

WESTWOOD EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Definition of Terms

Vital and Recurring Terms in this report include:

Tenure Groups (how long people have attended Westwood Baptist Church)

- **New Attenders:** those who have attended this church for 5 years or less
- **Intermediate Attenders:** those who have attended this church for 6 to 19 years.
- **Pioneers:** those who have attended this church for 20 years or more.

Generation Groups¹

- **Gen Z:** people 23 years of age and less
- **Millennials:** people who are currently 24-40 years of age
- **Gen X:** people who are currently 41-55 years of age
- **Boomers:** people who are currently 56-74 years of age
- **Silents:** people who are currently 75-95 years of age

Strengths to Build On

Westwood has numerous strengths on which to build. You have a strong Boomer & Builder (Silent) generational presence at WBC; with these members mobilized towards the mission they will bring critical wisdom and resources. Westwood is doctrinally sound which is a critical cornerstone in a post-modern world, and there is a strong desire for solid messages and being fed spiritually. You have a willingness to get involved and participate with 90% of people willing to spend more than one hour a week serving and 44% willing to spend 4 or more hours serving. Faithful giving as a discipline is high; 72% give 10 or more percent to combined Kingdom activities and 48% give 10 or more percent to Westwood. There is a strong core who LOVE their church and desire to see it succeed. More than 2/3 of survey respondents believe this church has growth potential as well as the belief and conviction grows as the age of respondents becomes younger.

The Scope of This Report

This ministry assessment is a team effort and is intended to be a **MIRROR**, reflecting back to you what 271 survey respondents said and what 98 of you told us in 86 input sessions (including former pastors Jon Cardona and Phillip Miller). The aim of synthesizing the data from the online surveys with what our 14-member Diagnostic Team heard in the input sessions is to provide you with a **MAP** forward toward a revitalized journey that reflects God's preferred future at Westwood.

¹ After July 1st, we assume people have had their birthdays which makes them a year older and also moves the generations up a year. Millennials can now be 40 years of age. Gen Zers are becoming the young adults.

Overview

The primary question that will be both asked and addressed in this Executive Summary is: **WHOSE CHURCH IS THIS?** The data and input sessions were confusing. While Westwood has one of the strongest doctrinal scores of any of the churches we've had the privilege of serving, our Diagnostic Team was perplexed. We wondered why your good doctrine has not produced more and better fruit?

Here's what we see taking place at Westwood: gossip, division, bullying, threats, "*enmities [or hostility], strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions*" (Gal 5:19).

This is not what we think, this is what you told us—and our belief is that this is NOT what you want the legacy of Westwood to be.

Let's consider a few verses that seem to be in contradiction to what the survey data and input sessions indicate...

- Matthew 12:33b: "*the tree is known by its fruit,*" Again, what do you want your legacy to be?
- Consider the church at Ephesus (see Rev 2). They had good doctrine and perseverance, but they *left their first love*, drifting away from what REALLY mattered.
- 1 Corinthians 13:1: "*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*"
- Micah 6:8: "*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*"
- Jeremiah 29:7 "*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*"

Here are some verbatim responses² from the survey and input sessions:

- "We moved from OUR church to MY church – entitled, resist[ing] change, and [the] focus is not on Jesus."
- "Too many have been Westwood-centric vs gospel-centric."
- "I have become embarrassed by my church. I no longer want to tell people where I go to church."
- "We've separated people into two camps, two churches, and now we are paying for it."

² Verbatim responses are direct quotes from either the online survey ("What do you want to PRESERVE, AVOID, and ACHIEVE?"), or from an input session.

- “With the people who have [been] publicly nasty, can I trust them? I don’t feel bitter, but a little leery. I’m fearful for the new pastor.”

With all your activity and Bible knowledge, it’s seems you have lost your focus of who you are in Christ—and whose church this is. While Westwood has several strengths to build on, this report will show there are a number of very real threats that should not be ignored. The majority of these threats are not subtle but plain and obvious. Westwood is at a distinct crossroads and the status quo must be relinquished. How these threats are embraced and addressed will make a huge difference in the future of your church.

Taproot Issue, Branch Issues, and Recommendations



After analyzing the data and conducting the input sessions, the *VitalChurch* Diagnostic Team, through prayer, discernment, and decades of experience sees **one taproot issue** and **five branch root issues** (some of which are overlapping) as the *primary hindering factors* at Westwood at this time. Additional issues are certainly present and can be identified in the Appendices Section of this report. However, the following issues need to be addressed immediately.

Taproot Issue

You acknowledge, confess, and profess Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace, but you are not exhibiting the peace of God or the practice of peacemaking. (See Rom 15:33; Isaiah 9:6; Phil 4:7-9; Matt 5:9)

Branch Issues (Major Current Threats)

The data shows that there is:

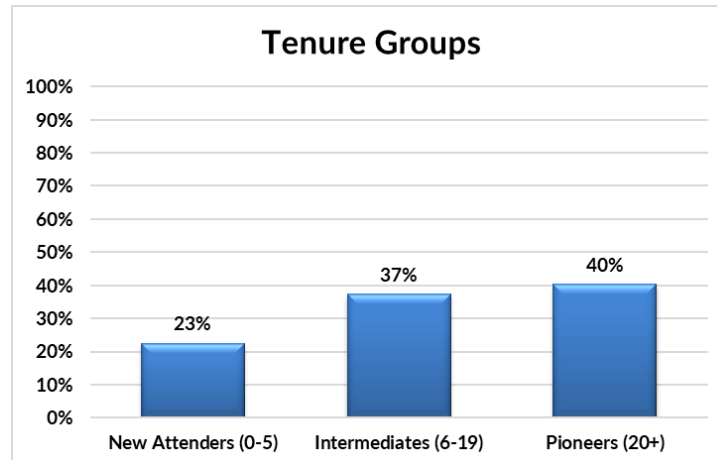
1. Substantial unresolved conflict
2. A lack of acceptance and belonging
3. Weak adult evangelism
4. Resistance to change
5. The lack of a unifying and compelling vision

We will look at each Branch Issue individually by reviewing the rationale from the survey data and input sessions and then make a series of nine specific recommendations to address each issue.

Rationale (The Mirror)

Prologue: Tenure Analysis

A look at Westwood’s Tenure Analysis will help to provide context for the Branch Issues. Tenure Analysis is based on comparing the sizes and perspectives of three groups. New Attenders have attended Westwood for 0-5 years, Intermediates have attended for 6-19 years, and Pioneers have attended 20+ years. On the chart below we see the sizes of these three tenure groups at Westwood.



Twenty-three percent (23%) of survey respondents fall into the New Attender group. The Intermediate group is 37% and the Pioneers are 40% of the current attenders. The normal guide for interpreting this data is as follows:

Interpretative Guidelines	
New Attenders	
•	40% plus indicates a growing church
•	Should be largest of three groups
•	30-40% usually indicates a plateaued church
•	Less than 30% usually indicates a declining church
Intermediate Attenders	
•	Ideal—smaller than New Members, but larger than Pioneer Group
•	A low figure usually indicates a pattern of poor historic assimilation or history of strife especially if this is the smallest of the three groups.
Pioneer Group	
•	Ideal—less than 25% and smallest of three groups
•	Probable serious pathology if 40% or more

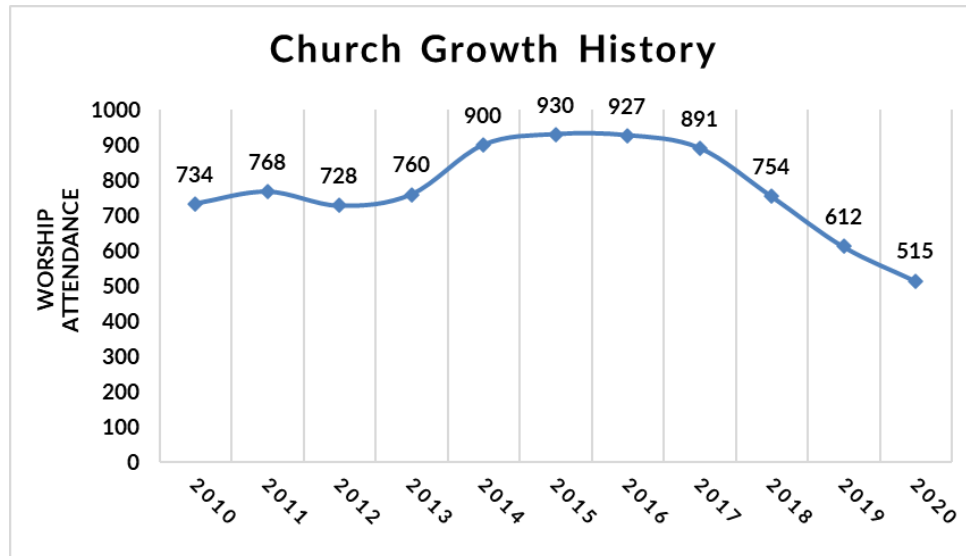
The data provides some specific insights. First, **23% New Attenders** would suggest that the church is not adequately attracting enough new people to grow. Twenty-three percent New Attenders usually indicates that a church is in decline—which Westwood is.

The **Intermediate group** is the second largest group at **37%**. The size of this group suggests that, over the past 19 years, the church has been able to include many new people so that they feel part of the Westwood family. The result is that many have opted to stay. However, ideally, this group should not be larger than the New Attenders group.

Westwood has a very high percentage of **Pioneers (40%)**, which often indicates the church is Pioneer-focused and not as accommodating to new people as it needs to be. While it is always good when a church has a solid group of Pioneers, problems arise when the Pioneer group makes up over 25% of current attenders. The consequence is that too few people have been added over the years and the Pioneers begin to get tired—many of the Boomers and especially, the Silents. Pioneers can also find it difficult to let go of control as well as resist inevitable change, both of which are happening at Westwood. This will bottleneck vitality and growth. The solution is (certainly) not to lose your Pioneers, but to begin to open up your various fellowship and leadership circles to invite, sponsor, and enfold more new and younger people into the church.

An additional issue related to the high percentage of Pioneers is that Westwood is “aging out.” The average age of the survey respondents is 67 years—and in-house data indicates a median age of 60 years. When the average age of a church reaches 55+ it is considered to be starting to “age out” and its chances of survival begin to decrease significantly.

The low percentage of New Attenders (23%) suggests that something has changed in recent years. Over the last three years 376 people (57%) have exited Westwood (see the chart on the following page). It is entirely possible that many of those who have exited were New Attenders. As mentioned above, newcomers are either not feeling included, or perhaps guests and newcomers are sensing the tension (i.e., the lack of peace) that Westwood is currently experiencing? An important question as we make our way through the following Branch Issues is, what has happened to hinder Westwood’s attractiveness to New Attenders?



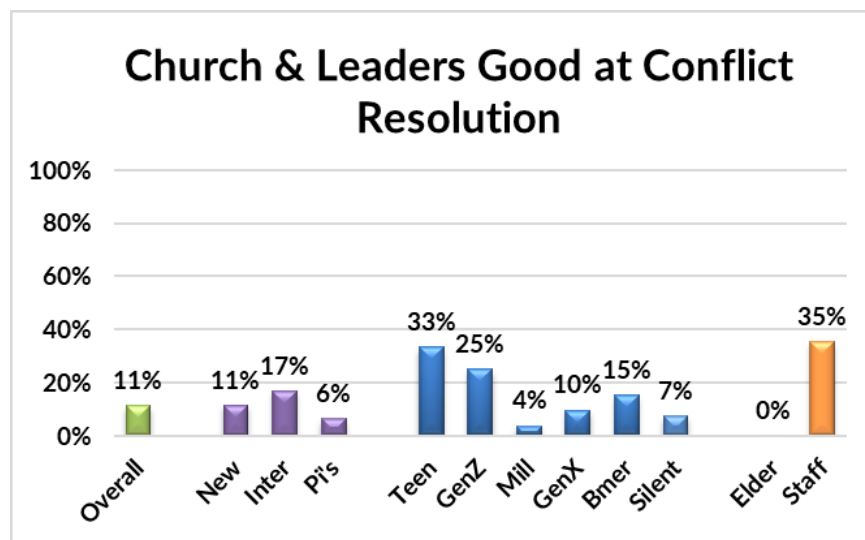
ACHIEVE Verbatim Responses:

- “I have only been here one year. No one reached out to me...I do not know about any of the classes. I feel left out of the loop. New people are not welcomed.”
- “A ministry for newcomers. When we first came to the church, there was a newcomer's table but no one manning it which seems impersonal.”

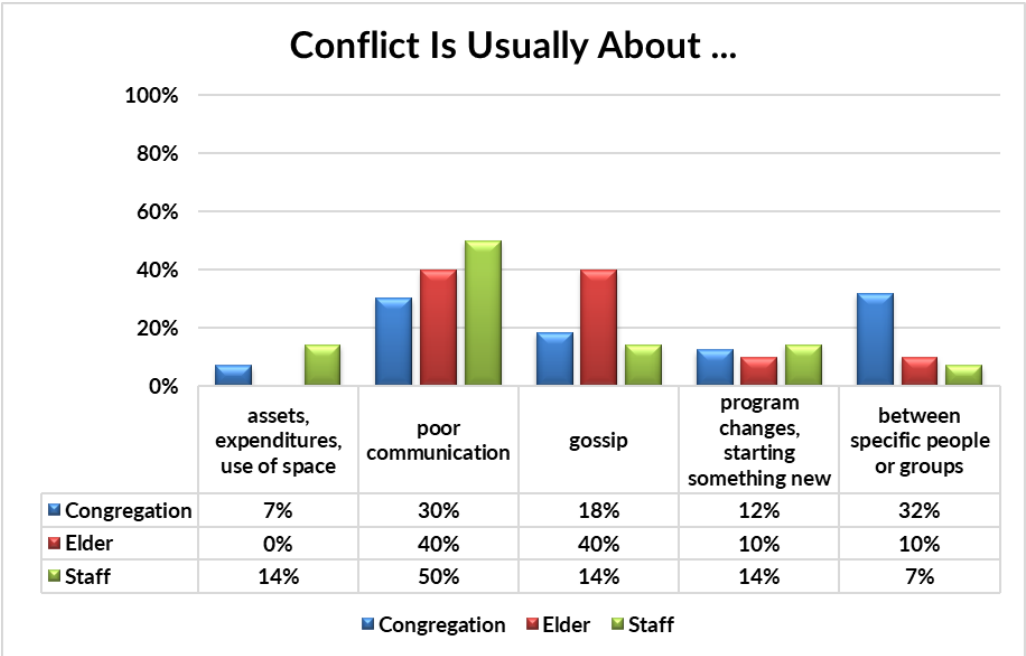
Five Branch Issues

Branch Issue # 1: Substantial Unresolved Conflict

Unresolved conflict is a very serious weakness at Westwood. Only 11% of the survey respondents say the church and its leaders are good at conflict resolution. Any score lower than 70% is cause for concern. It appears that the Staff, Teens, and Gen Zers are trying to believe the best, yet even their scores are quite weak.

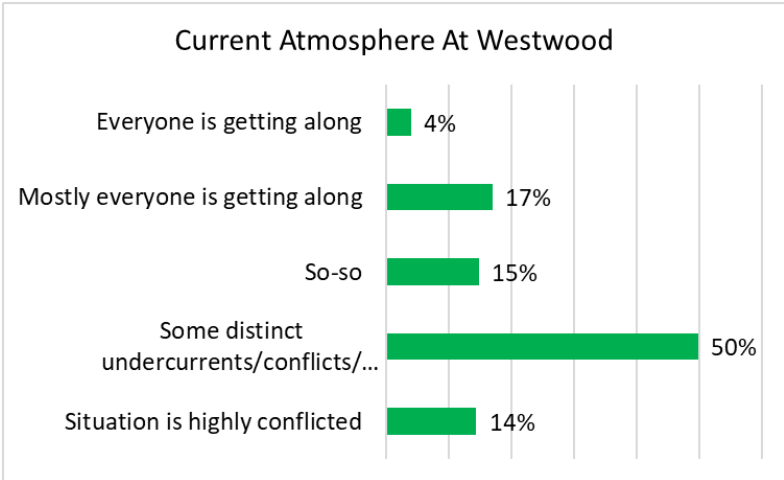


The chart below identifies the areas where Westwood is most conflicted.

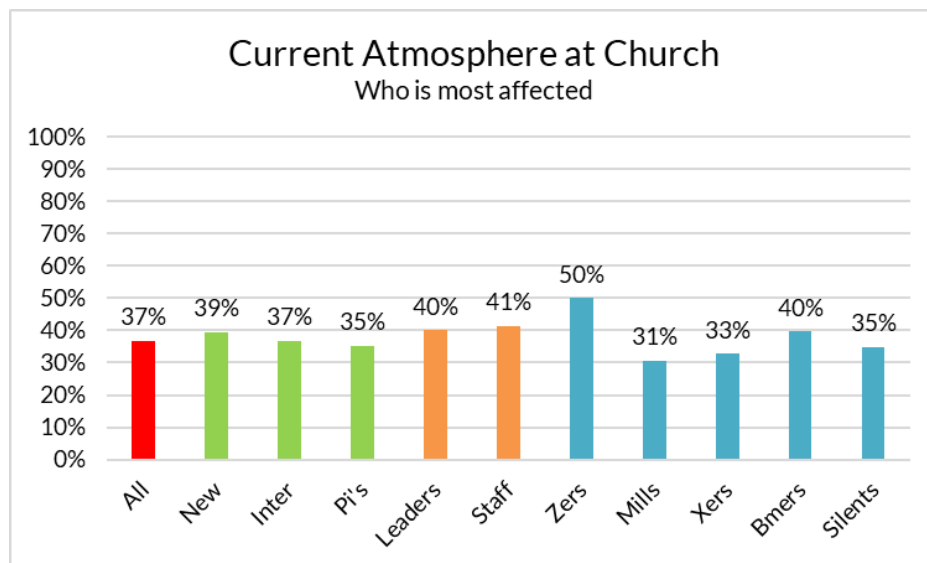


“Poor communication” is the overall highest area of conflict with half the staff weighing-in in the affirmative. The Elders identify “poor communication” and “gossip” equally. The Congregation sees the conflict as “between specific people or groups” (32%) followed closely by “poor communication” (30%).

The ongoing conflict is having a detrimental effect on how congregants are viewing the church. Notice in the chart below that 64% of the survey respondents see conflict as a serious issue, with 50% identifying “some” distinct undercurrents of conflict and an additional 14% identifying the current situation as “highly conflicted.”



Notice in the Current Atmosphere at Church chart below that your unresolved conflicts are affecting literally every group in the church, with an overall score of 37%. A score of 81+ indicates that “Everyone is getting along.” A score between 61-80 indicates “Mostly people are getting along.” A score between 41-60 range is “So-so.” **A score between 21-40 range indicates “Some distinct undercurrents/disagreements.”** Scores less than 21% are in the “Situation is highly conflicted” range. Perhaps the only upside is that things could be worse! The Gen Zers have been least affected by the conflict (50%) while the Millennials have been most affected (31%).



Verbatim Responses:

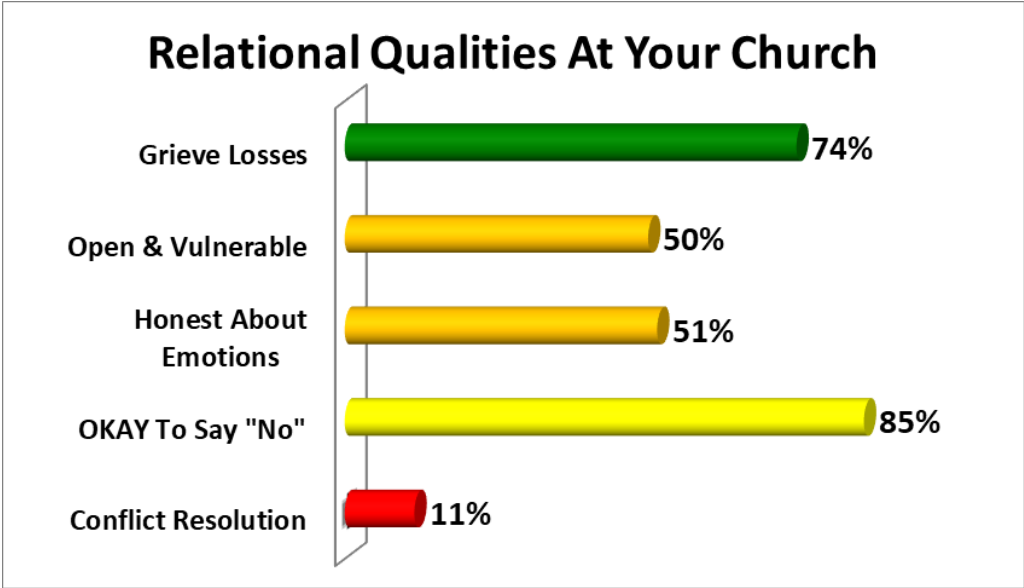
- “People can’t deal with or don’t want to deal with conflict.”
- “The Holy Spirit is still convicting. We as members need to look within ourselves about what went wrong. Where were we listening to rumors?”
- “When there was anger in business meetings, there was no one to say, ‘Stop, this is inappropriate.’ Problems were allowed to continue instead of being addressed immediately.”
- “We need to learn how to get on the same page, even with different styles, and collaborate and build trust. There’s a lot of broken trust. We need forgiveness.”
- “Westwood feels like it is divided by services, age and cliches.”
- “We are in a civil war”
- Lots of gossip, people not applying the gospel.
- AVOID Verbatim Responses:
 - “Face the fact that there is CONFLICT and deal with it. This has been going on since the [church was] formed.
 - “Trying to force merge the warlike gossip culture of the traditionalists with

the attendees. It drives off the younger people and makes outsiders hate the church. I am one of the very few people in my age group that attends this church and that hurts.”

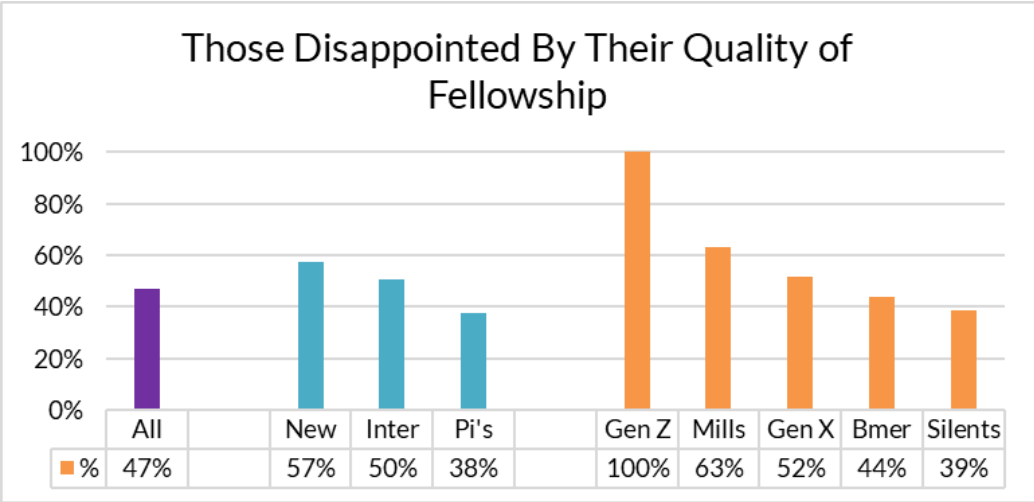
- “Rancor, self-centeredness, a lack of grace for one another, unforgiving and prideful attitudes, and bitterness towards others who have different opinions from one’s own”
- “...Tensions rising because of an unwillingness to resolve conflict...If members are acting inappropriately, they can’t be allowed to run rampant and spread rumors or stir up conflict in the church.”
- “Exclusion of people different than us, class discrimination, King James only, hymns only, social gospel, political involvement, Christian club atmosphere.”
- **ACHIEVE Verbatim Response:** “I'd like to see unity restored, a willingness to be gentle with each other, and people with maturity enough to be willing to compromise with others to ensure unity. This has been lacking in our church this past year.”

Branch Issue #2: A Lack of Acceptance and Belonging

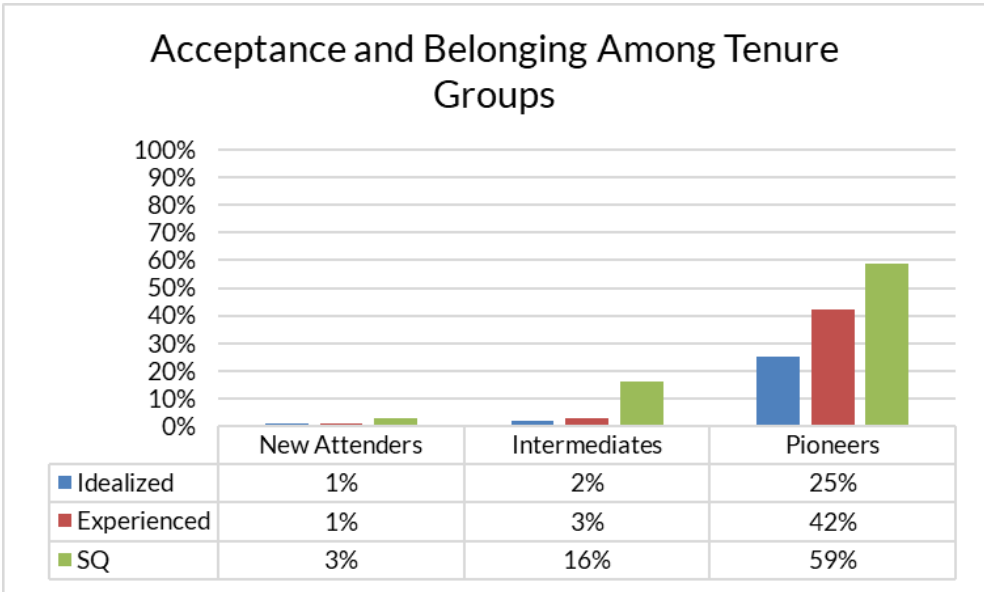
The unresolved conflict at Westwood seems to be bleeding into almost every other area of church life. In the Relational Qualities chart below, notice the uneasiness people have with being “Open & Vulnerable” (50%) as well as being “Honest About Emotions” (51%). Again, any score below 70% is cause for concern. Currently, Westwood does not seem to be as safe a place as it needs to be for people to be open and vulnerable as well as honest about their emotions.



The Quality of Fellowship (i.e., biblical *koinonia*) is weak at Westwood. (See Section 4: Quality of Fellowship in the Appendices for a more complete discussion.) As noted in the chart below, almost half (47%) of the survey respondents are disappointed in their quality of fellowship. It is essential to notice that both the newer attenders and the younger generations are the most disappointed.



It is also important to notice the Quality of Fellowship experience of the three Tenure Groups. Of the three, only the Pioneers are “experiencing” a Satisfaction Quotient (SQ) that would be considered in the normal range. The SQ of the New Attenders and the Intermediates are both quite low. With these scores it would not be unreasonable to assume many are just barely hanging on at Westwood.



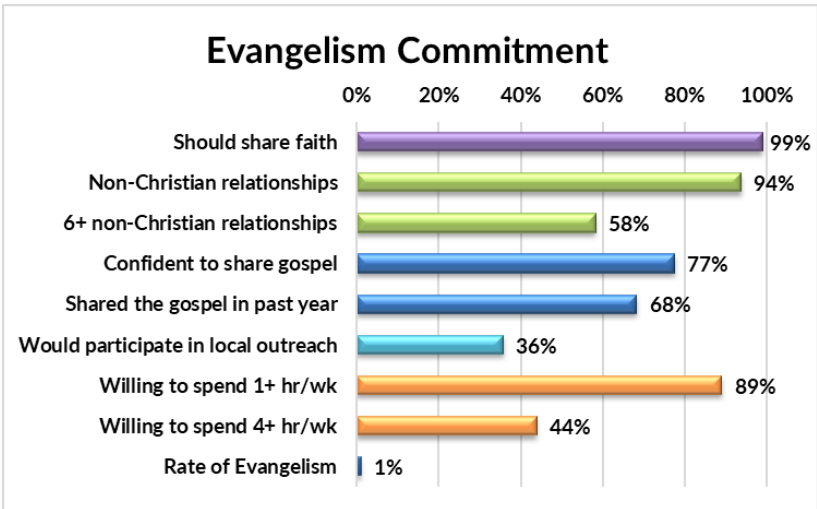
Research shows that close to 90% of evangelicals looking for a church home are hoping to find family-like relationships in their new church. Research also shows that one-half to two-thirds of people who begin attending a church will drop out before five years are up. The most common reason for them leaving is that they did not find the acceptance and belonging they were seeking. Most churches that are vital, consistently focus on providing acceptance and belonging to all who attend, which include fellowship circles that are open to newcomers as well as a specific, systematized, and a reproducible pathway designed especially for newcomers. If this (overall) disappointment factor is not addressed, Westwood will not have a bright future.

Verbatim Responses:

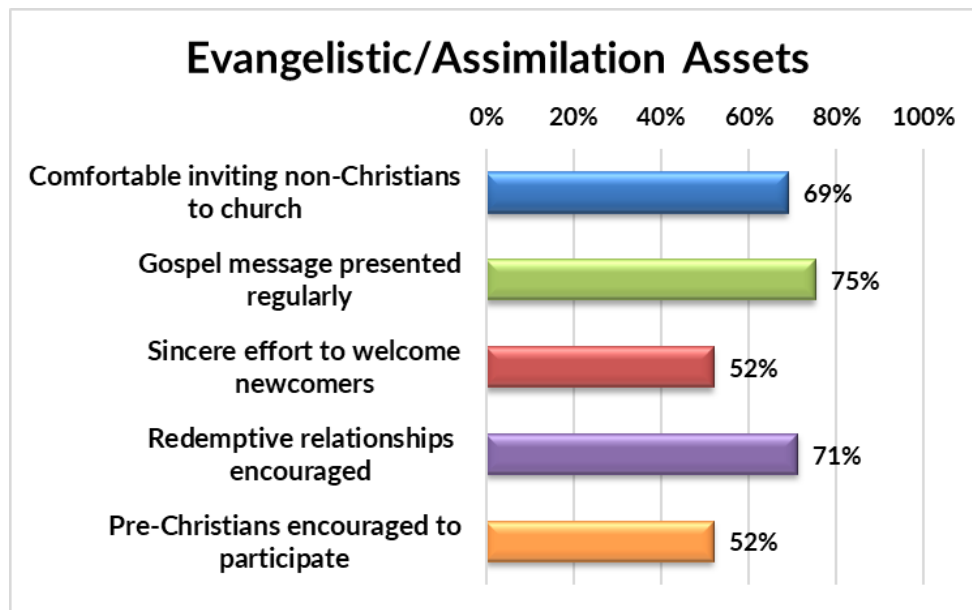
- “People’s interactions are very shallow.”
- “As long as the pews were full, we were hearing good messages and we liked the music, there was a sense of complacency.”
- “Our culture is to deride the things we don’t agree with.”
- AVOID Verbatim Responses:
 - “My husband and I tried to get involved but felt pushed aside.”
 - “I’d like to see avoided the pettiness and unwillingness to conform to Christian unity that has been going on this past year. I have been appalled at the behavior of many Christians during open meetings that may have had new believers. What they must think of our church!!”

Branch Issue #3: Weak Adult Evangelism

While there is a high level of agreement at Westwood on the biblical mandate to evangelize, there is little evidence of any adult evangelism taking place. Notice the agreement percentages in the chart below...



Having stated the above, Westwood currently possesses weak assets to support both evangelism and the inclusion of new people.



On the chart above, 80% is a minimum positive score. Notice that only 69% of the survey respondents are comfortable inviting new people, including non-Christians, to a church service. This is probably related to the Taproot Issue as well as the Branch Issues unpacked above. Only 52% stated there is a sincere effort to welcome newcomers and only 71% indicated that redemptive relationships are encouraged.

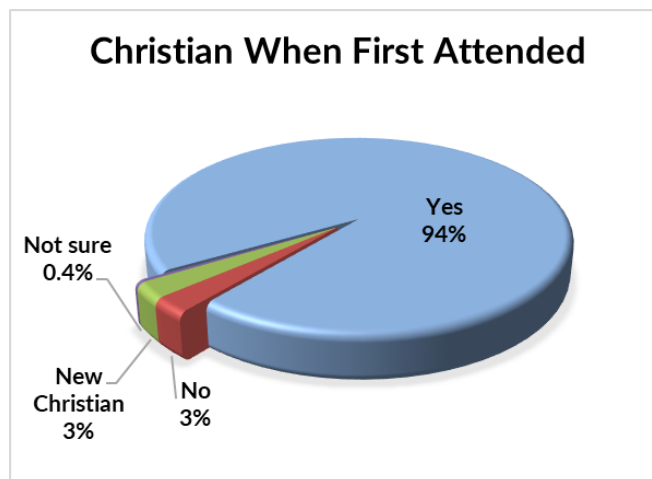
It is also essential to acknowledge that there is almost zero adult evangelism taking place at Westwood. Consider the chart below:

	All	New	Inter	Pi's	Teen	GenZ	Mill	GenX	Bmer	Silent
Number who were not Christians when they came	7	1	5	1	1	1	1	3	1	0
Still Seeking	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Number currently attending who came with their parents and have since become Christians	3	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
Net conversions from the world	3	0	3	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Rate of Evangelism	1%	0%	3%	0%						

Overall, the rate of adult evangelism is a paltry 1%. A vital church's rate of evangelism would be between 15-20%. Among the survey respondents seven people reported that they were not yet Christians when they first attended Westwood of which one is "still seeking" and three were children when they came prior to making their faith

commitments; leaving three individuals who represent the evangelistic outreach of Westwood. It is also important to note that all three of those conversions are part of the Intermediate Tenure Group and took place more than five years ago.

Overall, 97% of the survey respondents were already Christians when they first attended Westwood...



If we include the 3% who were “New Christians” with the 94%, it becomes 97%. With this many attending who were already believers, it makes Westwood a “transfer growth” church, not an evangelistic church—or, as one author says, you are a “come ye church,” not a “go ye church.”³ The problem is that fewer and fewer people are coming.

Verbatim Responses:

- “We have a sense of spirituality that’s lost its sense of life. Westwood’s focus is on our group.”
- “We need to get real about our desperate need to share the gospel with our city.”
- “Our witness is embarrassing.”
- ACHIEVE Verbatim Responses:
 - “Focus on our Oikos and the intersection of Mission, Community, and Gospel. Focus on serving the south sound, around the world, and in our church.”
 - “... reaching out to the hurting and the lost with the hope of the gospel”
 - “... more focus on marginalized people in our own community rather than in other countries.”

³ Jerry Cook. *Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness: Being Christian in a Non-Christian World* 2009.

- “I love the focus of "go and be the church" and the idea of Oikos. I think community and global outreach is important and I want my kids growing up to see and be a part of that.”

Branch Issue #4: Resistance to Change

Another indicator of a Pioneer focused (or, inward focused) church is the overall resistance to change at Westwood. The consensus is that Westwood and its leaders either acknowledge that you do not navigate change well or you tend to resist change. The totals are highlighted in yellow in the chart below, 77% of the Congregation; 100% of the Elders; and 65% of the Staff either acknowledge they don’t navigate change well or are actually resistant to change.

		Congregation	Elders	Staff
Progressive Total		23%	0%	35%
Radicals	We anticipate and value change	8%	0%	6%
Progressives	We are open to change	15%	0%	29%
Conservatives	We do not navigate change well	49%	60%	35%
Traditionalists	We tend to resist change	28%	40%	29%
Conservative Total		77%	100%	65%

Almost every church that is over 20 years old is subject to what has been termed “institutionalization.” The essence of institutionalization is that the congregation has turned inward and is more concerned about their comfort than their calling. Unfortunately, this appears to be the case at Westwood. “Aging out,” as mentioned above, is also a specific form of institutionalization.

Churches that are deeply resistant to change need to be reminded of the old church saying, “The message never changes, but methods do.”

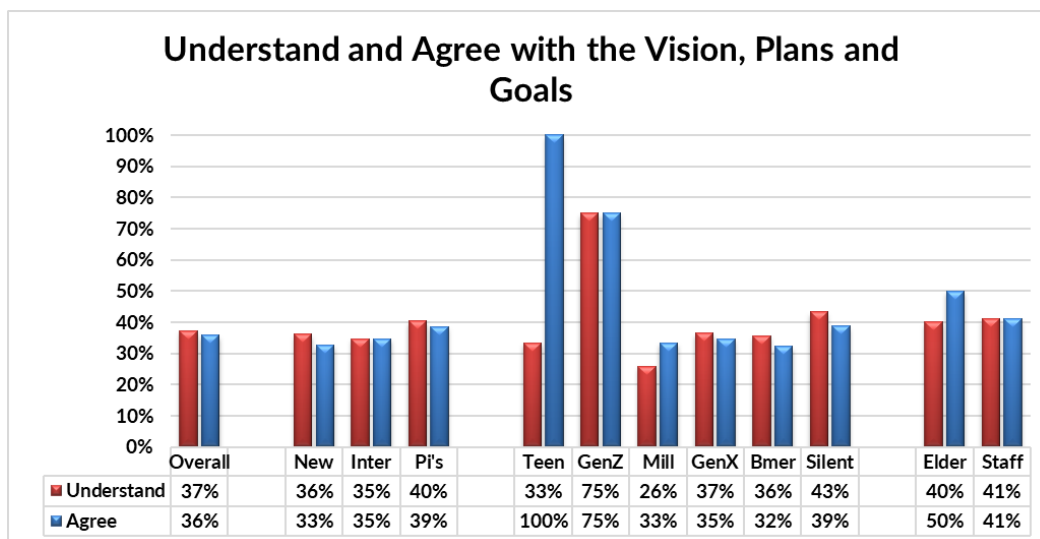
Verbatim Responses:

- “We have been praying about change, but we are not embracing change.”
- "Change is hard for everyone, but at Westwood we don't want to show our scars. We act like everything is ok. We are like a family where the Mom has cancer and no one wants to admit it.”
- “How can we move forward if expectations are that we never change? I expect change.”

- **AVOID** Verbatim Responses:
 - “fear of change ...”
 - “Poor change management that leaves people alienated and distressed.”
 - “I would like to see our church avoid people pleasing and being led by the Holy Spirit instead of being led by our financial supporters, personal traditions, and old beliefs about how church should look like to them. We should avoid stuck ideas...”
 - “The church needs to avoid complacency, and not being willing to change and push the boundaries to pursue God’s calling. Break out of the comfort ‘bubble.’”
 - “Long time members needing to have things their way and not changing.”
 - “Protecting ‘sacred cows’ like preferences in how we worship.”
- **ACHIEVE** Verbatim Responses:
 - “I would like to see our church continue to grow with the times and continue to break out of old traditional patterns and ideas.”
 - “People who accept that everything won’t always go their way, and that we have to adapt to it, while still obeying God through it all.”

Branch Issue #5: The Lack of a Unifying and Compelling Vision

There is a distinct lack of vision, plans, and goals at Westwood. Notice in the chart below that only 37% of the survey respondents indicate that they understand the vision, plans, and goals of the church (22% disagree and 41% are not sure) and only 36% indicate that they agree. This is an extremely serious issue!



The minimum acceptable “understand” score for a vital church is 70% or greater. All Tenure Groups and nearly all Generational Groups seem to currently lack an

“understanding” of the church’s vision, plans, and goals. Gen Zers (75%) are the outliers on this question. Even the Elders (40%) and the Staff (41%) agree that they do not understand.

The minimum essential for a church to be doing ministry well is that the church shares a clear and compelling vision that motivates the membership to sacrifice in order to accomplish that vision. At the present time, no such unifying and compelling vision exists. For Westwood to flourish again, you will need to be restrained to a fresh and powerful vision (see Pro 29:18, NASB).

Verbatim Responses:

- “Decisions are never done from vision. We always back into it.”
- "The congregation has been blaming the staff & elders and the staff & elders have been blaming the congregation."
- “If the Lord was looking at us, I think He would say that there is lukewarmness that has seeped in.”

ACHIEVE Verbatim Response:

- “Humble service to one another and our community born out of a true love for Jesus (as opposed to jockeying for power or to have our voice heard).”

Concluding Thoughts Related to the Rationale

There is no other way to say it—Westwood is currently in *grave danger*. The threat is real. Your substantial unresolved conflict, your lack of acceptance and belonging, your weak evangelism, your resistance to change, and the lack of a unifying and compelling vision are all indicators that many of you, quite possibly, see Westwood as your church and not God’s church. It seems you have chosen your comfort over your calling and you are in jeopardy of succumbing to the death throes of aging out and institutionalization. The data affirms this, and these Branch Issues point to the **taproot issue**:

You acknowledge, confess, and profess Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace, but you are not exhibiting the peace of God or the practice of peacemaking.

Recommendations: The MAP

To be refreshed and revitalized will require serious commitment and sacrifice. Stated simply, at Westwood you desperately need to take the time to integrate your head knowledge with what every heart longs for—a growing intimacy with God and one another through an increased understanding of the deep implications of the gospel to redeem and shape all parts of your lives. Another way to say this is, when Doctrine (knowledge) and Doxology (worship) are united, we experience God.⁴ It is with this in mind that we make the following nine recommendations to address the issues that are currently preventing Westwood from flourishing:

Recommendation #1: Restore Peace and Repair Relationships

Become *peacemakers* (Matt 5:9), learning the skills of biblical conflict resolution beginning today. Conventional wisdom seeks to convince us that it is better to keep peace than to make peace. Peacekeeping creates a false peace and ensures that real issues, real concerns, and real problems are not dealt with.

Conflict is inevitable and is an instrument God uses to develop qualities in our lives that aren't developed any other way. When faced with conflicts we must ask, "What is God trying to teach me?" In Acts 6:1-7 church conflict was used by God to release a greater number of leaders into the fledgling church and bring to light a grievous sin (in their case, it was racism). Conflict becomes redemptive when it highlights areas of needed growth and brings clarity to God's sanctifying plan for our personal lives and for our church.

- Begin to practice straightforward biblical conflict resolution steps like:
 - Focus your efforts on identifying and owning the log/s in your own eye before you attempt to remove the speck in another's (Matt. 7:5).
 - Commit to making things right when you've been offended by someone or offended someone—proactively seek to be reconciled (Matt. 5:23-24).
 - Learn how to speak the truth in love to one another (Eph. 4:15).
 - Restore your brother or sister with graceful gentleness (Gal. 6:2).

- Take personal responsibility for your own growth and development as a follower of Jesus. Church-wide renewal begins with personal renewal and personal renewal begins with a humble acknowledgement of our need for God's grace and mercy to do IN us and THROUGH us what we cannot do on our own.

⁴ This is what is happening in the doxologies of Paul, Peter, and John in Eph 1:3-14; 1 Pet 1:3-9; 1 Jn 3. We experience each one of them experiencing God.

- Cultivate a lifestyle of repentance. Martin Luther said, “The whole life of believers should be repentance.”⁵ While this may appear to be paradoxical, it becomes the unlikely route to a deep and lasting joy.
- Read, reflect on, and put into practice:
 - James 4:6-12. Gospel-driven humility will be manifest in us as we acknowledge and turn from our sins.
 - The Beatitudes (Mat 5:3-10). There is an emptying and then a filling. The journey begins with humbly owning our own poverty of spirit, mourning over brokenness and sin, becoming humble learners. As we are emptied, a hunger and thirst for righteous begins to fill our hungry souls—and then mercy, purity, peace, and persecution are added to our lives.
- Seek to understand the deeper issues at work beneath the conflicts you are experiencing at Westwood. Family of origin issues⁶ can deeply affect our ability to relate in healthy ways to others, which underscores our need for grace-empowered transformation. When a system [either familial or organizational] is confused, deceptive, and/or unable to deal with situations in a straightforward manner, every problem is allowed to continue to the point of crisis.”⁷ The ongoing conflicts at Westwood need to be viewed and addressed with this in mind.
- Whatever we sweep under the rug stays there and will eventually erupt into serious conflict. It appears that Westwood, for much of the past five decades, has endured a peacekeeping mentality (i.e., conflict avoidance) that has consistently erupted into serious church-wide conflicts. It is time to put a stop to these unhealthy and ungodly patterns.

Therefore:

- Invite the whole congregation to read *Making Peace: Growing Redemptive Community* by Jim Van Yperen. This practical book will provide Westwood with

⁵ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/repentance-first-last/>

⁶ Family of origin issues may include having grown up in an alcoholic or chemically dependent family system, witnessing domestic violence, having lost a parent through death, having an absent parent, being adopted, being a child of divorced parents, or having had step-family issues, being a survivor of childhood neglect or emotional/physical/sexual abuse, having a parent who was a ragger or a workaholic, growing up in a family system plagued with eating disorders, having had a mentally ill parent or a sex-addicted parent, or having been brought up with a “Christian” legalistic or moralistic orientation that somehow causes spiritual and emotional conflicts in adulthood. Yes, you are a new creature (2 Cor 5:17), yet these are things we bring into our Christian experience that need to be embraced and processed biblically (see Mal 3:2-3).

⁷ *The Addictive Organization*, Anne Wilson Schaefer, HarperOne: 1990.

common language, definitions, and context for understanding and applying healthy and biblical conflict resolution skills from a systemic viewpoint.

- Additional resources include:
 - *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* by Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane. (Additional titles from these two include Lane's, *How People Change* and Tripp's, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*.)
 - *True Faced: Trust God and Others with Who You Really Are* by Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch.
 - *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande.
- Many may find *The Grace of Repentance* by Sinclair Ferguson to be helpful as well.
- For church leaders or mental health professionals, four (more scholarly) authors would be helpful regarding congregational and family systems:
 - Ron Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*.
 - Peter Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*.
 - Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*.
 - Brian Borgman, *Feelings and Faith: Cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian Life*.
 - Perhaps 2-3 of these books could be assigned to an interested leader or staff member who could then craft a review toward initiating a proposal for how Westwood could identify dysfunctional patterns and make emotional system adjustments.

Verbatim Responses:

- "Grow up – humility authentic Christianity, People need to own their own issues with each other."
- "I'm worried about just plugging the hole. I want to see restoration."
- "We try to program people into what God is calling them to do, into doing what we want them to do."
- "This process is painful but I'm hopeful. We just need to be open to working on hard communication issues and have the Lord help us work through them."
- ACHIEVE Verbatim Response: "A Biblical approach in expressing disagreements."

Recommendation #2: Recognize and Navigate Your Complicated Grief

There have been many changes and losses at Westwood, including pastoral transitions, ongoing conflict, friends (and family?) who have left the church—as well as the effects of what we have all been through in 2020, including the pandemic, economic recession, job loss, racial unrest, and political polarization. An important aspect of this current transition season will be to intentionally process your significant losses and grief (2 Cor. 1:3-4; 1 Thess. 4:17-18).

In his classic book *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis wrote about grappling with the pangs of grief after the death of his wife: “Grief still feels like fear. Perhaps, more strictly, like suspense. Or like waiting; just hanging about waiting for something to happen. It gives life a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn’t seem worth starting anything.”⁸

Humbly embrace your grief as a pathway to hope and growth, viewing it as an opportunity to know God and one another better. King David is famous for being a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), yet we sometimes fail to recognize how he repeatedly paid attention to grief, loss, and disappointment. As King David led Israel to God through acknowledging his own sins and experiences of grief and loss. Seek to grasp the rich biblical theology of loss, both for your own personal lives, the church as a whole, and for those who have yet to be enfolded into Westwood.

The “stages” of grief are not neat and tidy sequential steps⁹ but a messy relational process of moving through hurt to holy hope in Jesus Christ. The fruit of moving through this transformational process is that you will reflect Jesus more because He was, “*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (Is 53:3). For you to move forward as individuals, couples, families, and as a church, you must fully embrace your grief and loss. We don’t go around grief to get to Jesus, we go through grief to get to Jesus. The good news is that we go through grief “*with Him at [our] right hand*” (Ps 16:8). This is a “*grace disguised*”¹⁰ opportunity for Westwood.

Therefore, read *God’s Healing for Life’s Losses* by Robert Kellemen. The book includes two application/discussion guides for individual or group study. This may also lead to launching a new *GriefShare* ministry at Westwood to serve the needs of congregants as well as attract unchurched people who are grieving significant loss.

⁸ 1963:33.

⁹ *VitalChurch* finds the secular model of grief, which consists of moving from denial, to anger, to bargaining, through depression, and, finally, to acceptance to be fundamentally flawed and shallow.

¹⁰ Adapted from a book by the same name, written by Jerry Sittser (Zondervan 2004).

Verbatim Responses:

- "We need to adjust to a new pastor. Pastor Lee is not coming back. It's time to accept a new man. We need to grow up."
- "The Holy Spirit is saying, "I AM with you, I hurt for you, I want to guide you into restoration." God is grieved. Satan is doing a number over here. But in the midst of it, God has a plan for us to come out stronger and be a better testimony than what we were."
- "People loved Pastor Lee so much whatever the new guy did there would have been issues."

Recommendation #3: Reorder Your Priorities

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reduces the entire Old Testament to two commandments in Matthew 22:37-40:

"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

The order of these two great commandments is important. Jesus did not teach that in order to be in a loving relationship with God, His disciples must first love their neighbors. He taught instead that the *"great and first commandment"* is to love God with one's entire being, and elsewhere Scripture makes clear that this love for God is possible only because God loved us first (1 John 4:19; see also Rom 5:8). A loving commitment to God, initiated by God Himself, results in love for one's neighbor. When we love God, we love what and whom He loves—because, out of gratitude, we desire to please and honor Him.¹¹

Additionally, we find the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The disciples of Jesus have been commissioned to make additional disciples of all people groups (v. 19). Matthew has shown throughout his Gospel that the kingdom of God

¹¹ Adapted from *Gospel Transformation Bible Study Notes* (Edited by Bryan Chapell), Matthew 22:34-40.

crosses all social and ethnic boundaries (1:3, 5; 2:1–12; 4:15; 8:1–13; 9:9–13; 12:38–42; 15:21–39).

Disciple making involves two basic tasks, the first is baptizing and the second is teaching.

- Water baptism is a repentant and wholehearted response to the proclamation of the gospel of God’s kingdom having been established on the earth (Matt. 3:6, 11)¹² and symbolizes the inward cleansing that God effects when people turn from their sins and turn in faith to God for forgiveness of their sins (3:14–15; see also Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3; 1 Pet. 3:21).
- “Teaching” involves instructing people to follow Jesus’ commandments concerning how God wants His people to live. These commandments primarily refer back to the two Great Commandments in Matthew 22.

Again, the order of these two foundational elements of discipleship is important. People do not become disciples of Jesus by obeying His commandments in order to win His acceptance. We have His acceptance as a free gift, as we come to Him in faith (Rom. 3:21–22, 24; 5:1–2). What we see as the New Testament unfolds is the disciples of Jesus joyfully doing what Jesus has commanded them to do, which is the result of God’s transforming their hearts, they joyfully proclaim the gospel (Rom. 6:12–14), empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).¹³

As we step back and look afresh at Matthew’s Gospel, we see both a **priority** and a **process**.

- First and foremost, we are to love God—with all of our heart, soul, and mind.
- Second, we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

We must ask, “Who is our neighbor?” The biblical answer is the lost, poor, sick, brokenhearted, and trafficked people who (primarily) live within a 20-mile radius of the Westwood campus.

The first question of the Westminster Shorter Confession (1647) asks, “What is the chief end of man?” Their studied response is: “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” John Piper would amend that to, “glorify God, BY enjoying Him forever...” Piper also states in his seminal book, *The Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, that, “missions exist because worship doesn’t.”¹⁴ What the Westminster

¹² Having already been established by Jesus’ first coming, the Kingdom will be consummated at His second coming.

¹³ Adapted from *Gospel Transformation Bible Study Notes* (Edited by Bryan Chapell), Matthew 28:18–20.

¹⁴ Baker Books 1993/2003: 17.

Confession and Piper and are saying is that worship is the ultimate goal of the Church. The purpose of evangelism is to work with the Holy Spirit in order to change the worshipers of false gods into worshipers of the one true God.

When all is said and done, it is worship that fuels our evangelistic zeal that longs for lost and broken people to be awakened to the beauty and majesty of the gospel. The ultimate purpose of the Church is to worship God in gratitude for His ever-active mercy and saving grace. The fruit, or overflow, of loving God and loving our neighbors is the Great Commission (see Jn. 7:38). This is the missional charge of every Bible believing church.

To this end your ongoing worship war must end. The infighting, the anger, the unholy passion for preferences over people is hindering Westwood's celebration of the Savior—as well as your evangelistic endeavors. Locate your concerns and issues about style of worship in accordance with a studied biblical theology of worship aimed at honoring God, edifying the saints, AND engaging unbelievers. Set all personal preferences aside for the sake of the greater good. The key to praising Christ is prizing Christ above all else. Read and conduct church-wide dialogue on Tim Keller's essay [Evangelistic Worship](#)¹⁵, aiming for worship to be rooted in orthodox theologically, to edify the saints, as well as to be highly evangelistic. Keep in mind that adjustments will need to be made in the light of Olympia being a very different environment than Manhattan, NYC, even though both are highly secular.

Once again, make Jesus Christ your greatest hope and boast, your deepest longing and delight, and your most passionate song and message. During this transition season, reevaluate all ministries in the light of actively pursuing the Great Commandment as the fuel for engaging the Great Commission. By God's empowering grace, seek to engage the three essentials well: Love God, Love People, and Make Disciples.

Verbatim Responses:

- "Love requires action. You can't just go to church and go to bible study; you have to serve people."
- "The compass has not been straight for the leaders"
- "They teach you the foundations of the gospel and how you can get plugged in. But for training and equipping, I don't know."
- "I've experienced communication issues, where expectations aren't clearly communicated, teams get protective of their part, and aren't open to collaboration. We're not on the same page, we have separate agendas, which breeds suspicions."

¹⁵ <https://redeemercitytocity.com/articles-stories/evangelistic-worship>

There's been a lack of unity among the staff heads who were not talking, and that bred suspicion down the line.”

- ACHIEVE Verbatim Response: “The worship of God as the primary focus of the church!!”

Recommendation #4: Re-Tool Ministries

Rekindle authentic biblical fellowship through retooling your Welcome/Assimilation Strategy, Discipleship Pathway, and Small Group Ministry.

First and foremost, Westwood needs to repent of your inaccessibility to people who are in need of fellowship and evangelism. Open your hearts and open your fellowship circles to those who seek greater acceptance and belonging—*invite people in*.

- **Welcome/Assimilation** connects people to your church through relationships—so a church that is proactive about assimilation will also be well on their way to growing strong disciples. A robust assimilation ministry begins with a person's (or family's) first visit to Westwood and ends when that person (or family) becomes deeply connected to and engaged within the church. Assimilation includes four basic processes:
 - Gracious, non-judgmental, but not overbearing hospitality. There is both passive and active hospitality. Passive hospitality includes excellent signage that often includes multiple signs and/or video monitors, while active hospitality involves warmhearted greeters. Boomers and Silents are used to exuberant and animated greeters, while Gen Xers, Millennials, and Gen Zers generally appreciate a more subdued greeting.
 - Patient and gentle information gathering. How to harvest appropriate information in order to follow-up can be tricky. Boomers and Silents are used to filling out cards but younger people are much more comfortable texting. Some churches provide iPads to Greeters to process follow-up information right on the spot. Information from visiting families who sign their kids into Sunday School must be merged into a database of other weekend guest attenders.
 - Non-obtrusive follow-up and follow through is an intentional ongoing process that shows a church genuinely cares. More and more people would rather receive a text or email instead of a phone call or a letter. Having said that, all avenues of follow-up should be explored.
 - Deep and meaningful connection opportunities are essential. Churches can confuse attendance with connection. People who feel intrinsically connected

to their church—that they are valued and that they matter—are people ready to delve deeper into their relationship with Christ.

- Deep and meaningful connection is the beginning of an effective **discipleship pathway**. Church is not only the place for Christians to simply be “fed,” but it is to be a sanctuary to find rest, church is also a hospital where broken people can be healed, and an army where people can be equipped to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12). It is time for Westwood to move from milk to meat (1 Cor. 3:2-6) by retooling a discipleship pathway that incorporates head knowledge with passionate activity such that you, “*prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves*” (James 1:22, NASB).
- Re-tool your **small group ministry** that disciples and builds authentic community at Westwood. One author states, “A real church aims toward spiritual community where souls connect, where shame weakens, where sin surfaces, where failure meets grace, where irritations soften, where holy desire grows.”¹⁶ In the book of Acts, we see that the church grew both in large groups and in small groups (Acts 2:41-45). As stated above, “church” is typically associated with a meeting on Sunday mornings (which has been hampered in the current COVID climate), yet large group settings fail to allow a congregation to practice the many *one another* commands in the New Testament (which might be a great sermon series!). Now is the time to focus on building and multiplying small groups that either meet in person or online. If you haven’t already, you will find that effective small groups can have participants that are present with one another as well having people join online. Discipleship is best carried out in the context of close intimate relationships that foster genuine accountability. Begin afresh to develop this kind of authentic and transparent biblical community where people can share their lives together—at whatever stage people are at in following Christ. Create a climate where sinners are safe, but sin is not. Two books that will be especially helpful are: *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This book is an excellent introduction to developing biblical community. And *Hearers and Doers: A Pastor's Guide to Making Disciples Through Scripture* (2019) by Kevin J. Vanhoozer. *Hearers and Doers*’ doctrinal approach to discipleship returns to the heart of the Great Commission, helping believers integrate objective truth with subjective action.

This recommendation is not aimed at the adult Sunday School classes. While theological education is essential and should be expanded in due time at

¹⁶ Larry Crabb. *Real Church*, Thomas Nelson 2009:152.

Westwood, the above recommendation is for the multiplication of groups that fit into the Acts 2:42-47 category, which is difficult to accomplish in an hour on Sunday.

Meaningful connections to a church begin with building meaningful relationships. Proactively helping people connect at progressively deeper levels creates opportunities for responsibility as well as ownership. When people feel that their church is intimately invested in them, they are more likely to sacrificially invest in their church—becoming members, givers, servers and volunteers. Every church—of every size—must have processes in place to ensure that no one gets lost, left out, or overlooked.

Verbatim Responses:

- “Discipleship is not on our radar at all.”
- “We are good at doing our duty, but not good at training people to work in their gifting.”
- ACHIEVE Verbatim Responses:
 - “A stronger sense of community - close the division.”
 - “Expansion and more done to create small groups and integrate people.”
 - “I would like to see a discipleship program develop.”
 - “Strengthen ministries that promote the spiritual growth and health of those in the church”
 - “a) More emphasis on discipleship of all members in the process of sanctification. b) Easily accessed, non-judgmental biblical counseling within the church for those who are hurting/struggling with a particular sin. c) The disciplined Christian who is glorifying God in their personal relationship with Him and growing in sanctification will then be an effective witness to those outside the church. d) A growing love for Christ and for each other. e) A friendly church where people are real with each other—known in the community as the ‘church that loves.’”

Recommendation #5: Re-Consider How You Will Join the Mission of God.

Dealing successfully with your worship infighting will certainly encourage congregants to once again become “inviters and includers.” Having said that, Christian community is ultimately about God’s glory being displayed IN and THROUGH the church. Community, however, is not the final destination; it is the means with which the church joins Jesus to live on mission (see Jn. 13:35 and Matt 28:19). While acknowledging the three Missional Community Groups and a basic congregational understanding of Oikos Evangelism, the data and input sessions would strongly suggest that Westwood is currently an inward focused church. During this transition season, intensify church-wide efforts to connect

with unchurched family, friends, and acquaintances in the marketplace as well as in neighborhoods. Unchurched and de-churched people are longing to connect with authentic and transparent people—especially in this COVID season. Be honest about your faults and failures as a church. Seek to become genuine and vulnerable. Invite people on this journey with you.

A missionary learns about the people and lifestyle preferences of those s/he is trying to reach with the gospel. Moreover, a missionary incarnates the gospel within that culture or lifestyle group. This requires humility and the sacrifice of personal preferences to serve this group in receiving the gospel. New structures and forms are sorely needed at Westwood.

Read *Center Church* by Tim Keller and prayerfully implement the following five features of a missional church:

- Share the gospel in the vernacular of the culture. That is avoiding we/them language, or tribal terminology, and when meeting in public, assumes that unchurched people are present.
- Contextualize the gospel by showing that the secular culture’s deepest desires are met only in Christ.
- Train and send people out into public life so that on their jobs, and in neighborhoods, they live out distinctly kingdom values with convictional civility.
- Live out your faith in a counter cultural Christian context that shows the culture how radically different society is with regards to money, sex, and power, law, justice, etc.
- Seeks the peace and prosperity of the region that it’s part of—even if that city, town, or county is distinctly secular – *“for in its welfare you will have welfare”* (Jer. 29:7).

Verbatim Responses:

- “I want to see leaders peacefully working together towards that common goal, and that we’re serving the needs of those outside the church. To do that I think we need to work with active local ministries, build up our lay leaders, and enable them with resources and support.”
- “I envision a Westwood that is growing in volunteer numbers, where people are living out their faith and being encouraged by the Body, where the money priority is helping people grow in service and how to use their gifts and talents.”
- ACHIEVE Verbatim Responses:

- “Being able to build a close relationship with God and carry it out into the community. Acceptances of differences, building on forgiveness.”
- “I would like to see our church more actively involved in our community needs. I don't feel like our church has personal resources and direction for the people in our community.”
- “I would like to see Westwood take a huge role in leadership and influence in the greater Olympia area where believers and non-believers pause and take a look and listen to the positive role we can have in our community.”
- “Be involved in the community...not only serving people in need but involved in community affairs ... When people have a personal relationship with JC - the more missionary minded they become. I volunteer with several organizations rubbing shoulders with people who are not Christians. There are often times that I can share the gospel.”

Recommendation #6: Re/Discover Who You Are in Christ and Initiate a Church-Wide Re-Focusing Process to Reaffirm Westwood’s Identity.

Westwood currently lacks a clear and compelling vision. The data along with the input sessions strongly suggests that Westwood is in need of a rekindled encounter with Jesus Christ. As stated above, when good Doctrine (knowledge) and passionate Doxology (worship) converge people will experience God. In order to SHOW Christ, there is the need to SEE Christ afresh for who He really is. The opportunity before you is to intentionally re-commit, re-focus, and re-build Westwood’s hope and identity around the Person of Jesus Christ. One of the best ways to initiate a fresh encounter with Christ is to humble yourselves and repent (see below).

Teach, preach, and focus on your identity in Christ.

When hearts are re/awakened to Christ and the power of the gospel, you will have fresh encounters with Him (think of John encountering the risen Christ in Rev 1) and you will also see more clearly who you are “*in Him*,” which is the most common New Testament description of a follower of Jesus. The expressions “*in Christ*,” “*in the Lord*,” “*in Him*,” or their equivalency, occur 164 times in the letters of Paul alone, and are indispensable to the understanding of the effects of the gospel. Consider this: If you are “*in Christ*” all that is true of Christ is now true of you. What would be different about Westwood if you (all) began to truly embrace this and walk in this?

The late pastor, theologian, and missiologist John Stott wrote, “To be ‘*in Christ*’ is to find personal fulfillment, to enjoy brotherly unity, and to experience a radical transformation. Only then can we become the world’s salt and light, sharing the good news with others,

making an impact on society, and above everything else seeking to bring honor and glory to his wonderful Name.”¹⁷

We would certainly suggest a sermon series through the book of Ephesians and/or Romans. Book recommendations include *Union with Christ* by Rankin Wilbourne and *Who Am I?: Identity in Christ* by Jerry Bridges.

Develop and Implement A Church-Wide Re-Focusing Process¹⁸

Appoint a “Re-Focusing Team” made up of 10-12 godly men and women who possess a heart and desire for Westwood to be “re-focused” on your missionary calling to Olympia and beyond. This can (also) become an effective leadership training cohort. Seek to have (at least) 50% be under the age of 45. The team members should possess administrative capacity as well as leadership potential to plan and implement the Re-Focusing Process. This will take the pressure off the staff to have to add more all-church events to their plate. And obviously, creativity will need to be employed to pull off all church events in the COVID context. The goal is to look back at the successes and failures of Westwood, celebrate your successes, learn from your mistakes, identify and embrace your current reality, and begin seeking the Lord for His intended future. The more you accomplish in this transition season the higher caliber of pastor you will attract when it’s time to conduct a search.

Take the next several months with as many people from Westwood who are willing and work through the following seven re-focusing questions.

- **Who has God shaped us to be?** What are the most significant events in our past—both positive and difficult—and how have they shaped you as a church? Talk about your strengths, your weaknesses, and significant transitions in the life of your church. This will also help you face the grief, pain, and/or anger over the traumas of the past.
- **Why do we exist as a church?** Reaffirm what the Bible says about biblical mission. Ask, “What next steps are needed?”
- **Where is God leading us in the future?** Generate a Vision Statement. A Mission Statement describes “What we will do?” while a Vision Statement describes “How, specifically, we will accomplish it.”
- **Whom has God called us to reach?** Redefine Westwood’s ministry focus for the future. Who will you reach?

¹⁷ John R.W. Stott. *In Christ: The Meaning and Implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*. Address given in 1983 at the Leadership Luncheon following the National Prayer Breakfast, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ *VitalChurch* has significant resources and trainers to either coach or lead a ReFocusing Process.

- **Which ministry model best facilitates our vision?** Redefine/Reaffirm Westwood’s ministry model as needed to focus outward. Usually this leans heavily on some form of small group ministry model.
- **How will we accomplish our vision?** Set 3-5 “big hairy audacious” [ministry] goals.”¹⁹
- **What is our plan for ministry for the next 2-3 years?** Develop a strategic map. (A strategic map is more flexible than a strategic plan.)

Verbatim Responses:

- "If we heal together, we will obtain a vision together."
- “We stepped back from wanting to be used by God to wanting to be fed and nurtured.”
- AVOID: “A future filled with looking back. We must ask the next generation what they need to encounter God, and not pander to those that would try and keep things the way they were.”
- ACHIEVE: “Unity behind a common vision for our church and a desire by the church body to support and trust the church leadership (Staff and Elders) to lead our church in the direction God wants us to go.”

Recommendation #7: Re-Align Leadership (Three aspects)

There is a need to continue to strengthen the confidence in leadership at Westwood, reengineer your governance model, and staff an Intentional Interim Pastor.

- **Continue to strengthen the confidence in leadership.** Currently only 56% of the survey respondents believe the current Elders have the ability to lead the church into the future. Any score under 70% is cause for concern. The congregation seems to be increasingly supportive of the current Elders (see verbatim responses below). With that being said, strong and effective leadership starts with clearly discerning God’s will for this congregation and continuing to recruit and train biblical leaders. Good hearts and intentions are not adequate criteria for serving in these roles. Become the “*sons of Issachar...who understood the times, with knowledge of what [Westwood] should do*” (1 Chr. 12:32). To restore this confidence, leaders need, at a minimum, to:

¹⁹ BHAG is a concept developed in the book *Built to Last* by Jim Collins. A BHAG is short for “Big Hairy Audacious Goal”) and is a powerful way to stimulate progress. The best BHAGs require both building for the long term AND exuding a relentless sense of urgency: What do we need to do today, tomorrow, and the next day achieve our BHAGs?

- Listen well to the heart cries of members and attenders and take seriously their biblical concerns.
- Continue to clearly, regularly, and creatively communicate with members both the *what* and more importantly, the *why* of ministry decisions.
- The congregation at Westwood is asking the leaders to deal with the conflict “between specific people or groups” (32%) and the “poor communication” (30%).
- One of the most important subjects’ members need in order to maintain leader confidence is an explanation and accounting of how the monies are be spent.

When trust is lost it can be difficult to regain. The opposite of mistrust is not trust, but care. Continuing to grow the credibility and trust of the Elders in their roles of casting a godly vision, teaching sound doctrine, shepherding the flock, administering church discipline, and oversight of budget assumptions are vital.

- **Reengineer your governance model and update the bylaws.** During this transition season in preparation for calling a permanent pastor, the Elders, Staff, and other key Lay Leaders should read *Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence* (2005), by Aubrey Malphurs. Seek to implement Policy Governance (Carver Model) and train the church to recognize the authority of the Elders and for the Elders to be the servant-leaders required in Scripture. Church polity, leadership qualifications, tenure, nomination process, means of congregational input, and a detailed grievance procedure should all be recast and clarified. Organize your ministries by ministry teams that are empowered to make most of the decisions related to the implementation of their respective ministries within general policies determined by the Eldership. Delegate the management of all staff and operations to the Lead Pastor who is accountable to the Eldership, which oversees general church policy, doctrine, biblical discipline, budget assumptions, and the legal responsibilities of the corporation. The Eldership, which includes the Lead Pastor, forms a plurality of leaders sharing as overseers of the congregation. All are charged with the responsibility to defend correct doctrine and refute those who contradict it (however, special honor is given to he who excels in preaching and teaching as 1 Tim 5:17-19 indicates).
- **Staff an Intentional Interim Pastor (IIP).** Again, the more you accomplish in this transition season, the higher quality of pastor (or candidates) you will attract. Westwood needs to reaffirm your values, mission, and vision in order to re/affirm who you are before you call a new Lead Pastor.

Through the IIP hold staff and leaders accountable for the health and fruitfulness of each area of ministry. The IIP at Westwood cannot be expected to carry out all the duties of a normal pastor and will focus instead on:

- Resolving any unresolved conflict.
- Updating and developing systems, policies, and procedures.
- Making polity and governance changes with the input of the Elders, Staff, the Transition Team, and the congregation—through a study of the Scriptures with recommended companion books listed in this report.
- Equipping the Staff, Elders, Transition Team, and other lay leaders for the work of ministry.
- Preparing sermons and sermon series that explore Scripture in ways that speak directly to the current revealed, Holy Spirit breathed needs of Westwood, and the unchurched population that surrounds your campus.
- Westwood elders, staff, ministry leaders, members, and attendees will be released to minister to one another in those ways the IIP cannot.
- At the appropriate time the IIP coach a Search Team to identify the next Lead Pastor of Westwood.

Verbatim Responses:

- “Some of the former elders gave and gave and gave. They tried hard to resolve conflict related to the senior pastor. But they weren’t treated well.”
- “There is a lack of trust. If there is anything at Westwood, there is a lack of trust in the leadership” (Context of quote is the Congregation trusting the leadership).
- "I applaud our current elder board on the current communication being given."
- "The current elders are working very hard..."
- "The current communication is night and day better than it's been in 17 years."
- “The new elders are doing a good job, working for transparency, they’ve apologized for what has happened. I’ve been approached by two elders who want to understand the issues more. They send weekly email updates.”
- “We need to get an intentional interim pastor immediately to show some stability. We need the stability as a basis for a process of asking and giving forgiveness, showing grace, and to put the hurts of the past behind us by the help of the Holy Spirit.”
- “Westwood’s leadership development is very poor.”
- AVOID Verbatim Response: “We need better, more detailed communication around forward looking plans for the church. The current elders appear to be focused on this.”

Recommendation #8: Repent

Take a deep look inside yourselves through entering a season of repentance, prayer, and fasting—seeking God’s face for a fresh infusion of God’s grace, as well as seeking His vision and purpose for the next ministry season at Westwood. This will culminate with a time of *Sacred Assembly*²⁰ where you formally repent of and confess the failures of the church and return anew to God and His purposes.

- This should go well beyond regularly scheduled prayer meeting/s and involve prayer in people’s homes, individual and corporate fasting, repentance, and concerts of prayer with extended worship.
- Humble yourselves before Christ. Surrender completely to Christ and receive His grace.
- Change business as usual. Avoiding inevitable conflict, fighting over personal preferences and traditions, and being resistant to change are not what it means to worship Jesus.
- In preparation for this *Sacred Assembly*, each attendee at Westwood must willingly own his, or her, part of the current weaknesses and dysfunctions and make things right with brothers and sisters—both inside and outside the church. Start today by committing to biblical reconciliation.

VitalChurch would adamantly assert that every church (and every person) has a collection of sins and sinful patterns that require active and ongoing repentance. We do not believe that you should find a call to repent demoralizing, we would like you to find it to be liberating and transforming—as did Paul as he leads us from the end of Romans 7 into Romans 8 (see Rom. 7:14-8:1).

Verbatim Responses:

- "If we were a broken people who had a revival in our midst it would change everything."

²⁰ Plan a time of *Sacred Assembly* where you confess the failures of the church and return anew to God and His purposes. (Some translations render it *Solemn Assembly*.) In times of severe struggle and pain a church may have no recourse but to cry out to God in humility and repentance. Those times of corporate repentance and confession are known as a Sacred Assembly. The term and concept of Sacred Assembly is used several times in Scripture. In Leviticus 23, each feast of Israel was to be a sacred assembly (23:2); each Sabbath was to be a sacred assembly (23:3). (Note also 23:7, 8, 21, 24, and 35.) The concept is further developed by the OT prophet Joel and from the book of Nehemiah. Joel describes a situation where the nation finds itself at odds with God because of their sin. Nehemiah 9:3-38 is an example of a Sacred Assembly. Though the term is not used, the concepts are clearly articulated. Revelation 2-3 could be described as a NT call for a Sacred Assembly.

- "We need to cut the distractions, cling to the Word. We've lost the plot. We've dishonored the Lord. The Holy Spirit can help us heal, let's ask Him what we can learn from this."
- "I am continuing to go but my heart is not in it anymore because things have not been dealt with well and still are not being dealt with well."
- "We need to evaluate, but mostly we need to be praying."

Recommendation #9: Recognize the Need to Prayerfully and Creatively Plan Ahead for Post-COVID Ministry.

It has been said that because of the pandemic “every organization is now a start-up organization.”²¹ The pandemic is not just something for leaders to “get through” and then return to normalcy, it will change the way that churches hold services, as well as conduct effective outreach, make disciples, and develop leaders. Due to the complex and interconnected nature of our culture and economy, the majority of organizations (including churches) are effectively in a start-up mode—whether we like it or not.

This is both good news and bad news. Many of the underlying assumptions that have sustained organizations in the past are simply no longer true. The upside of our (hopefully) post-COVID reality is that unchurched people are earnestly asking the important questions of life. The Church must seek to mobilize by creatively making ourselves available to love, serve, and listen to their longings, which will (eventually) create opportunities to share the gospel.

One example is that online ALPHA classes, in some places, are attracting hundreds of people who are more comfortable interacting from the safety of their living room than they would going to a church building or a stranger’s home.

The creative potential for touching the lives of people is unparalleled right now—but as the footnoted article states, paradoxically this creativity will only be fully available to us if we also make space for grief and lament. We as the Church need to process our grief and lament. We also need to let our unchurched friends, family, and acquaintances grieve and lament too—even if they don’t know they need it.

Verbatim Response: “I know a lot of parents experiencing fear in the pandemic. I would hope we would be church reaching families to know the truth.”

²¹ There will be countless articles and books written to address the post-COVID new realities and opportunities for church. *VitalChurch* would suggest you proceed with creative caution as you prepare your church for the future. Here is a good place to begin: <https://journal.praxislabs.org/leading-beyond-the-blizzard-why-every-organization-is-now-a-startup-b7f32fb278ff>

Do you want revival Westwood?

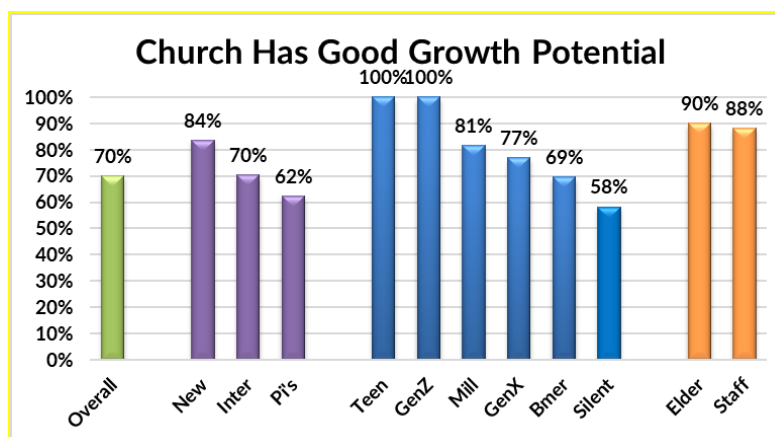
James Burns, in his book *Revival, Their Laws & Leaders*,²² asks the question: Do we want a revival? Do we really? And then he answers...

“To the church, a revival means humiliation, a bitter knowledge of unworthiness and an open humiliating confession of sin on the part of her [pastors] and people. It is not the easy and glorious thing many think it to be, who imagine it filled the pews and reinstated the church in power and authority. It comes to scorch before it heals; it comes to [convict] people for their unfaithful witness, for their selfish living, for their neglect of the cross, and to call them to daily renunciation and to a deep and daily consecration. That is why a revival has ever been unpopular with large numbers within the church. Because it says nothing to them of power, or of ease, or of success; it accuses them of sin; it tells them they are dead; it calls them to awake, to renounce the world [system] and to follow Christ.”

Revival means letting go of your preferences, owning your own issues, and consciously and specifically making room in your church for lost and broken people. Are you willing to do this Westwood?

Next Steps:

1. There is hope. Many of you expressed a strong commitment to the future of Westwood in the verbatim responses from both the online survey as well as in the input sessions. Build on this!
2. 84% of the people who began attending Westwood within the last five years say Westwood has good potential for growth along with 100% of the Teens and Gen Zers and 81% of the Millennials (and 70% overall). These are VERY positive data points. Build on this too!!



²² London: Hodder and Stoughton 1909:50.

3. 90% of the current Elders and 88% of the Staff indicated that Leadership Training is welcomed.
4. Learn how to disagree agreeably. Humble, prayerful, convictional dialogue is the way forward.
5. Read the article, *Don't Waste a Crisis* by Dr. Bruce Hopler, Executive Director of Church Strengthening at Converge.
6. Celebrate the strengths that need to be reinforced and built upon.
7. Surrender afresh and let Christ be the Head of His body in Westwood. Repent of your self-focused tendencies. Everyone will need to be openhanded with your personal preferences.
8. Pray, pray, pray, and pray some more.
9. Dialogue with one another regarding this report.
10. Choose to accept the recommendations and with the IIP's help, begin to prioritize and implement the recommendations.
11. The wisest decisions concerning your future will include respect for and preservation of the strength of being firmly rooted in the authority of the Scriptures as well as your relationship with Converge.