodbury or both.</p>
<p>I enjoy sharing worship and activities with the other churches – whether it leads to any consolidations – or not. Expand and enhance, or just continue ok – could also explore opportunities with other North St. Paul churches for events or community building.</p>
<p>I like the idea of having things with the other churches. I don't like driving at night, so it makes it hard for anything at night.</p>
<p>I like our partnership and find it enriches our congregation and church life. I really enjoyed the VBS experience at Church of the Way, and I have really enjoyed our Seasons joint worship service with New Life. I think we should ask New Life's members to join our church when their church closes. I would like to see us host the other church's congregations more often for worship and fellowship, as we do for Festival of Cultures.</p>
<p>I think having joint participation with New Life, Trinity, and Church of the Way is wonderful for increased participation and joy in special worship services, fellowship events, youth programming, and fundraisers like the Pumpkin Patch and State Fair Park & Ride. I am in favor of continuing the relationships – I'm not sure by how much more. I like what we're doing now, but if Session or other members have ideas for doing more, I would be interesting in hearing about them.</p>
<p>not interested</p>
<p>I would like to continue our fellowship with these other congregations.</p>
<p>Festival of Cultures is one of the best things that we do, it is so much fun. I really like Pastor Riz, so I would love to continue joint fellowship and worship with New Life. Even with the culture and language barrier, I would love more joint fellowship opportunities with El Shadai. I find them to be a congregation with a strong faith in God, and I enjoy when we do things with them.</p>
<p>Thank you for the opportunity to worship with New Life Church. I am sorry that I have not participated with the members of Trinity Church in any meaningful way. I have enjoyed the worship components that Pastor April has participated in with NPC and New Life Church. I am not sure what our relationship is with Church of the Way. I am open to exploring more ways to build relationships and to worship with other churches. Is there a vision and are there goals established for building the relationships with other churches? Will we ultimately share in administrative support and worship leadership? Until I understand the strategic direction of building greater relationships with other churches, I cannot suggest how to enhance or expand relationships.</p>
<p>I like the joint activities and services - and welcome more of it. We need to expand opportunities for our youth and this is a good way to do it.</p>
<p>I think it's great to share staff, services and worship space with other churches. Great way to connect with others.</p>
<p>If needed, but prefer to go to North</p>
<p>I think it's necessary to consider these options. I like the relationship with New Life.</p>
<p>Mixed. We are all creatures of pattern and adjusting to a new physical location could mean losing more people than keeping them. All of the people I have met from the other churches are friendly and nice and everyone brings something different. It is very encouraging when we have the Festival of Cultures to see everyone come together to celebrate. How could we bring that energy to every Sunday?</p>
<p>We feel very positive about the relationship with New Life and Trinity. How about some combined youth social events?</p>
<p>I feel Roseville is too far away from North St. Paul. I feel more connected with Woodbury.</p>
<p>I've enjoyed having Pastor Riz preach here bringing a different perspective to worship. However, I really missed not having the Maunday Thursday service here at North. Driving a distance at night can be an issue for some.</p>
<p>Yes – all of them – maybe others as well...</p>

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**1. What is one change that would get you more excited about worship?
2. Do you like the current times and lengths of our services?**

1. I like traditional worship as it is. Have the choir up front more often.
2. Yes, especially morning service. [I] rarely do Seasons.

1. I miss the more traditional hymns, especially during Advent.
2. Yes.

1. [No response]
2. Yes.

1. [No response]
2. Yes, yes! Convenient for elders and families!

1. Spontaneity – different people leading the service.
2. Yes.

1. Merging with New Life for fellowship in Christ.
2. The current time and length of our services is perfect to me.

1. [No response]
2. Time is fine. Length is good.

1. More active singing that engage[s] all the congregation other than hymns singing. Live music that engage[s] all the Christians.
2. Yes. The length and time of services is just fine.

1. More people in the seats. It saddens me to see the numbers continue to decline. Music sounds better with more voices.
2. Morning worship time works for me. Earlier would be better. Sunday evening doesn't work for me.

1. Jointly [joint?] worship with other congregations.
2. They are very good/OK.

1. [No response]
2. Yes.

1. Better acoustics in Sanctuary.
2. Really like Seasons service.

1. Sing at least one hymn each week that we all know. Keep most of our services at North. Read scripture from NRSV Bible so congregation can follow in pew Bibles.
2. OK, but prefer 9:30 am.

1. I'm already excited about worship. I believe it is my responsibility to make worship relevant. I do not attend worship to be entertained.
2. It works fine for me.

1. Having a larger group attend the 10 a.m. service on a regular basis. It was embarrassing to have so few here when we had a guest minister a few weeks back!
2. Yes – I love the 10 a.m. start – it should help to bring in more of the late risers!

1. More interactivity during first service.
2. Yes! 10 a.m. is great. Seasons gets a little late, especially for families w/young children, but w/o supper included, it would be difficult to get there any earlier. So, 6 [p.m.] is good!

1. Have once a month lay people tell how God works in their life. Maybe 2-5 minutes. 2. The times are OK with me.
1) Engaging all of or church family in meaningful ways for all members. 2) Yes, for 10am service. I do not attend the Seasons worship often enough to comment on it.
1) Skipped. 2) Yes
1) I am very happy with the recent changes to Sunday worship, and the addition of Seasons. One change I would like to see has little to do with our leadership teams, and more so with the congregation. I wish that more people would give Seasons a chance, most of the congregation hasn't even been once. If more people tried it, I believe they would enjoy it as I do. 2) I LOVE the Seasons service. It is at a perfect time, and it is very fun and spiritually fulfilling. 15 minutes of music, 45 minutes of sermon/discussion, and 1 hour of fellowship is a great balance. I enjoy attending the traditional service sometimes too, and 10am is a much better time than the previous 9am.
1) Skipped. 2) I like the 10 o'clock time for Sunday service. Length is just right.
1) I like both worship services very much. 2) 10:00 am Sunday works well for me. I like the Seasons service but find Sunday evening to be a difficult day/time to make it to worship.
1) A bit more contemporary praise music in traditional service - guitars? 2) I wish there was a way to have Seasons service earlier. I recognize the shared space with El Shaddai. I have enjoyed my experiences with Seasons but driving in the evening is problematic for me personally.
1) BIBLE STUDY 2) Yes.
1) Singing the Lord's Prayer occasionally and one spiritual song per service 2) Yes
1) Bring back a morning contemporary service. 2) Time - Traditional is fine. Contemporary (Seasons) - too late on Sunday. Length - seems fine.
1) Skipped. 2) Yes
1) Skipped. 2) Yes
1) More information in the bulletin. Names and short bio when we get new members; people who are ill that would like cards and/or prayers; 2) Yes
1) Skipped 2) Yes. I'm not in town very often, but mid morning seems to work for me.
1) Good contemporary music 2) I miss 2nd service but the lengths are fine and seasons is a nice change
1. Less organ, more piano please. Make sermons more relevant to our everyday life. Prayers in program – great! 2. OK – would enjoy a 9 am service.
1. A few more of the old standard hymns. 2. Yes – it appears to be the best solution.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK – SUNDAY, MARCH 17TH, 2024

Is there an elephant in the church at North, an issue that needs to be addressed that we are uncomfortable addressing?

Session spent an entire meeting discussing the answers to this question. They reviewed all the feedback we received and discussed it at length. While most of the responses were thoughtful and respectful, some of the feedback used phrasing or tone that could be seen as hurtful to certain individuals or groups and we determined that it would not be constructive to share those pieces of feedback with the whole congregation. At the same time, we thought withholding only a select few responses would give people the impression that we are cherry-picking the topics that we want to talk about, and we assure you that is not the case. For these reasons, we have decided not to share any feedback from the question "What is the Elephant in the Room?" What we can say is that it became apparent to us that we have more work to do in building an environment that is inclusive of all people.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK – SUNDAY, APRIL 7TH, 2024

Would you attend adult education?

- 12 Sundays at 11:15 am
- 5 Wednesdays at 6:00 pm
- 0 Another time (indicate day and time)
- 3 I want to be able to attend via Zoom

Comment (please specify):

- Zoom is accessible at any time.
- Life is busy. Coming to adult ed when I'm already going to be at church is helpful.
- Either one [Sundays or Wednesdays].
- I do think this has been missed and is a very good idea.
- I miss Kerygma
- Sometimes I work until 6pm so having a Zoom option attached to this would be great.
- These responses should be "select all that apply". I would be interested in both Wednesday and Sunday. I assume this would be the case, but I would really like James to lead the education, he is really good at it. I would not attend over zoom most likely.
- Not too likely to attend adult ed
- I would be interested in intermittent adult education opportunities.
- No

Theme:

- 10 Bible Study
- 6 Topical
- 2 Read Bible in a Year
- 0 Other

Comment (please specify):

- I miss our Kerygma class.
- I would like to study specific topics like inclusion, equity, and explore many diverse perspectives.
- Kerygma [was written on 2 cards].
- Any.
- These responses should be "select all that apply". I would much prefer both "Bible Study" and "Read Bible in Year" to "Topical".
- All of the Above
- Topical - Depends on the topic, leading it requires lot of prep & time and who would lead it?
- Focus on community and international topics that support others.

QUESTION OF THE WEEK – SUNDAY, APRIL 14th, 2024

What fellowship events have you enjoyed in the past and what ones would you like to see continued? Any other ideas you'd like to see?

<u>21</u>	Ice cream social
<u>25</u>	Festival of Cultures
<u>10</u>	Bingo
<u>13</u>	Cookie exchange/other advent activity
<u>19</u>	Hot Dish Cook-Off

Comments:

- This [all of the above] looks fine [to] me (with your good coffee & Splenda).
- All [of the above] and more.
- All fun! Could turn these activities into fundraisers.
- All the above. Outdoor worship.
- All continue.
- Softball. Bowling. Frisbee golf in our huge yard.
- Continue Festival of Cultures and Bingo. Years ago people donated items and we had a silent auction. Then we had a potluck supper afterwards, with everyone bringing a dish to share. It was always well-attended and was a good fundraiser besides. Sign up ahead for food items so we had an assortment of foods. Many crafters donated their creations to be auctioned.
- I would like to learn more about the different nationalities in our congregation – their arts and crafts – their lives.
- Festival of Cultures is essential!
- The “social hour” after church is poorly advertised.
- Hearing from missionaries about their experiences. Or/and hearing from those who have been in mission type work.
- I have enjoyed all of the fellowship events that have taken place and would like to see all of them continue.
- I like ice cream social, festival of cultures, agape meal. I also liked the outdoor worship and BBQ we did last year. I also love all the fellowship opportunities tied to Seasons.
- Festival of Cultures 5/5 stars, Hot dish cook-off 5/5 stars, Halloween party-Trunk or Treat 4/5 stars
- All of the above and would like to see them repeated
- Ice cream social, Festival of Cultures, Summer picnics
- Ice cream social, Festival of cultures, hot dish cook-off, coffee time after morning service, continue all
- I have participated in all activities (not every year) except Bingo. I would like to see the following opportunities: An organized church team for softball or volleyball and small group gatherings for a meal or appetizer held at member homes or at a restaurant
- I've enjoyed the Ice Cream Social, Festival of Cultures, Crafting nights, Cookie Exchange, Hotdish Cookoff, other meals/potlucks where people gather and just have a chance to enjoy each other's company. Even though we have coffee & refreshments in the classroom down the hall, I miss when it was in the Fellowship Hall where I think more people would make their way over.
- How about donating something for bidding on and have a little entertainment
- Omg... Anything, just let us know what is going on! Communicate, communicate, communicate!
- All of the above. Also, a breakfast meeting for all men. A luncheon for all women.
- I enjoyed all of these events, and hope to see them continued.
- Ice cream social, Festival of cultures Enjoyed both and would like to see them continue.

- Festival of Cultures, Ice Cream Social, cookie exchange, hot dish cook-off, Superbowl viewing party. I would like to see more community events with low barrier/cost to enter and lots of opportunities for everyone to mix and build community. I think it would be nice to do more festivals/fun activities with other churches, like New Life, Trinity, and Church of the Way.
- All of the above. Would like to see a young adults group.

Annual Meeting Agenda

(Times are approximate)

- **10:50:** Gather, get your group number, get refreshments, be seated at your table. Meet your session host. There will be one session host for two groups.
- **10:55:** Opening Prayer
- Purpose
- **11:00:** Presbytery consultants and co-annual meeting moderators Carol and Julie introduce themselves
- **11:05-11:13:** Each group has 8 minutes to discuss “what you noticed” from the answers to the “Question of the Week” and your perceptions. Write insights on sheet for session.
- **11:14-11:22:** Each group has 8 minutes to discuss “what is next” and write insights for session. -Sheets gathered. **Session will read all of these insights. Your insights will be an input into future session discussions and decisions.**
- **11:22:** Election of Officers
- Celebration of those who entered Life Triumphant in 2023
- **11:30-11:45:** Loss, grief, anxiety
- **11:45-11:50:** Based on your answers to the “Questions of the Week” and numerous other inputs session identified 3 options. Distribute three options sheet and describe each option. Mike G presents option sheet.
- **11:50-11:55:** Carol and Julie clarify each option.
- **11:55-11:57:** Pastor James shares current opportunities
- **11:57-12:10:** Clarify questions on these options. Please, no speaking for or against an option. Session wants you to be able to discuss these options in your group and then we will have a poll vote to see if an option emerges as the preferred choice of the congregation. If someone starts speaking for or against an option at this point you will be asked to stop and save those perspectives for your small group.
- **12:10-12:19:** Your discussion should include both your perspective and what you think is God’s will.
- **12:19-12:20:** Ballot poll on the option you believe God is calling us as a church to explore together.
- **12:20-12:22:** Tabulate votes, perhaps, stand, stretch, get refreshments, breathe deep
- **12:22:** Share results
- **12:22-12:35:**
 - *Split Vote* - If the vote is evenly split between two options; then invite volunteers to speak to an option, alternating between support for a particular option. Show of hands if anyone wants to change their vote. If a significant number then revote. Discuss what is next.
 - *Preferred Option* - If one option is preferred; Invite volunteers to share; why they choose the option with the most votes. Have volunteers share; the concerns they have with that option. Have volunteers share; what excites them about that option.
- **12:35:** We need to start concluding our meeting. Session will be in the sanctuary after the meeting to listen to anyone who wants to continue the conversation today. You are invited, encouraged welcome to call, or email, any session member or Pastor James with insights, questions or comments. Email is preferred as email can be forwarded to the entire session.
- **12:36:** At your table you have 4 minutes to share gratitude you have for North Presbyterian Church
- **12:40:** Popcorn Prayer of gratitude.
- Sing a song together

“Cracked Pots”

2 Corinthians 4:7, Isaiah 43:19 & Psalm 31

Pastor James York

April 28, 2024

Prayer for Understanding May the words of our mouth and meditations of our heart be pleasing to you gracious God our rock and redeemer. Amen

At next week’s Annual Meeting, we will have time for you to share your emotions, perceptions, and insights. It is my hope that my sharing will inspire your sharing.

I grew up attending the First Presbyterian Church of Abbotsford where I felt loved and that I belonged. Reverend Everhard was the pastor for all of my childhood and youth. He frequently shared that he was a cracked pot and shared the parable of the cracked pot about once a year.

There once lived a water carrier. Every morning, as soon as the sun rose, she walked from her home to collect water in two earthen pots that hung from a long pole that she carried across her shoulders. One pot was perfectly formed, the other, although the same shape and size as its counterpart, had a crack in its side. So, whenever they returned to the water carrier’s house it was only half full. For years, the water carrier repeated her journey to and from her house collecting water from the river. As the years passed by, the cracked pot created a story in its head about its level of worthiness and inability to properly perform the job for which it had been created. Eventually, the pain and shame that it felt about its own perceived imperfections, became too much for it to bear. So, one day as the water carrier knelt beside the river and began her usual task of filling the pots with water, the cracked pot found its voice and said: “I am so sorry. For years and years, I have watched you fill me with water and I can only imagine what a fruitless task it must be for you. As whenever we return home, I am only ever half full. While in comparison, the other pot is perfect, rarely does it lose a drop of water on our long walk back to our home, but me, I am far from perfect. This crack in my side, not only does it cause me so much hurt and shame, but it must also cause you to want to get rid of me. Surely, I am only making this long, arduous job that you do each day, that much more difficult? I can understand if you are thinking of getting rid of me and replacing me with another perfectly formed pot.” The water carrier listened to these words with both care and compassion. She knew about the crack, but did not see it as an imperfection, or as something that made it less worthy than the other pot that hung from her shoulder. Gently she turned to the pot and said, “On our return walk home, I want you to look up and to the side of you. For too long, it would seem you have been looking down, comparing yourself to others and not noticing how you and the crack that you have in your side has brought untold beauty into my life.” Puzzled, the cracked pot wondered what on-earth her words meant. She seemed to be suggesting that its story of lack, unworthiness and shame, was in some way faulty. As to how this could be, it could not comprehend. However, the cracked pot trusted the water carrier. It occurred to it that in all the time that it had journeyed with her, she had never said a harsh word, never scorned or ridiculed it, but had always shown a sense of gratefulness and care when filling it with water. So, on the return journey it heeded the water carrier’s words. It looked up and it looked out. In its former depressed state, it had not noticed that along the path that they travelled there was a dazzling array of beauty, color, and life. The water carrier in her wisdom, knowing of the crack in the pot’s side, had sprinkled seeds along the path. These seeds were duly watered every day as a result of the crack in the pot’s side and the path that had once been barren and devoid of life was now resplendent with an array of beautiful wildflowers. Now, the cracked pot understood. Now the cracked pot began to see itself in a new light.

The apostle Paul wrote: **2 Corinthians 4:7 “We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.”**

The parable of the cracked pot resonates with me. I have an abundance of flaws. My dyslexia means I am slower than average to read, write, speak, and process communication. I have always been terrified of public speaking. I feel awkward around people. I often think of what I should have said hours after a conversation. My first reaction to any new situation is no, flee, go back to the familiar. I connect with God through nature and struggle in my understanding of the many other ways God connects with people. My analytical mind sometimes diminishes my ability to enjoy mystery. I could go on naming many other flaws. And yet God often waters others through my flaws.

The summer before I attended UW-River Falls, Reverend Everhard met with me. He encouraged me to become a pastor. I politely listened as I thought there is no way I will ever be a pastor with all my flaws. He talked about being a cracked pot. To always remember that as a person, and as a church, we are all cracked pots with plenty of flaws. And God’s living water flows through us creating beauty. He explained that the church will likely continue to decline in numbers. What is important is not how many participate, how much water one can carry, rather helping a person experience God’s grace so they feel that God loves them and that they belong to God’s family.

Three years later, Reverend Everhard retired. Due to low attendance, and no leaders, the church was not going to offer youth ministry. I remembered how I felt loved and that I belonged at youth fellowship. So, I thought, I am a cracked pot. I have no training, no experience facilitating youth ministry, and plenty of flaws. And God's grace will flow through my flaws, so I drove two hours each way to facilitate youth ministry. My hope was for the youth to experience God's grace, that they are loved and belong. Peak attendance was three. Sometimes I was the only one. And I sensed that God loved through me.

I have had three profound, mystical, insightful experiences in my life. Times when suddenly a surge of energy flowed through my body. All my senses heightened giving me a feeling of intense connection to God, people, and the cosmos. My body tingled. I felt light. In an instant, volumes of insights were perceived although I am not able to put those insights adequately in words.

The first of these experiences happened on the Deep Freeze Retreat at the Wilderness Fellowship in Frederic, Wisconsin where I was a volunteer youth leader. I had a compelling experience of God's grace. I perceived that God wanted me to become a pastor, so God could love through me to help others experience God's grace. I protested. I am a cracked pot. God assured me that God would work through my flaws.

In seminary, I learned again that the church is a cracked pot. In terms of numbers, the crack is getting deeper and wider. Church attendance peaked in the 50s. We were frequently told that all of us will serve a church of declining attendance and resources.

Denial about declining attendance began in 2000. God abundantly blessed the First Presbyterian Church of Maumee where I served as Associate Pastor with a focus on youth ministry. During those five years youth ministry flourished. And I had the honor of serving with others facilitating growing presbytery youth events and growing ecumenical youth events. This growth was a remarkable exception to the overall trend.

Denial continued when I began serving here in 2005 as we grew in attendance for several years. I realize growth is never about me, rather God blessing through the we of the church. During these years, I forgot some of the insights of the cracked pot. The focus should not be on how much water I can carry, how many people attend, a balanced budget, rather is someone being watered through me.

My flaws are unique. There are plenty of people that will not experience God through me and that is fine for God is watering them through other people and other ways. If one person is being watered through me, then ministry is happening.

Around 2012, the accelerating decline of church participation in the United States, neighboring churches, and North drove me to prayer, research, listening to session, and serving with you to launch a series of new ministries. My denial took the form of working harder.

For 29 consecutive years, I facilitated some type of Deep Freeze Retreat with youth. Twenty-one of those years was at the Wilderness Fellowship. In 2019, everyone and everything was packed in the vehicles. We were ready to leave the Wilderness Fellowship. I had the overwhelming sense I forgot something. I went back to the cabin. As I put my hand on the doorknob, I had my second, profound, mystical, and insightful experience. In an instant, I saw all the people who ever attended a retreat. Then, I perceived this was the last time I would enter this space. This was the last Deep Freeze Retreat which puzzled me for I reserved the cabin for next year when I checked out. I opened the door seeing the light shining through the window illuminating the spot where I had my first experience with the message of grace. Suddenly, I was emotionally numb from feeling many emotions intensely at once. Gratitude for all the people who helped me experience God's grace. Honor for all the people I have been able to serve. Joy that God gave them an experience of grace through me. Wonder in the majesty of the cosmos. Delight in the myriad of ways God loves. The veil of denial was lifted. Sadness that I would not return to this place. Grief for the temporary loss of 171 people who I have had the honor of celebrating their resurrection. Nostalgia for the church past. Anxiety about the church future. Sorrow for the people who no longer feel that church is their family. Frustration with my struggle to communicate how deeply I care for people. Shame that I am not able to help the church grow in numbers. Discouraged that no one has a way that will grow the institutional church. Embarrassed that a desire for more participants and a balanced budget, distracts me from the joy of serving someone. Bewilderment as I saw people from throughout my life. Confusion as to what to do next. Entangled as to who to be. Grief over the many ministries that have already died. Joyful excitement in resurrection ministries that have already emerged. Glad anticipation of the coming resurrection church. And a multitude of other emotions. With my denial dispersed I accepted that the institutional church as I know it, is dying and will cease to exist as I have experienced it. Thankfully I believe every death gives rise to resurrection. The institutional church as I know it will die. A resurrected church will emerge.

The prophet Isaiah declares God's message to us. **Isaiah 43:19 "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"**

Later that year, Leslie, Spencer, Abigail and I used the money we inherited from her parents to go on a trip to Hawaii. It was a spectacular trip. On the plane home, I had the third profound, mystical, and insightful experience. The

message was remember the love, joy, peace, and wonder of this trip. Remember for you are about to go through a season of numerous losses and intense grief. Remember as you endure pain. Remember as you row through storms. Remember.

As I stood to debark the plane, I experienced inflammation and intense joint pain which intensified into chronic pain. Two major ways through which I experience God walking and biking at times was unbearable. Pain interrupted my sleep. Sleeplessness and pain accentuated my flaws. My grief came in overwhelming waves as I experienced numerous losses. When I entered church, I became numb, feeling numerous intense emotions. Grateful joy for all the wonderful loving service that has happened here. Grief for all the people that are no longer here. I lamented where they sat. Mourned how they loved. I had my first panic attack as I pondered the future of the church. I went through a season when it took all my energy just to get out of bed and do the essentials. Intense shame haunted me despite being told in numerous ways, from numerous sources, that the decline of participation in the institutional church as I know it, is inevitable. I believed that somehow, I was to blame for the decline in participation. My counselor told me it is not enough to know, it is not my fault. I need to believe, it is not my fault. Pain and a series of losses magnified my grief.

The psalmist sings: **Psalm 31: Select phrases “I will be glad and rejoice in your unfailing love, for you have seen my troubles and you care about the anguish of my soul. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am in distress. Tears blur my eyes. My body and soul are withering away. I am dying from grief; my years are shortened by sadness. Sin has drained my strength; I am wasting away from within. I am scorned by all my enemies and despised by my neighbors—even my friends are afraid to come near me. I am ignored as if I were dead, as if I were a broken pot. I have heard the many rumors about me and I am surrounded by terror. In your unfailing love, rescue me. Praise the Lord, for God has shown me the wonders of God’s unfailing love. So be strong and courageous, all you who put your hope in the Lord!”**

In 2023, I made numerous changes in numerous aspects of my life that makes my physical pain manageable and is making whole my life. Most nights, I am able to sleep again. An exception was when I pondered what we should do at the Annual Meeting. I perceived. Let it go. It is God’s church. Let it go. The church that inspired me is not the church that will inspire people in the future. Let it go. God’s grace will touch everyone in new ways. Let it come. A resurrected church is coming. Let it come. The message of the cracked pot returned. Let go of trying to carry all the water. Be a cracked vessel. Let go of trying to mend my flaws. I need to let God’s grace flow through me to water another. Even if I am able to help only one person experience God’s grace, then I am a good servant.

I am grateful for the blessings of the church past. I am excited about the church future for I believe God is constantly guiding us to ever-expanding love. I am striving to live in the present, savoring the honor of serving with you, savoring blessings and sharing blessings.

Pastor, historian, researcher and consultant Gil Rendle wrote: “There is no going back because the “back” that is remembered does not exist anymore. Our current reality is that we are not in a turnaround situation. Leaders cannot take us back to a more comfortable time when the church was established at the heart of the culture as a bedrock, trusted institution. We have steadily lost participants since 1965. Our members have steadily gotten older. Organized religion attracts a continuously shrinking percentage of each successive generation. Ours is not a turnaround situation and we have little that we can return to. Faced with the data about their institutional decline the church began a deep investment in the 1970’s in ways to renew, redevelop or transform congregations with the assumption that if congregations got more effective, they could reclaim the strength of their remembered past. But it will not reclaim the past. Such current work on vitality will only provide a new base from which vital congregations will learn how they need to continue to change in order to live in the culture that now is and not how to recapture a culture that once was. The ending of a time of growth is a time of confusion.” End quote.

Gil invites church members, and pastors, to let go of their shame over the decline of the institutional church. Be grateful for a wonderful season. Grieve its passing. Be open to the resurrection church that will emerge. The church has gone through death and resurrection numerous times. Every 500 years, the church goes through a devastating death and a radically different resurrection. We are currently at that point in history.

I am aware that my emotions and experiences color everything. After much anxiety, grieving, processing, reflecting, praying, I am at the point that whichever of the three options we choose at the Annual Meeting I will continue to serve, striving to be a cracked pot, to carry some of God’s grace and share some of God’s grace so people feel loved and that they belong. Maybe God is calling us to move beyond churches and religions to a new way of being, one beloved worldwide family where all belong and all are loved. As Red Green says. “Remember, I am pulling for you. We are all in this together.” Since I do not know the future and speculation over the future church is all over the place, I will strive to be a cracked pot today, gratefully savoring the living water of blessings God continually pours into me and blessing others by freely letting the living water flow through me to bless others. No matter what, we are all loved by God, we all belong to God and will be loved forever. Amen