

Westminster Presbyterian Church

**Fort Collins,
Colorado**

2013 Mission Study

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Preface

As part of the process for preparing to initiate a formal pastor search, Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) conducted a Mission Study examining its past, present, and future in terms of who Westminster Presbyterian Church is and what God has called it to be and to do.

The members of the Mission Study Team, with guidance from interim Pastor Ken Gorman, are:

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The Mission Study team researched church history, researched area demographics, and reviewed results from home meetings led by church elders and deacons in the fall of 2012, soliciting feedback from approximately 50 members of the congregation on their views of the church and focus/improvements for the future. Building on this, the Mission Study team conducted a Mission Study Survey of the current congregation with nearly 100 people participating. Finally, the team has prayed for God's guidance throughout the process.

In this Mission Study report, answers are provided to the following questions for Westminster Presbyterian Church:

- 1) Who is Westminster Presbyterian Church?
- 2) What is the context of Westminster Presbyterian Church?
- 3) How is Westminster Presbyterian Church connected to the community?
- 4) What is Westminster Presbyterian Church called to be and to do?

Pending approval, the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC) will use the accompanying study to help write the Church Information Form (CIF) and to assist prospective pastors in learning about Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Who Is Westminster Presbyterian Church?

A Brief History – Fifty Years and Counting

In the Beginning

In 1962, in anticipation of growth in southwest Fort Collins, Boulder Presbytery and First Presbyterian Church called for a new church to be formed. This was carried out under the inspiration of Dr. William Hage, who gave a series of sermons from which were distilled by common assent the “founding principles” that guided the early members of Westminster Presbyterian Church. It was felt that these guidelines should lead to the development of an active, committed, cohesive, caring, tithing, mission-oriented church that serves and prays for individuals, families, local neighborhoods, the community, and the world. An interested group of First Presbyterian Church members met as a “Missionary group” on October 22, 1962 with the National Mission committee of the Colorado Synod, whose chairman was the Reverend Allan H. Swan of Boulder. The church organizing committee consisted of Mr. and Mrs. E.E. Mitchell, Dr. and Mrs. Edward R. Ames, Dr. and Mrs. Harry V. Unfug, and Dr. and Mrs. William Bussey. It rapidly became the unanimous feeling of this group that Reverend Allan Swan should be called as first pastor, and he officially received the call on December 6, 1962. The new church development fund was used to pay his first year’s salary, and the congregation assumed one-third the next year and two-thirds the following year.

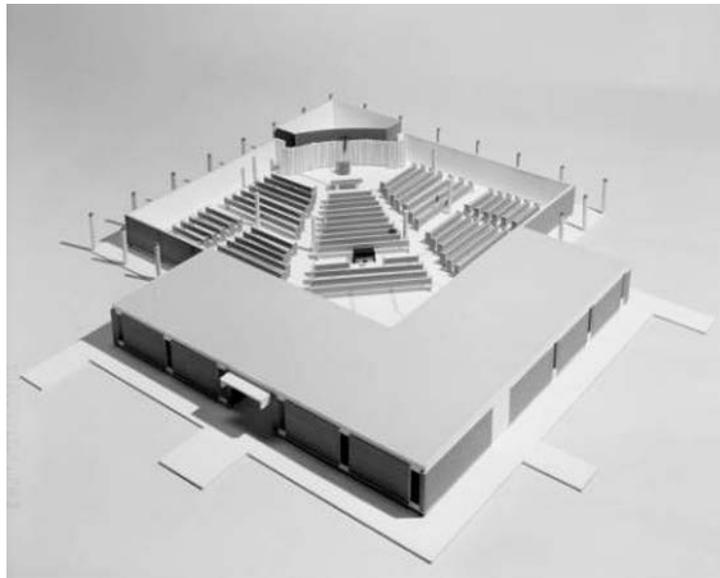
One hundred thirty-six people, mostly Presbyterians, chose to join, forming the new congregation. Reverend Alan Swan initially became the moderator and then the first pastor. On March 3, 1963 Westminster Presbyterian Church was officially organized as a congregation of the United Presbyterian Church, USA. Since there were not yet sufficient funds for a building, the new congregation met for the next three years at Moore Elementary school.

The early Session organized itself into committees focused on Christian Education, Evangelism, Stewardship, and Worship; variations of this model have been used ever since.

Building

After having met in the elementary school for a few months, a building committee was formed of William Forkner, William Bussey, Louis Swift, Juanity O'Zea, Harriett Napiecinske, and Orville Riddle. They studied the needs of the church, held open meetings on all aspects of worship and church life, and on March 4, 1964 submitted a report to the congregation detailing the requirements of the proposed new building.

A Denver-based architecture firm, Baume and Polivnick, designed the building that would be the future home of Westminster Presbyterian Church. The firm, which is no longer in business, designed a number of churches, educational buildings, homes and other buildings throughout Colorado, and tended to specialize in modernist design. The original design of the church is shown here as a model reproduction, and includes exterior walls and an interior view with pews, chancel, and lectern:



Falcon Contractors broke ground in August of 1964 on land that had been a gift to the church, and the building was rapidly and efficiently built at a remarkably low cost of \$84,000. A special feature was the parabolic, laminated beams in the sanctuary. The dedication of the new building was held on Sunday, March 27, 1966.

The interesting design of Westminster Presbyterian Church has to do with the idea that the sanctuary should be a circular, tent-style design rather than a linear formation. "The agitator," as some have called the steeple over the sanctuary, along with the circular design, are the result of the Reverend Alan Swan's idea that the worship area should resemble the meetings of the early church, which were held in tents, and around campfires.

On June 9, 1985, the final mortgage payment was made on the building, and the church held a “Burn Something” celebration in honor of that happy occasion. Yard sales were held for several years after that to fund improvements to the sanctuary.

As the church grew over the years, more space was needed. The Christian Education wing was added in 1978 to expand Sunday school and Christian education opportunities for children and adults. It also included the pastor’s office and restrooms. This was a major addition, adding significantly more space to the existing building.

Agape Hall, a large fellowship space, was added in 2005. This provided the church with a kitchen, a large fellowship area for hosting events and meals, and an extra storage room. Agape Hall has enabled the church to host Presbytery events, regional Presbyterian Women events, Church Women United, congregation meals and events, large meetings, and more.

The Memorial Garden was added in 2011, and is a peaceful and beautiful addition to the church property. It measures 30 feet by 40 feet, and includes plants that have been selected to provide beauty and meaning in all seasons. It is a sacred ground for holding memories and ashes. Urns may be placed in wall niches or ashes may be scattered in the garden.

Others in the community have also benefitted from use of Westminster Presbyterian Church space. For example, from 1976 to 1985, Westminster Presbyterian Church facilities were used to host the Fort Collins Cooperative Preschool. A contract renewal in 1981 set the rent at \$165 per month with the session noting that the church was subsidizing the preschool for a considerable amount at that rental rate. The agreement with the preschool was terminated when a state review of the use of the church property determined that, in order for WPC to maintain non-profit tax exempt status, the preschool would have to be under the jurisdiction of the session and would have to be a Christian-based entity using a Christian curriculum.

Many other organizations and groups have enjoyed use of the space in Westminster Presbyterian Church throughout the years, including Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts (1996-present), Alcoholics Anonymous, Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS), Japanese Bible Fellowship, American Association of University Women (AAUW), Save our Stadium, CSU Women’s Association, Narcotics Anonymous, a Waldorf school, yoga groups, political party caucuses, and others.

Pastors

Westminster Presbyterian Church has had four pastors and four interim pastors over its fifty-year history. The pastors were: Reverend Alan Swan (1963-1970), Reverend Philip Dunford (1971-1978), Reverend Roland McDonald (1978-1996), and Reverend Richard Fennig (1997-2013). The interim pastors were: Reverend Bob Geller, Reverend Judy Minear Wrought, Reverend Roe Johnston, and Reverend Ken Gorman. Reverend Phil Dunford also traded places for six months, from April to September in 1975, with Reverend Bruce Gentle from Australia, who led Westminster Presbyterian Church during that time. While Reverend Dunford was in Australia, Reverend Bob Geller was the appointed moderator of the WPC Session.

The church has also been blessed with pastoral aid from Parish Associate Reverend Ruth Billington, who filled in for Pastor Rich when he was on sabbatical. She provided guidance to the deacons, and brought some new ideas to Westminster, including the Prayer Shawl Ministry, Epiphany Star Service, and Care Note Ministry. Westminster Presbyterian Church has also been fortunate to benefit from the services and spiritual guidance of the Reverend Steve Geckeler, who filled in at the pulpit and helped with Grand Sweep Bible studies. The Reverend Bob Geller, who acted as an interim pastor, is still with the church and is a great part of both the past and present of the church.

Church Membership

Membership at Westminster Presbyterian Church grew very quickly in the early years, with new members joining nearly every month. Growth was so dramatic at that time, a group was formed to look at the future of the church and to plan infrastructure for up to 800 members. However, active membership peaked at 486 members in 1973. Membership declined some in the late 1970's, held steady in the 1980's and early 1990's - ranging from 250 to 300 members, then began to decline again from the late 1990's through the present. Currently, WPC has 183 members, along with numerous "friends of the church" who participate actively, but are not members.

Mission

Westminster Presbyterian Church has always been a mission-oriented church, and has given freely to the community, as well as to those in foreign countries. The early vision was to give 50% of the church budget to mission. Although the church could not maintain this lofty goal, it has continued to keep its mission focus, and to be dedicated to helping others in need.

The focus of the church's mission work has varied and evolved over time. For example, in 1973, benevolent programs included: a fresh air program, a community work day, training in advocacy, correspondence with Chinle Navajo Mission in Arizona, projects to aid migrants, a grant to the Golden Gloves Program, a grant for Student Health Center Counseling through United Campus Ministry (UCM), friends of children of Vietnam, special Christmas help to many families and helping with Christmas stockings for the Salvation Army. In 1990, a Westminster

Presbyterian Church member initiated the first annual CROP Hunger Walk in Fort Collins. This fundraiser to address hunger locally and globally has continued ever since. Westminster participates in the CROP Walk annually, and has often given the most of all the churches involved (and won the Sacred Sneaker award). In 1994, giving to the Rwanda Relief Fund was important to the church. More recently, Pasta in the Rockies has been a great fundraiser for Habitat for Humanity, thanks to committed leadership and hard-working volunteers.

On an ongoing basis, Westminster Presbyterian Church has been active in Habitat for Humanity PresBuild homes, and currently participates in buying shares for homes being built in Guatemala. The church has supported United Campus Ministries (now called the Geller Center) for decades. And the youth group has cooked and served meals at the Catholic Charities Mission for nearly ten years.

Funding for Mission work comes from a variety of sources. The annual Mission Auction with pancake breakfast is a fundraiser that has been very successful and has a twenty-four-year history. At the last Mission auction, Westminster Presbyterian Church raised over \$6,000, which came from the congregation through the purchase of donated gifts.

An equally important source of mission funding comes from the Bethel Fund. This special fund was endowed to WPC in 2008 from Bethel Presbyterian Church in Waterloo, Iowa, and was designated specifically for the purposes of giving. The principal is never touched, and half of the earnings on the principal remain in the fund to continue its growth, while the other half of the earnings are given by the WPC Mission Team to a worthy, non-local mission project.

Additional sources of funding have been the Grocery Certificate program, which has been in place for many years, and the recent Scrip Card program. Some of the proceeds from both programs are donated to the Food Bank for Larimer County.

In 2012, Westminster Presbyterian Church celebrated the donating of a record total of nearly \$75,000 for mission - an impressive accomplishment for a church with an annual budget of \$250,000.

Westminster Presbyterian Church has also sent mission teams to various places in the U.S.A. as well as to foreign lands. Some recent mission trips and projects include:

- A mission trip to Nepal in 1995.
- Several trips to Joplin and New Orleans to help rebuild after hurricanes from 2005 through 2011.
- A mission project to help build a school and purchase computers for that school in Tortuguero, Costa Rica in 2009.
- A trip to build wells in Malawi, Africa in 2010.
- A trip to Haiti to help a special-need orphanage in 2011. The Sunday school classes

raised money to purchase a swing set and outdoor playground equipment for the orphanage.

- A mission trip to Africa through Kenya Medical Mission to help with health and medical challenges there in 2012.

Additionally, several members have served in the Peace Corps over the years.

Worship and Music

The church has experimented with different adaptations of traditional and contemporary services over the years. Westminster Presbyterian Church has had two services at times and has also had only one service on Sundays at other times. Typically, there has been just one service on Sundays during the summers, regardless of whether there were one or two services on school-year Sundays. In 2011, the church decided to go to one service again, but added a popular and fulfilling “Coffee with the Pastor” discussion session following each service. 2011 became the “Year of the Grand Sweep,” which was an ambitious pledge by over 60 church members to read the entire Bible over the course of the year. The pastor’s sermons were based on the week’s Grand Sweep readings, and groups met after church for related discussions, led primarily by Reverend Ruth Billington and Reverend Steve Geckeler.

The church worship service has typically included scripture readings and a sermon that is biblically-based and encourages continuing God’s work in the world today. It has also included traditional and contemporary hymns, children’s time (currently called “Time with the Younger Church”), and Communion on the first Sunday of each month for all who feel called to the Lord’s Table.

Other Events and Programs

Westminster Presbyterian Church offers Vacation Bible School (VBS) every summer, which has typically been a great success. In 2013, VBS children went on several local trips to learn about the needs of others who are less fortunate and who need compassion from those who can help. A trip to the Food Bank for Larimer County was the highlight of the summer’s VBS field trips. Also, the children raised over \$300, which was used to purchase flocks of chicks from Heifer International. Children from the church and from the community participate together.

In addition to the weekly worship services, Westminster Presbyterian Church has typically had a number of special services, gatherings, and music events. The church currently hosts the following special events each year:

- Ash Wednesday Service
- Maundy Thursday Service
- Easter Cantata presented by the Chancel choir

- Easter Sunday service with Easter Brunch following
- Thanksgiving Dinner
- Christmas Cantata presented by the Chancel choir
- Children's Christmas Pageant
- Christmas Brunch
- Christmas Eve Candlelight Services

Christian Education

Westminster Presbyterian Church has had Christian education programs for both children and adults from its inception. Sunday school for all ages, Vacation Bible School during the summers, youth groups, adult Bible study groups, and periodic special events such as guest speakers have provided ongoing enrichment for members and friends of the church.

The church began with the participation of many families, and by 1973, there was an active Junior High youth group that had its own study/recreation times on Sunday mornings and Monday evenings. The Senior High youth group met on Sunday evenings for a time and then changed to Monday evening gatherings. By 1974, there was a formal commitment to keep these youth groups going on a continuing basis. There was also an active young adult group (college age) that met for their own study time on Sunday mornings, with typical attendance ranging from 75 to 100.

Westminster still provides a variety of Christian education opportunities today. The youth group typically meets on Sunday evenings, serving at Catholic Charities Mission soup kitchen on the first Sunday of the month. Recent young adult programs have been experimental, as the church works to bring more young adults back into the church. Sunday school, VBS, and Bible study groups, along with "Coffee with the Pastor" discussions after the Sunday service, continue to provide valuable Christian education opportunities.

Groups

There have typically been a variety of groups at Westminster Presbyterian Church to support different ages, genders, and interests. At one point in Westminster church history, a Mariners group for young, married couples, met. There have been several book groups led by various church members. And there have been men's and women's groups throughout the church's history. Westminster currently has a Men's Breakfast club, Golden Girls, Silver Gems, Westminster Presbyterian Women, and Women's Faith Connection. For a number of years, women in the church were invited to participate in retreats at Highlands Presbyterian Camp. These were particularly special times for the women who went. Westminster members have also participated in various recreational sports, including volleyball, softball, golfing for charity, snowshoeing, hiking, and skiing.

Outreach

Westminster has had an evangelism/outreach team with representation on Session since the church began. By 1973, the church motto was “We are Christ’s Church in this place and time; our responsibility is to witness.”

Westminster’s outreach today is less evangelical and more service-oriented and mission-oriented. The current motto is “the small church with the big heart.” One gift Westminster Presbyterian Church gave to the people of Fort Collins for several years recently was a Christmas *Walk Through Bethlehem*, which welcomed nearly 10,000 visitors. This event portrayed Bethlehem as it may have looked during the time of Jesus’ birth. Congregants were arrayed in realistic costumes, interactive marketplace activities were available all along the way, and live animals added to the realistic and much-enjoyed tradition.

Westminster also hosted Community Forums during 2007 and 2008, bringing in speakers to discuss important current issues.

Other recent outreach efforts have included Vacation Bible School sessions offered to the community each summer, hosting Pasta in the Rockies and inviting the community to enjoy dinner and support Habitat for Humanity, helping build houses through PresBuild, and partnering with other organizations to benefit the community.

Westminster Presbyterian Church Today

In the fall of 2012, Westminster Presbyterian Church had a series of in-home meetings, each headed by a Deacon and an Elder, where members were encouraged to share their visions for the future of the church. Westminster Presbyterian Church currently has 183 members and the average attendance in 2012 was 136.

Westminster Presbyterian Church is now in an interim stage under the capable leadership of the Reverend Ken Gorman. The church is examining its past, present, and future potential, as it works through God’s plan and the calling of the next minister to share a passion for all that Westminster Presbyterian Church is and all that it can be.

Chronology

A chronological listing of some of the important events in the history of Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) follows:

- 1962:** The need for a new Presbyterian church in southwest Fort Collins was recognized and work to that end began.
- 1963:** On March 3rd, Westminster Presbyterian Church was officially organized within the UPCUSA, meeting at Moore school under the leadership of Pastor Alan Swan.
- 1963-1970:** Reverend Alan Swan led WPC as pastor.
- 1964:** In March, a new building was proposed and designed. Ground was broken in August.
- 1966:** In March, the new building was complete and dedicated.
- 1971-1978:** Reverend Philip Dunford led WPC as pastor.
- 1973:** The church library was begun, the first paid nursery attendant was hired, and a new church sign was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Rohland Reider.
- 1973-1974:** Strong focus on youth groups, team teaching, college-age adults, and ongoing continuity of the youth programs.
- 1975:** From April 1 through September 22, Westminster Presbyterian participated in a pastoral exchange. Rev. Phil Dunford served a church in Australia, while its pastor, Rev. Bruce Gentle, came to Fort Collins to serve at WPC.
- 1976-1985:** The Fort Collins Cooperative Pre-school operated at Westminster Presbyterian Church.
- 1978:** The Christian Education wing of the building was added.
- 1978-1996:** Reverend Roland McDonald led WPC as pastor.
- 1985:** The final mortgage payment on the building was submitted, and the church community celebrated.

- 1989:** Westminster Mission Auctions began.
- 1989:** The women's group at WPC changed its name from United Presbyterian Women to Westminster Presbyterian Women. This name change was a result of the national merger creating the Presbyterian Church USA.
- 1990:** The annual CROP Hunger Walk began in Fort Collins, with WPC as one of its biggest participants.
- 1994:** Papers were signed to make WPC a nonprofit corporation under the Articles of Incorporation of a Colorado Nonprofit Corporation.
- 1997-2013:** Reverend Rich Fennig led WPC as pastor.
- 2002:** Pasta in the Rockies dinners benefitting Habitat for Humanity were started by the WPC Bridge Club.
- 2005:** The Agape fellowship hall was added to the building.
- 2010:** In April, the Women's Faith Connection was established to provide additional connecting and religious study opportunities for WPC women.
- 2011:** The Memorial Garden was established.
Also, the congregation did a "Grand Sweep" through the Bible together in one year.

Mission Statement

Westminster Presbyterian Church is committed to its mission, approved by Session in 2007:

To be an inclusive community of faith, called by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate God's love in the world.

Additional detail is provided online about the “flavor” of Westminster Presbyterian Church for those looking for a compatible faith family in Fort Collins. This “Flavor of the Church” statement, included below, reflects the current culture of Westminster Presbyterian Church as of 2013.

Flavor of the Church

Every church has its own unique character, or “flavor.” Some congregations are very traditional, while others are more informal in how they express their beliefs. Some may see themselves as very conservative in theology, while others may be more moderate or even progressive. For those who may be “church shopping,” it is a good idea to get a sense of the “flavor” of a particular church before making a commitment. You may be more comfortable in a congregation that shares, in a general way, your values, world view and theology.

At Westminster, we often use words like “open,” or “inclusive,” to describe ourselves. We also affirm that, wherever you might be in your spiritual/Christian quest, you are welcome to join with us in the journey of life and faith.

Worship

Our worship experience tends to be informal - we strive not so much for perfection in performance, but rather coming together to celebrate and give thanks to God. We offer a wide variety of music, from contemporary to traditional. The preaching is relevant and engaging, and at times uses drama and other art forms to convey the message. We practice an open communion table at Westminster, and all are invited to partake, regardless of religious connection or spiritual background.

The Bible

At Westminster Church, we see the Bible as one of the foundations of our faith. The Sunday sermons are biblically based, and we offer opportunities for more in-depth Bible studies. We view the Bible not as inerrant, but as the Word of God written by humans who were inspired by God. As such, the Bible is not a textbook on history, geology, or science, and we see no conflict between science and faith because they ask different questions about life. The Bible is the story of God's interaction with human beings in the journey of faith.

Jesus

The Bible says that Jesus is the “son of the living God.” He is the center of our faith. He is God’s revelation to us “in the flesh,” and came to call us to true faith in God. He died at the hands of the religious and political authorities, in large part because he spoke out on behalf of the poor and outcast. The bottom line is that as we struggle to know Jesus in our lives, we respect one another, and value the diversity of opinion and experience that is evidenced in our unique spiritual journeys.

Salvation

Most Christians believe in an afterlife, and take great hope in that belief. Hope for the future is what gives us strength for living today. But Jesus tells the disciples not to worry so much about the future, but to live faithfully *today*. So we trust God for what lies ahead. Salvation means more than getting to heaven when we die. Salvation, a word meaning wholeness and health, starts right here, right now, in this life. It is spiritual health and wholeness that enable us to reach out to the world around us with the love of Jesus.

Resurrection

We affirm that God raised Jesus from the dead, and he lives in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. But in the faith journey we sometimes struggle with understanding what that means. We believe that Jesus came to show us what true love is, and what our calling is. He was crucified but not even the power of the state could conquer love, so the resurrection stands as a symbol of that miraculous power of love in our world. Some in our fellowship would affirm a physical, miraculous rising, while others would say it is symbolic, and metaphorical of the new life made available to us in Jesus.

Inclusiveness

We believe the church ought to be welcoming to persons of any race, creed, age, nationality or sexual orientation. All should be permitted to participate fully in the life of the church. The Presbyterian Church (USA) recently adopted ordination standards that open the door for all gays and lesbians to be considered for ordination as elders, deacons, or ministers. The leadership at Westminster supports this change.

Other religions

We believe that other religions should be approached with openness and respect. We further affirm that God’s spirit can be found in other religions. We might say that the “Christ spirit,” the spirit of love and new life that Jesus embodied, may well be a part of other faiths even though it might not go by that name. We also recognize there are many in our world who consider themselves to be “spiritual” but not “religious,” and we would welcome them to join us in our faith journey.

Strengths

The strongest defining characteristics identified for Westminster Presbyterian Church are: friendly, welcoming, caring, inclusive, progressive, and non-judgmental. The church's focus on mission work, locally and worldwide, is a major defining strength. Worship and music are also important, meaningful aspects of church life at Westminster. And smaller groups within the church have added a great deal of enrichment for the participants.

Church Character

Westminster Presbyterian Church has a strong sense of community, and feels God's call to embrace all people as God's children, including those in challenging circumstances or marginalized by society. Every individual is welcome, regardless of where he or she is in his or her personal faith journey. As a church, Westminster hopes to create broader awareness in the community that this church is a caring and safe place for all who would like to come and journey in community.

Mission

The church has felt called, throughout its 50-year history, to commit significant funds and efforts toward mission work locally and world-wide. Funding for mission work comes primarily from the annual church Mission Auction along with the associated money-making meal (currently a pancake breakfast) and bake/craft sale, the Bethel Fund, and grocery certificate / scrip card sales.

Mission efforts and contributions include the following:

- Members of Westminster Presbyterian Church regularly and enthusiastically participate in the annual CROP Hunger Walk, which benefits the hungry, locally and worldwide.
- Westminster supports Habitat for Humanity in a variety of ways. Westminster is a charter member of the Fort Collins "Building on Faith Committee," contributes annually to the funding of the project, and sponsors a house-build workday of volunteers. Westminster Presbyterian Church is also connected to Habitat International, and has provided financial support for homes being built in Guatemala (currently on the ninth house). The church has been active in Habitat for Humanity PresBuild homes for many years. Pasta in the Rockies was started about 10 years ago, and has been a great annual fundraiser for Habitat for Humanity.
- The youth group has cooked and served meals at the Catholic Charities Mission for nearly ten years.
- The church sells several different varieties of coffee through the Equal Exchange / Fair Trade Coffee program sponsored by the Presbyterian Coffee Project. For each pound of

coffee purchased, Equal Exchange makes a contribution to the Presbyterian "Small Farmers Fund" for projects supporting small farmers and their families.

- Westminster contributes funds and labor to Highlands Presbyterian Camp so kids of all ages, regardless of economic situation, can participate.
- Westminster participates in Blanket Sunday to benefit those around the world suffering from homelessness and/or disasters, and donated over 200 blankets last year.
- Westminster Presbyterian Women (WPW) is quite active in mission giving. WPW does Prayer Shawl Ministry, providing prayer-shawl comfort to those who are grieving or struggling; they conduct a layette drive each year to help Maternity Assistance of Larimer County support local, low-income moms with new babies; and they contribute health kits and blankets to Church World Service to help those in need all over the world. Historically, WPW has raised funds through dues and donations from serving at receptions, and has given nearly all of it to mission projects. WPW has most recently provided financial support to: the Food Bank for Larimer County, Highlands Presbyterian Camp, St. Joseph's Indian School in Chamberlain-South Dakota, Doctors without Borders, a Joplin rebuilding mission trip, a Malawi mission trip to build wells, the Geller Center for Spiritual Development (formerly United Campus Ministry), Crossroads Safehouse for battered women and children, and Salud Family Clinic for low-income families. WPW has contributed annually to the national Presbyterian Women's Birthday Offering in the spring and the Thank Offering in the fall. WPW has also provided holiday grocery gift cards to members of the congregation who are struggling financially.
- The church collects Christmas gifts annually for children and mothers at Crossroads Safehouse for battered women.
- Recent Bethel Funds have supported building water wells in Africa through Marion Medical Mission, medical services in Africa through Bonyo's Kenya Mission, and support for orphans at Kimmy's House in Haiti.
- The church also regularly provides financial and material donations to the Food Bank for Larimer County, Habitat for Humanity, the Geller Center, the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope, and many more worthy organizations. And Westminster contributes annually to the following Presbyterian Mission programs: One Great Hour of Sharing, divided among Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, Self-Development of People, and the Presbyterian Hunger Program; the Christmas Joy Offering, which supports racial ethnic schools and assistance programs of the Board of Pensions; and the Peacemaking Offering to support peace education and peacemaking efforts throughout the denomination.

Worship and Music

Worship through scripture, prayer, insightful sermons, a wide variety of music, humor, and creativity provides a positive, inspirational church experience. The “Westminster Players” present skits periodically to communicate biblical messages in unique, thought-provoking ways. The Youth Minister provides engaging, enlightening, and entertaining sessions during “Time with the Younger Church” in the service. Sometimes the children/youth speak, sing, present, or help with the Sunday service, which the congregation especially enjoys. Sometimes the worship service is conducted outdoors. And Communion is offered on the first Sunday of each month to all who feel called to participate. WPC varies methods of participating in Communion, and observes Worldwide Communion Sunday in October by including a variety of international breads. In addition, a nursery and Sunday school for children of all ages are provided during the service, so adults are able to focus on worship while children enjoy learning at their own levels.

Following the Sunday service and a brief fellowship time, “Coffee with the Pastor” is open to any who would like to come and discuss the sermon, scripture, or ideas from the service with the pastor and other participants. Sometimes special guests are brought in to provide information about a need or organization in the community, or other meaningful topic. This unique program has been very successful in bringing church members closer together, and encouraging learning, open communication, and enthusiasm for what Westminster as a church can do.

The music style for Sunday service is currently blended, and includes both traditional and contemporary hymns. The Chancel Choir, the Celebration Singers praise team, and the Hand Bell Choir all provide wonderful music during the services and conduct special music events on other occasions. Individual musicians also contribute to the variety of music – flute, guitar, trumpet, violin, piano, organ, and singing solos have all graced the service at times. Sometimes guest artists participate, including a Methodist Dixieland band called “Stover Street Stompers” that has gotten the congregation’s toes tapping periodically since 2000.

Groups

Smaller groups within the church where people can connect more and spend time together for specific purposes truly enrich and strengthen the church. Current groups at Westminster Presbyterian include the Westminster Men’s Breakfast group, Westminster Presbyterian Women, Women’s Faith Connection, Golden Girls, Silver Gems, Book Club, Adult Sunday school Groups, Children’s Sunday school, and middle school/high school Youth Group. Sports groups also form from time to time.

Weaknesses

The primary perceived weaknesses at Westminster Presbyterian Church are that it has an aging, shrinking congregation, and that it is not sufficiently known in the community. The public image of Westminster Presbyterian Church and the appearance of its grounds are related concerns.

Additionally, there could be better communication within the church, and there is a need for wider participation in leadership roles. There is also a desire for additional adult education classes and small group connecting opportunities.

And finally, while analysis and brainstorming of new ideas are strengths in the church, executing these ideas and bringing them to fruition is often a weak point.

Membership and Attendance

There is significant concern surrounding membership, including the lack of young adults and young families at Westminster, aging and declining membership, and the need to seek more diversity in the church's overall makeup.

Church attendance should be encouraged, especially among younger members, and the church should do careful follow-up with non-attending members and those who leave Westminster. It is also important that the existing congregation members be well cared for; their needs and spiritual growth must continue to be a high priority.

Public Image

The building and surrounding grounds of Westminster Presbyterian Church are unassuming and gradually aging. The church is set back from the street, so is less visible than buildings closer to traffic flow. Improving the appearance and visibility of the church would make it more inviting to those passing by and those who come to visit.

Westminster would also benefit from connecting more with the public and collaborating more with other churches and organizations in the community. Making the strengths of Westminster Presbyterian Church known, and inviting the community to attend musical presentations, mission projects, and other special events could be helpful.

Communication

Greater communication within Westminster would also be helpful. One positive step in that direction is the report that Session started including in the church's monthly newsletter, providing information about the topics and significant decisions from the most recent Session meeting. "Grace Notes," an e-mail communication sent electronically as needed, have been useful in keeping the congregation apprised of immediate happenings. To improve further, providing information about what deacons, committees, and other small groups are doing would be helpful. Groups in the church are often doing good things that are not known to the rest of the congregation. Additional communication could help build enthusiasm for and participation in projects that are taking place, could prevent overlapping efforts, and could help congregants know who to contact about a specific topic, issue, or project.

Leadership

Greater participation by congregants in leadership positions and in church life outside of Sunday services is much needed. More elders and deacons are needed, along with more people willing to participate on project teams and committees in order to get things done. It is important to have as many people as possible feel ownership of the church and its successes, and to spread out the work so individuals don't get overloaded and burned out.

There is also a need for more leadership training and guidance so that those who do assume leadership roles know what to do and aren't overwhelmed.

Education and Connection

Additional adult Christian education opportunities and more small groups to provide connecting opportunities are also desired within the congregation. These kinds of groups allow for more personal spiritual growth, and for closer relationships among the members of the congregation.

Taking Action

Great ideas are not useful unless put into practice, and this is something Westminster has identified as an area on which to work. Obstacles to putting good ideas into practice include:

- 1) *Lack of ownership* – Each idea needs a champion to take it on, bring it to session, and make it happen. This may be one or more people. The champion(s) need to build enthusiasm, obtain approval, build a team, and identify and coordinate related tasks to implement the idea. Results from the Time and Talent survey can be used to help identify those who might be interested in helping with a particular type of project.

- 2) *Ideas that are big and nebulous* – If a project seems overwhelming, or if the idea is not specific enough to act on, nothing will happen. Big ideas need to be fleshed out and broken down into manageable pieces.
- 3) *Projects that are too time/energy-intensive or too costly* – There are many good ideas that simply require more resources than are currently available. It is important to recognize these early-on, and drop them, postpone them, find outside partners (other churches/organizations) to help with them, or find less resource-intensive alternatives.
- 4) *Lack of communication* – Bringing an idea to the congregation with enthusiasm, providing information on why it is important and how the work can be broken down, and calling for help to make it happen is an important step. An idea is much more likely to happen when communicated in this way to the broader group than an idea that is only discussed among the members of a small group that doesn't have the bandwidth to implement it.

Westminster is working on overcoming these obstacles and becoming more action-oriented and willing to take reasonable risks.

Westminster Online

Westminster Presbyterian Church in Fort Collins has an online presence at <http://www.westpresftc.com/>, as well as an associated Facebook page.

What Is The Context of Westminster Presbyterian Church?

The Mission Study team has researched area demographics and trends in order to identify opportunities for future growth. Though the following data is focused on a five-mile radius around Westminster Presbyterian Church, many members come from a wider area, including Loveland, Windsor and Wellington. For those coming from further away, distance traveled does not seem to be an issue. While efforts to maintain or grow membership numbers will include the immediate church area, Westminster Presbyterian Church will also focus on groups based on criteria other than geography. These days, a lot of church searching happens via the internet, and physically searching the neighborhood for churches happens less than it used to. It may be difficult to grow a church at this point based purely or primarily on a geographical focus (or even an age focus). Westminster Presbyterian Church will continue to be open and inclusive as it seeks out people who need what Westminster has to offer.

Regional Trends

Some trends in the Fort Collins community could affect the focus of outreach efforts. In 2011, news articles referred to how the aging population was changing Fort Collins and Larimer County. Fort Collins has received much publicity nationwide through rankings of the best places to live, work, do business and retire in America. One publication ranked the city the number one place to live in the nation in 2006. In 2010, Fort Collins was ranked number six, and in 2012, Fort Collins was ranked number 70 among the best small cities in which to live. It was ranked one of the ten top places to retire in 2012. In another publication, Fort Collins was named the fourth-healthiest mid-size city in 2012. Publicity of such ratings is expected to attract people of all ages, and especially retirees, from other states to the city and immediate area. Retirees are often looking for a church home in their new surroundings and afford an opportunity for Westminster to reach out to them.

Another population, Colorado State University students, is increasing and is expected to continue to do so. CSU, which is in close proximity to Westminster Presbyterian Church, has a current enrollment of over 31,500 students, a 3% increase over last year. It has been reported that CSU intends to grow enrollment to 35,000 in the coming years. Opportunities to reach out to this population may be in the future for Westminster.

An analysis of the current demographics in the immediate area surrounding Westminster Presbyterian Church will provide additional insight. The source of the following information is "Community Demographics—Presbyterian Church (USA)," free online demographics.

Age Demographics

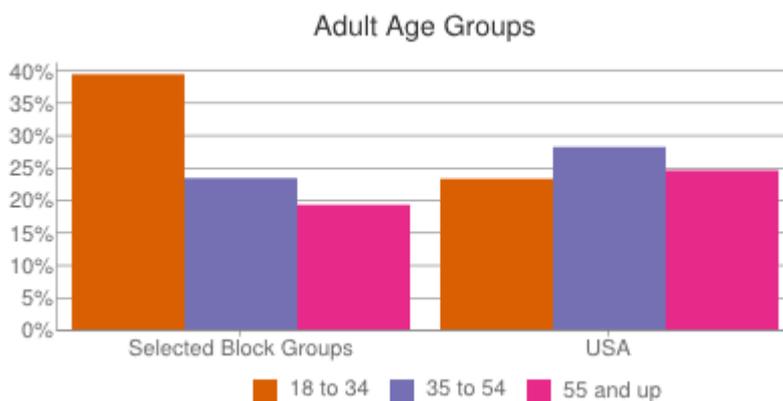
The population within a five-mile radius of Westminster Presbyterian Church, which includes most of Fort Collins and a portion of LaPorte, is 134,479 as of 2010. The growth rate of the area was 1.9% from 2009-2010. There are three PC (U.S.A.) churches in addition to Westminster within that area—First Presbyterian Church, Harmony Presbyterian Church and LaPorte Presbyterian Church.

Age groups within the area are as follows:

0-17	18%
18-34	39%
35-54	24%
55 and up	19%

Westminster Presbyterian Church membership does not reflect this breakdown, with adults 55 and older making up well over 50%. Westminster Presbyterian Church should continue to do what it does well, attracting and serving those in their retirement years, as well as trying to bring in more young families. There are many apartment and rental units, as well as retirement communities near the church. This could make Westminster Presbyterian a convenient choice for young families, students and retirees.

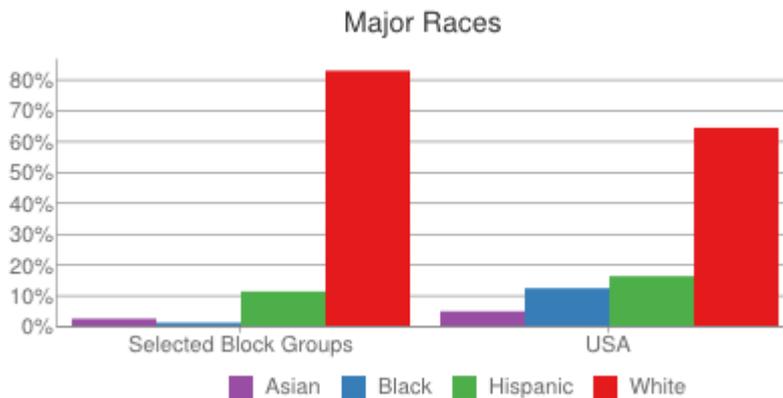
Households with children make up 24 percent of housing units in the area. Families with children make up a small percentage of Westminster’s church attendance. Vacation Bible School is one activity that has reached out to families in the immediate area of the church. This has brought more community children to VBS but not to church.



The chart above shows the breakdown of the adult population within the five-mile radius. The number of younger adults age 18-34 is much larger than the national average. A major contributor to these figures is the proximity of Westminster Presbyterian Church to Colorado State University. Within a two-mile radius of Westminster, college and university age adults (18-24) make up 38% of the population. Westminster Presbyterian Church should consider ministering more to this group, keeping in mind that students might attend Westminster

Presbyterian Church for a time, but would not generally stay with the church in the long run, as they move on to new jobs and geographies.

Race, Education, and Income Demographics



Within the five-mile radius, the racial/cultural breakdown of the population is as follows:

- 84% are white
- 11% are Hispanic
- 2% are Asian
- Less than 1% are black
- All others make up 2%

Increasing the diversity of attendees and members is a goal that the church should pursue. However, opportunities to do so are limited, considering the much larger percentage of whites and lower numbers of other races in the area as a whole.

In terms of education, forty-seven percent of adults in the area hold a bachelor's degree or higher. The average household income is \$65,000. However 22% make less than \$20,000. Making Westminster Presbyterian Church a comfortable and accepting place for those of all income and education levels is important.

Contextual Conclusions

What do these demographics mean for Westminster Presbyterian Church? The church recognizes its need to grow, but not to the point of losing the close, friendly atmosphere that makes the church special. The increasing population in the area provides the church with an opportunity to grow by reaching out to all who would care to come, including college and university students, families, singles of all ages, and those in their retirement years, regardless of their ethnicity, economic status, education level, or sexual orientation.

How Is Westminster Presbyterian Church Connected to the Community?

Westminster Presbyterian Church is located near Colorado State University on the west side of Fort Collins. The church draws its members from all over the city, as well as from outside the city (including Wellington, Windsor, Greeley, and Loveland). Members often choose to travel to Westminster because they are drawn to its friendliness, openness, mission focus, and positive worship experience.

Westminster Presbyterian Church is well-known and loved by those who attend, but does not have as strong a presence in the community as the congregation would like. The church name is confusing to some, as “Westminster” is a suburb in the Denver area, as well as the name of a Presbyterian church in that city. But the church is known visually for its unique architectural design that has earned it the nickname of the “agitator” church.

Westminster Presbyterian Church has reached out to the community in a variety of ways. One of its most unique offerings for a number of years was the Christmastime “*Walk Through Bethlehem*,” which was a live re-creation of Bethlehem and its marketplace at the time of Jesus. Many in the community came and looked forward each year to participating in the activities, petting the live animals, and ending at the live nativity. Westminster has also offered Vacation Bible School (VBS) annually during the summers, and has attracted many children from the community to participate in these fun programs. The community has also participated in Westminster’s mission fundraising events such as its annual Pasta in the Rockies dinner event to benefit Habitat for Humanity, and its annual CROP Walk to support the local food bank. Westminster has won the coveted Sacred Sneaker Award for several years running for raising the most funds for the food bank during the CROP Walk. Westminster has also partnered with a number of other organizations, including the Geller Center, CSU, the Interfaith Council, Highlands Camp, and, of course, the Presbytery.

Westminster Presbyterian Church is currently considering ways to further connect with the community. This includes looking for opportunities where WPC is well-suited to meeting specific needs in the community. It includes looking at all age groups, from young families to retirees. It includes identifying marginalized groups and considering how they might be made welcome. The building is currently used by a number of community groups including Scouts, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and a number of others. But it could be used to serve even more. WPC might also consider hosting more programs/activities of interest to the community, including options such as bringing in special speakers or inviting more public participation in WPC mission efforts.

WPC can also work internally to ensure church is personal and relevant. Encouraging members to share their faith inside and outside church, providing guidance on how to share faith without being offensive, creating meaningful small groups where people can easily make connections when they visit and keep connections going thereafter, are some examples of ways to do this.

Finally, better advertising conveying who Westminster Presbyterian Church is and where it is located is important. The WPC website and Facebook page are being improved on an ongoing basis to provide more and better information about the church online.

Westminster Presbyterian Church expects to better communicate its differentiating characteristics, including mission focus, outstanding music, handicapped-accessible building, and recent underlying philosophy:

“Wherever you are on your faith journey, you’re welcome here.”

What Is Westminster Presbyterian Church Called To Be and To Do?

For several years now, both demographers and theologians have been writing books and articles claiming that “Churches Must Change -- or Die.” What does that mean for Westminster Presbyterian Church?

Certainly, it would mean expanding on the commitment to being an inclusive, open, and welcoming Christian community. It would mean continuing the strong emphasis on mission. It would mean offering inspiring services of worship, music, and hearing the Word weekly. It would mean being true to the Reformed tradition. But it would also mean being open to change, welcoming new challenges, always re-forming, and being willing to take risks, perhaps beyond the congregation’s typical comfort zone.

Other faiths have grown, secularism has come on strong, and the electronic age with more options (diversions of every kind) has drastically decreased membership and attendance in mainline churches. Church, for many, has become irrelevant. More people today are claiming to be “spiritual but not religious.”

At Westminster Presbyterian Church, participants believe that *everyone* is on a journey, a faith journey, certainly at different places, but all striving to draw closer to the Holy, loving, creator God. Westminster is committed to just that -- helping members grow spiritually. Westminster church believes that God is calling people to be disciples, demonstrating daily God’s love *for all creation -- how each individual can show genuine love of God and neighbor.*

Through hearing the Word, fervent prayer, contemplation, and discernment, Westminster Presbyterian Church believes that God is calling this church through the Holy Spirit to participate in a continuing creation -- the creation of a true community of believers. God is calling this church to hear the Word, praise, learn, and serve -- especially “the least of these” -- both locally and globally. And God is calling the church to expand its vision of mission, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and his gospel of love and compassion. Westminster Presbyterian Church stands ready to discover anew God’s plan for this church.

What does this mean in practical terms - actions to take, challenges to tackle, plans to devise? What is needed going forward falls into several specific categories:

- (1) Reaching out to draw more people into the church community.
- (2) Continuing the emphasis on mission, with an increasing focus on serving locally.
- (3) Building upon internal strengths through connection, education, and worship.
- (4) Being a church of God-inspired vision, passion, and compassionate action.

Reaching Out

Westminster needs to find new ways to draw more people into the church community. Thoughts on how to do this include:

- Training and engaging the congregation in outreach efforts, and becoming effective as a congregation in personally inviting more people to visit and join Westminster Presbyterian Church.
- Communicating in creative ways that the WPC community is open, inclusive, welcoming, friendly, and accessible.
- Developing new ways to reach out to diverse groups such as young families, young adults, and newly-relocated retirees, as well as those who may not feel accepted or comfortable at other churches.
- Improving church appeal, both physically and electronically. This includes improvements inside and outside the church, as well as to the web site.

Mission

Westminster Presbyterian Church feels God's call to continue a focus on mission work, with an emphasis on finding ways to serve locally. This can be accomplished by:

- Maintaining a strong and active relationship with the Geller Center, CSU, the Interfaith Council, the Food Bank for Larimer County, the Sister Mary Alice Murphy Center for Hope, Highlands Camp, and the Presbytery.
- Collaborating with the community, other churches, and other organizations to allow WPC to do more, given the combined resources, networks, and expertise gained through partnerships.
- Involving the congregation as a whole, including the children, in church mission projects.

Internal Strengths and Growth

A third area that is important for Westminster Presbyterian Church is building upon and growing internal strengths through connection, education, and worship. This includes:

- Encouraging wholehearted worship, and inspiring congregation members to hear the Word with their hearts, minds, and spirits, and so they grow in passion, compassion, and action as a result.

- Continuing to include in worship services a variety of music, drama, and inspiring, Bible-based messages. Additionally, continuing the valuable “Coffee with the Pastor” discussion time.
- Having children participate more in services, and having more intergenerational activities and mentoring.
- Building and strengthening interpersonal connections within the church by providing more small-group opportunities and encouraging members to openly share and discuss their faith.
- Improving communications within the church. This includes ensuring that leaders and groups communicate with the congregation on a regular basis about the church vision, challenges, projects in progress, and project possibilities.
- Making better use of the time and talent inventory filled out by members. This includes using the time and talent information to engage more leaders and active participants to carry out the vision of the church and to own specific projects.

God-Inspired Vision, Passion, and Compassionate Action

Westminster also needs to keep looking to God with an eye on the future, to build passion for what God wants this church to do, and to move efficiently from “idea” mode to “action” mode. This can be accomplished by:

- Praying earnestly and continuously for God’s guidance; listening to God; having faith; remaining open to change and innovation; and being willing to take risks.
- Dreaming big, spreading enthusiasm, and bringing vision, passion, and compassionate action to the church and community by:
 - Developing a 5-year plan to set priorities, and build a vision for the future.
 - Focusing on specific projects, fleshing them out, analyzing the feasibility, then breaking them down into small, manageable pieces.
 - Seeking out partner churches, organizations, or others in the community with which to collaborate for projects that the church feels called to do, but that are beyond WPC’s means and/or ability.

May God give Westminster Presbyterian Church the vision and wisdom to guide and bless this church in its endeavors to serve God and humankind with love, humility, compassion, and grace.