

# **Westminster Visioning Team Report**

**Respectfully submitted by the Westminster Visioning Team  
On March 31, 2019**

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## **Introduction:**

The need for a visioning process within Westminster was first realized several years ago by the Facilities Task Force. A consulting architect suggested to the Task Force that before considering any remodel projects, we needed to better define a vision for Westminster -- What purpose will we serve? This visioning effort seeks to answer that question.

**Background.** A Facilities Task Force was convened by Session in 2015 to consider a possible remodel of the Sanctuary and other spaces. However, shortly after it was convened, Westminster was approached by the Capitol Area Development Authority (CADA) with a proposal to develop a housing project in our parking lot. In response, the Facilities Task Force changed its focus. Over the next 18 months, it studied the proposal and produced a report to Session in November 2017 recommending against the CADA project. The recommendation was accepted by Session. The Facilities Task Force then returned to its initial purpose of addressing a possible remodel of our facilities. That inquiry ended in the Spring of 2018 when the Facilities Task Force realized that there was a need to better define a vision for Westminster.

In 2018, Session authorized the employment of Reverend Jim Kitchens to lead a visioning process for Westminster. Pastor Wes Nordman selected seven members from the congregation for inclusion on the Visioning Team. That Team included one member from the Facilities Task Force. Session approved the Team as constituted. The Visioning Team included Marcy Daniels, Marc Narlesky, Tim Hawkins, Deborah MacMillan, Peter Winslow, and Sharyl Stevens. Debbie James was also appointed, but she withdrew from Westminster in December.

The visioning process, as organized and designed by Rev. Kitchens, is a collaborative discernment process carried out by the congregation and led by the Visioning Team. Three congregational meetings, each attended by approximately 100 members of the congregation, were held throughout the Fall.

The first congregational meeting was held on September 23, 2018 and focused on those qualities of Westminster that initially attracted people to the church and kept them coming back. We learned that the top qualities that kept people coming were:

- Family-like community
- Music programs
- Pastor's ministry
- Progressive/inclusive and welcoming attributes
- Opportunities to serve; social justice/action
- Educational opportunities

The second congregational meeting on October 28, 2018 focused on an evaluation of existing programs. Participants were asked the question whether to “keep, improve, drop, or add” the various ministries. As a result the various ministries were ranked. The top ranked ministries were the following:

- Worship/music
- Community outreach/missions
- Education/spiritual formation
- Children and youth ministry
- Pastoral/member care

The third congregational meeting in early December 2018 focused on obtaining congregational input for the future of the church, or as Rev. Kitchens describes, “God-Sized Dreams.” Those dreams consistently touched on several themes:

- Community outreach
- Music
- Spiritual formation
- Further developing our church community

There was also considerable support for the following ideas:

- Helping the homeless
- Advocacy and leadership on social justice issues
- Great sermons
- Diverse programming to attract a variety of people, including more music offerings
- Greater emphasis on children and youth education, including choir and drama

The Visioning Team met in February 2019, and once in March 2019 with Rev. Kitchens to begin the writing process. We were asked to draw on congregational input and reflect on what God was calling us to become. We agreed on several areas of focus. Those areas were identified as follows:

- Our church community
- Community outreach
- Spiritual formation
- Music and arts

From Rev. Kitchens, we learned about the nature of a “provocative proposal,” which is an idea designed to challenge the status quo and provide a pathway forward over the next three to five years. We finished the meeting by doing a group exercise that resulted in an initial draft of four provocative proposals. The Visioning Team met again this March to review, discuss and further refine its provocative proposals.

In our work, we have focused on enhancing the strengths of Westminster. Those strengths were perceived as our sense of community, spiritual formation, and music. In addition, we recognize the need to move those strengths outside our church doors to engage with the larger community. In summary, we need to take our many gifts and share them with the larger community by opening our doors, engaging the congregation and communicating better within and beyond.

## **PROVOCATIVE PROPOSAL: BUILDING COMMUNITY WITHIN**

**Westminster practices community where people are supportive, active, caring and engaged in a fellowship that extends beyond Sunday worship. We reach out and attempt to address needs of everyone within the community.**

**Narrative:** One of the hallmarks of Westminster is that it is a welcoming, caring and inclusive community. This proposal seeks to build on those attributes by engaging our entire community to become more active in building that community sense beyond the worship hour.

**Smart Goal One:** Establish a baseline for congregational participation and increase congregational participation by 20 percent within the year.

### **Implementation:**

1. Survey the congregation to establish a baseline for participation by June 2019.
2. Survey the congregation in June 2020 to compare participation levels using an instrument similar to that used in June 2019.
3. Develop an active social media community where the activities of the church are shared and amplified, using Friends of Westminster, a Facebook group.
  - a. Extend invitations to the community of people who use Westminster, including members and people who attend Music at Noon.
  - b. Encourage staff and other leaders of groups within Westminster to post to the Facebook group page information about their events.
  - c. Appoint several administrators of the Facebook group to monitor postings.
  - d. Maintain a calendar of events
4. Encourage participation in small groups, such as women's circles, Connecting on Wednesday, Bible studies, Kerygma and parishes.
5. Reinvigorate parishes by identifying someone within each parish who is willing to assume the duties of facilitating the parish.
  - a. Assign each new member to a parish.
  - b. Have membership assign a buddy or contact to each new member to assure transition into the community is meeting their needs.

6. Ask the Membership Team and the Deacons to take the lead on driving the implementation, working with a new communication/outreach director.

**Smart Goal Two:** Identify the needs of our community and address those needs on an ongoing basis.

**Implementation:**

1. Annually survey the members of our community to identify needs/interests and attempt to address those needs through program responses.
2. Ask the Membership Team and the Deacons to take the lead in the assessment of needs while working with others to drive programs to meet those needs. This could include programs delivered by Christian Education, the church nurse, and the pastor or retired pastors. In particular, ensure that the needs of those who can no longer attend services are being met.

## **PROVOCATIVE PROPOSAL: COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

**We reach beyond our doors to nourish all with a message of spiritual peace, while providing a beautiful space for community gatherings, and a community resource that educates, advocates and addresses a variety of community needs. We draw on our gifts and join together with others in action.**

**Narrative:** There is a consensus that Westminster needs to do more to engage with the surrounding community both locally and beyond. First, we need to share what is happening inside our doors with the greater community outside our doors. Second, we need to practice our faith by engaging on issues within our community.

**Smart Goal One:** Develop an “omni-channel” approach for church and community engagement in which people can fully connect and engage with the church without needing to be in the physical environment every week. Take an audience centric approach and leverage the ‘content’ that is already a strength of Westminster. This “omni-channel” approach could include:

- a. Weekly podcast or video-cast of sermons
- b. Daily devotion videocast (sign up via text) or reading
- c. Live broadcast of each service (available on Facebook and other social media)
- d. Live broadcast and or videocast of the Wednesday Music at Noon Series
- e. Fundraising efforts for specific community engagements (example: Causes, Network for Good, FirstGiving, etc.)
- f. Community Partnership Calendar of events and online sign up/access

**Smart Goal Two:** Develop a community access building policy in which the church has accessible and open spaces for spiritual meditation and engagement during the day, examples might include:

- a. Yoga for Seniors
- b. Morning meditation and music
- c. Lunch Break meditation
- d. Provide a 'meet up' location for meditation groups  
(<https://www.meetup.com/topics/free-meditation-classes/us/ca/sacramento/>)

**Smart Goal Three:** Develop quarterly neighborhood focused outreach programs that will provide a venue within our "church complex" to engage neighbors. Examples include:

- a. Quarterly yard sale
- b. Outdoor concerts in the afternoons (utilizing patio and the parking lot space)
- c. Family engagement activities like Children's Chalk Art or an Outdoor Art Show

**Smart Goal Four:** Identify one or two social justice needs within the community and organize the congregation to participate in actions that are calculated to have a meaningful impact, whether through advocacy or hands-on action.

#### **Implementation:**

1. Establish a communication working group to work to bring about the communication piece of this proposal.
2. Hire an outreach/communication coordinator within the next six months that would work with the Outreach and Mission group and the Communication group to adopt a plan to better communicate and engage within and outside our community on community issues.
  - a. Define core community outreach projects/strategic engagement plan
  - b. Lead or partner with others in one to three community engagement projects that enable people from our church the opportunity to act together within the community at large to address issues of social justice, such as homelessness or refugees.
3. Retain a consultant in digital media to get us started in establishing a digital presence and develop a group of owners within the church membership to carry forward the initiative.
4. Develop a mobile phone app or online podcast channel (through existing podcast directories - iTunes, Buzzsprout, etc.) for Westminster through which people could access the content of podcasts, videocasts, etc.
5. Make better use of the existing digital sign board by broadcasting to the community with more frequent messages aimed at engaging the attention of the community and promoting our digital presence

## **PROVOCATIVE PROPOSAL: SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND EDUCATION**

**Westminster engages all to join in a spiritual journey to ask and answer the big questions of “Why?” and “For what purpose?” As an inclusive Christian community, we help individuals who have faith or are seeking faith to build a spiritual foundation centered on God’s love for all through the teaching of God’s word and spiritual practices.**

**Narrative:** We are all on a spiritual journey. We are all explorers, pausing from our daily lives to reflect, listen, be moved by the spirit and our sacred text, as we care for each other and share our gratitude as well as our sorrow. We need to encourage all to become explorers in that journey.

**Smart Goal One:** Within six months create an introductory curriculum for Bible study and spiritual practices to be taught annually. Classes would be taught by Pastors, Elders or Deacons.

**Smart Goal Two:** Encourage each member of the congregation to reflect, adopt and share a statement, testimonial, a passage of sacred text, music, or poetry that expresses their faith and describes a path forward.

**Smart Goal Three:** Begin a “Book of the Month or Quarter” club where the group reads a book on a spiritual topic and meets monthly to discuss. This could serve as the basis of a parish gathering.

**Smart Goal Four:** Develop a community of spiritual learners that has a digital presence and engagement.

### **Implementation:**

1. Request that the Christian Education Team take the lead in initiating the above activities.
2. Request that the Christian Education Team broaden their focus beyond the education of our children and youth to the spiritual formation of everyone.
3. Develop an online forum for members in which they can pose questions they have about the Bible or spiritual questions in which Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and lay members can provide their insight and wisdom.

## **PROVOCATIVE PROPOSAL: MUSIC AND ART**

**Music and the Arts resonate and inspire all who enter our doors and draw the attention of the entire Sacramento community. Westminster offers flexible worship and community spaces for multiple forms of spiritual and artistic expression that honor our architectural heritage.**

**Narrative:** Music has been in the forefront of not only our worship experience but also our presence in the community. We seek to build and expand on Music and the Arts by making our physical spaces more conducive to varied worship experiences while providing a better space for music performance, visual display of art and small group engagement.

**Smart Goal One:** Remodel the Sanctuary to provide for a more flexible and dynamic worship experience, while enhancing its usefulness for music performances and lectures, and preserving its essential and historic beauty.

**Smart Goal Two:** Remodel the Narthex to allow for the display of art.

**Smart Goal Three:** Remove pews from the Chapel and introduce more flexible seating that can be used by small groups.

**Smart Goal Four:** Expand the music/art offerings with one or two new regular programs.

### **Implementation:**

1. Retain the services of an architect to present proposals for the remodel of the Sanctuary and Narthex.
2. Re-form and re-appoint the Facilities Task Force for implementation.
3. Create Music/Art taskforce to expand music and art program offerings beyond Sunday and Music at Noon.
4. Broadcast music offerings performed at Westminster on digital media, such as podcasts or streaming on our website.

### **Conclusion:**

Rev. Jim Kitchens challenged us to dream, "Big hairy audacious dreams." We did our best to stretch our vision. According to Rev. Kitchens, provocative proposals more commonly run



the risk of reflecting more of a status quo image than a projection into the future. We think our provocative proposals do dream into the future and suggest possible paths forward that are consistent with our Westminster DNA.

There is a lot to digest in these proposals. There is no expectation that we have the staffing, resources or congregational bandwidth to implement all of these proposals in the next 12 months. We submit these proposals as a suggested guide forward, trusting that Session will carefully weigh the costs and benefits of each before proceeding. However, there are certainly some low-hanging fruit that can be plucked now, at little or no cost, while giving a substantial boost to implementing the vision.

The following are three examples of some low-hanging fruit that would form critical building blocks for our future:

Initiate a simple survey of the congregation to establish a baseline by asking just a few questions that focus on their frequency of attendance at worship services in the last three months, their involvement in Westminster activities outside of worship/coffee hour, and their needs that are not currently being met by Westminster.

Reconstitute the Facilities Task Force.

Constitute and charge a communications working group with the task of designing and implementing a communications plan.

It has been our profound honor to work together to develop this vision for Westminster. While we have expended much time and effort to get this point, we are excited by the challenging possibilities and bright future that awaits our church community. We all stand ready to help Session and staff further explain or implement these recommendations. Both Pastor Wes Nordman and Sharyl Stevens, Clerk of Session, are well versed in these recommendations and are in attendance at Session meetings. Marcy Daniels would be particularly well suited to explain our digital communications strategy.

