



ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR

**UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
OF GENEVA**

Geneva, Illinois

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BACKGROUND

United Methodist Church of Geneva was formed when Emmanuel Methodist Church merged with First Methodist Church in 1948. The church sits in a historic district on the edge of downtown Geneva, IL, bordered by restaurants, shops, and businesses in one direction and a residential neighborhood in the other direction. Church members describe their church family as “caring,” “older,” and “generous.”

In 2014 the church began to see a sharp decline in membership and weekly attendance following the vote of an official welcoming statement by the church. In the wake of this decision, people who felt strongly about either side of the issue were hurt and it resulted in a number of families leaving the church. In the spring of 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced further change as worship and education for all ages moved online.

In June 2019, the work of a dedicated group of people was revealed as Vision 2020 and provided the current mission statement of the church to reach up, reach in, and reach out. It helped to frame the activities of the church in these three categories. Although the unexpected global pandemic and significant leadership changes at UMC Geneva have kept Vision 2020 from reaching full fruition, the emphasis on this project helped serve as the catalyst for the Creation Care team and recent work on the children and youth ministries programs.

The current membership of the church is around 819 and on an average week, 150 people attend the 9:00 AM worship service including those viewing online. The worship service is live streamed on YouTube each Sunday. Recordings of the worship service are available on demand both on the church website and Facebook.

The current vision of the church to reach up, reach in, and reach out. It helps to frame the activities of the church in these three categories. The 10 active committees provide programming for all members from infants to the elders in the community. Yearly highlights that many participants mentioned included the ASP mission trip, Christmas Cantata, Memorial Day Men’s Pancake Breakfast, Swedish Days, and Vacation Bible School.

The Rev. Rob Hamilton has served as the Senior Pastor since July 2021. Other clergy members on staff include Associate Pastor Rev. Lisa Telomen and Coordinator of Congregational Care Rev. Mary Gay McKinney. The church staff also consists of a Director of Administrative Ministries, a Director of Communications, a Coordinator of Audio and Media Arts, a Director of Children’s Ministries, an Interim Director of Youth Ministries, a Director of Music Ministries, a Director of Choral Ministries, and an Administrative Assistant.

With the challenges that the pandemic brought to many churches, UMC Geneva has broadened its digital presence by hiring a Coordinator of Audio and Media Arts. In addition to their Facebook page, they have increased their footprint to include YouTube, Instagram, and Pastor Rob’s blog. Weekly devotionals are also available online.

The church has a 2022 budget of \$773,451 which is a decrease over the previous annual budget.

	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020*</u>	<u>2021*</u>
Annual Budget (\$)	860,101	836,134	769,914	770,749	752,811	805,148	810,838	795,764
Average Attendance	291	278	246	218	205	170	130	150
Average Membership	970	961	890	844	847	847	818	819
*COVID-19 Pandemic								

As recent as January of 2022, the church building has undergone a transformation with new carpeting and painting. In preparation of this work, volunteers came together to clean out many closets and rooms and filled the dumpster numerous times over. The refresh to the space has brought new energy into the facility while keeping the beauty and tradition of the church.

UMC Geneva has been working with Ministry Architects for the past two years on a renovation process for the Children’s and Youth Ministries. The process included a Vision Summit that has provided three-year goals with yearly benchmarks and review. At the end of 2021 the renovation team had seen success in eight of the nine goals. The unmet goal was connected to international travel which was unachievable in the time of COVID-19.

Ministry Architects was invited to do an assessment of the parish by Pastor Rob Hamilton after the success and noticeable changes within the children’s and youth programming to address the declining participation and make recommendations about how the church and its leadership might reverse those trends moving strategically forward. Ministry Architects met with 78 individuals in 7 focus groups. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed implementation timeline for the future.

MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

One lens Ministry Architects likes to use for understanding ministry is the idea of three “rents.” Churches that pay these rents with their ministry tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. Those churches that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing, and discouragement.

It has been Ministry Architects’ experience that though these three rents, in and of themselves, do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff, and the congregation at large.

Rent #1: NUMBERS—A significant percentage of people need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church’s ministry. It is important for this target number to be clearly agreed on by the church leaders and the staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, the ministry is typically *more likely* to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established.



The consensus is that this rent is not being paid. Pretty much to a person, the congregation is cognizant of the trend of declining membership and worship attendance. Many people expressed great concern about this decline, yet UMC Geneva currently doesn't have a targeted number for participation. The only agreement is that people want to see more participants than right now.

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

This rent appears to be paid. There are several programs that people are proud of, look forward to, and speak glowingly about: Spirited Women, ASP, worship, creation care work, and missions.

Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM—The joyful enthusiasm and positive attitude of the staff, volunteers, and the congregation themselves are essential to building trust in the church. The tension between the deep commitment of the congregation and the anxious fear of many about the future of the church suggest that this rent is only partially paid. Members are joyfully committed to this church, but, at the same time, there is a palpable uneasiness about how well UMC Geneva will move into the future.

As the leadership of the church develops its long-range vision, it will need, at the same time, to be attentive to these three rents.

CHURCH NORMS

There are seven rules of thumb – “church norms” – that Ministry Architects has researched from consultant work across the country which will be helpful to keep in mind. These are not necessarily targets for success; they are simply what an average church typically experiences:

1) Budget: The average church budget settles around \$1,400 per attender. UMC Geneva currently has a budget of \$5,156 per attender. With a budget of \$773,451 (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits), UMC Geneva has the capacity to effectively reach and maintain a weekly total worship attendance level of somewhere in the neighborhood of 550 attenders. With 150 currently attending every week, the ministry is experiencing the generosity of its congregation above most other churches of this size.

2) Staffing: Most churches have the equivalent of 1 full-time staff member (40 hours per week) for every 75 people in average total worship attendance. Considering the average worship attendance of UMC Geneva and all the positions both part and full time working in the church's ministry, including:

- Senior Pastor
- Associate Pastor
- Coordinator of Congregational Care
- Director of Administrative Ministries
- Director of Communications
- Coordinator of Audio and Media Arts
- Director of Children's Ministries
- Interim Director of Youth Ministries
- Director of Music Ministries

- Director of Choral Ministries
- Administrative Assistant

UMC Geneva has the equivalent of 6.7 full-time staff, one for every 23 attenders. According to this rule of thumb, UMC Geneva has the capacity to sustain the engagement of about 500 worship attenders on a weekly basis. The current staff configuration allows room for significant numerical growth.

3) Payroll Percentage—In a typical church, the percentage of the budget that goes to support the staff of the church (including salaries, continuing education, and benefits) tends to fall in the range of 45-55%. UMC Geneva’s budget of \$773,451 has \$449,645 dedicated to the staff of the church, about 58%. The staffing to budget percentage is slightly above average compared to what other churches dedicate to staffing.

4) Facilities—A church’s ministry is also impacted by the physical layout of its campus and the constraints it may contain. Typically, parking and seating become constraints for churches who are looking to see growth. Consider the following norms:

- **Parking Spaces:** Most churches need three parking spaces for every five attenders. As a downtown church UMC Geneva doesn’t own any parking spaces. While there are over 1000 spaces within the downtown area, the church shares this capacity with the variety of businesses in the vicinity.
- **Seating Capacity:** Most churches will simply stop growing once the worship center is 80% filled on a regular basis. With 450 total seats available, the church has an attendance capacity of 360 worshippers in a single service.

Given these norms, UMC Geneva can expect to reach its capacity in the current one-service structure at 360 people in weekend worship.

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE STAFF

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a pastor or staff person, instability is a predictable result. Ministry Architects has found that the most stable approach to staffing a ministry, particularly in the early stages of a rebuild, is to build a staff of three *different* kinds of people:

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

Each of these roles is important as United Methodist Church of Geneva pursues a more sustainable model of ministry. As the church moves forward, the following observations will be helpful to keep in mind:

- In many churches, there is no person or group playing the role of the architect. The ministry simply moves from one event to the next without a clear vision or stated outcomes.
- Sometimes paid staff are not given the time or training to do their important work as the “general contractor” of a complex ministry.
- At many churches, the staff is often expected to serve in all three of these roles. This is a recipe for congregational dissatisfaction and staff burnout.
- Some churches hire staff persons who are laborers who are skilled at leading worship, building relationships, or teaching a Bible study. These laborers often mature into an architect or a general contractor, but only if they are given permission, time, and training.

- At UMC Geneva, Pastor Rob serves as the architect for the church as a whole in collaboration with the church council, who currently functions more in an approving and executing role while Pastor Rob visions.
- At UMC Geneva, the ideal configuration, which Pastor Rob is aspiring to, is that the Church Council would serve in the architect role in collaboration with the clergy and staff.
- Councils/committees serve as the architect of their respective ministry area.
- In ministries at UMC Geneva that are directly led by a staff person, the staff person is expected to be the general contractor. In ministries, that are directly led by a council or committee, the chairperson is expected to be the general contractor.
- At UMC Geneva, many of those serving on the various councils/committees are the same people who do the hands of labor of executing the ministry as well.
- At UMC Geneva there are multiple times that staff serve in all three roles: architect, general contractor and laborer.

ASSETS

Strengths to protect in the current ministry

Caring People

Listening group participants could not say enough good things about the people of their church. Here are comments participants shared:

- “This church is filled with people who have a lot of love in their hearts and respond to specific needs.”
- “I love the community of caring people.”
- “This is my extended family.”
- “I love the wonderful people.”
- “This is a great group of very caring people.”
- “There are a lot of tightknit groups; people that really care for one another.”
- “I love how kind and friendly people on staff and people at the church are.”
- “I appreciate the friendliness of the church and all the people of the church.”
- “We have so many terrific members.”
- “This church feels like home and like family.”
- “We have a lot of dedicated Christ-following people.”
- “If ever there is a crisis in someone’s life there are a big group of people bringing meals, taking people to doctor’s visits, and providing whatever assistance is needed. This a group of caring people.”
- “There are a lot of people in our church that have a thing that they do that makes the world better.”

Fantastic Clergy

Listening group participants were also very appreciative of the pastors who are currently leading the church. One person said, “I’m very positive about where we are going under Rob and Lisa’s leadership.” Another commented, “I like the energy and compassion of our leadership team, especially Pastor Rob and Pastor Lisa.” Someone else glowed, “I feel really excited about the leadership of our church.” Implicitly, many comments in the listening groups echoed the explicit sentiment of one participant who said, “I appreciate the energy that Rob is transferring into the church.”

Great Location

Situated in downtown Geneva, just a few blocks off of one of the two main drags, UMC Geneva is in a very visible and desirable location. The church is also not far from residential neighborhoods and multi-family housing complexes as well. UMC Geneva is literally positioned in the center of town, which provides an opportunity for the church to be a vital congregation that is at the center of the life of the town. Additionally, the church meets and operates in a beautiful building that has a historic aesthetic. The church has recently completed an interior church beautification project.

Dedicated Volunteers

There is a core group of volunteers that have been serving in the ministries of UMC Geneva for years. These committed people serve on councils and in the hands-on work of ministry and are committed to the church and keep serving so that the church’s ministries may continue their work year after year.

Missions

Members of UMC Geneva consistently mentioned the pride they have in the church's efforts at outreach. When asked what they liked about UMC Geneva, listening group participants offered the following responses:

- "That we are mission-oriented."
- "Our outreach."
- "All the mission-oriented people in the church."
- "That the church makes a difference and does a lot of things globally and locally."

In addition, one church member described the congregation, saying, "These are caring people who care deeply about the hope in the world." Another person noted, "We have a lot missions that we participate in."

Music

The people of UMC Geneva love the music at their church. When asked what they liked about UMC Geneva or what made their heart sing about this church, many listening groups participants responded that it was the music. One person observed proudly, "The music is excellent." Another church member said, "Two of our strengths are music and mission." "We have wonderful music here was the comment of another listening group participant. Yet another fan of the church's music provided this praise, "We are so blessed to have Scott. He is so talented. And not just Scott, but Mike and Julie Popplewell too."

Virtual Experience

Listening groups expressed abundant gratitude for how UMC Geneva has continued to provide meaningful worship experiences throughout the pandemic. Much praise was lauded to the recorded services and how there was never a lapse in the availability of meaningful worship for the congregation. In the listening groups the staff was credited with investing the time, energy, and skill to make sure that virtual and recorded worship was done and done increasingly well during the lingering timeframe of the pandemic.

Clarity of Need

It is hard to get something done, if not everyone agrees that it needs to be done in the first place. However, this is not the case when it comes to the future of UMC Geneva. Listening group participants provided a consensus of opinion that the church needs to change if it is going to thrive, and even survive, through the 2020s and beyond. One person freely accepted, "We are in a state of change." Another member expressed, "I'm encouraged for a restart. There is energy building." Furthermore, a congregant said confidently, "UMC Geneva has a lot of great potential and God has a lot of future promise for this church. We need to find a way to redefine ourselves."

CHALLENGES

Obstacles to moving the current ministry strategically forward

Declining Participation

Over the past two decades, UMC Geneva has been in a consistent trend of declining worship attendance, except for a few year-over-year increases here and there. The congregation clearly notices the decline and feels fear and anxiety about what it might mean for the future of the church. “We are not as big as we used to be,” a member stated plainly. Another person observed, “There are not a lot of new people.” A member named a scary reality, “We are losing some momentum.” Another observed, “We are losing memberships.”

Aging Congregation

In addition to the simple numerical decline in participation, UMC Geneva is a church that is getting older. The congregation is aging and there has been no influx of new younger families to counterbalance the inevitable aging of the long-time members of the church. Listening group participants said the following related to the age dynamic in the church:

- “The congregation is getting older.”
- “We are too old of a congregation to last as we are now.”
- “I worry about the average age getting older and older.”
- “We need an infusion of young people.”
- “For this church to live on, not even be successful, we need to get new blood in here.”
- “We need to revitalize with new families and youth.”
- “We have lost a lot of young people.”
- “We need younger people. We have a lot of older people.”
- “We need young blood.”

Commodity Mindset – Young People

To reappropriate a famous quote from John F. Kennedy, “Ask not what young people can do for you, but what you can do for young people.” Listening group participants spoke frequently about how the church needs young families and young people. However, far less was shared about how young families and young people might need what the church can provide. Within the listening group discussions, young families and young people were subtly and implicitly spoken about as a commodity that could help the church overcome its decline and its aging trend. They were seldom spoken of as part of the mission of the church. UMC Geneva will need to ask itself “Do we want young people, or do we want to be a church that young people need and want? Do you want young people, or do you want to minister to young people?”

Vision Vortex

There is a lot of anxiety about the future of the church. People know that something needs to change, but they are having a hard time seeing the next iteration of UMC Geneva. “We know where we’ve been but I’m not sure we know where are going,” admitted a long-time church member. Someone else shared, “We are in a liminal place, and we don’t know where we are going.” Yet another person said, “We don’t really know who we are as far as a brand or a niche.”

“We need to be thinking about church differently. We need to be creative in our thinking and welcome some new ideas,” declared one leader. Another leader shared, “I think this church is a restart, especially after the pandemic. We are going to have to rethink how we do things.” A participant noted, “For a lot of people that have left the church, it is because we have stopped

being compelling.” UMC Geneva does not have a clear, shared vision for where to head next and is not quite sure how to get to that clear vision without help.

Bloated Leadership Structure

Both the council/committee structure and the staff structure at UMC Geneva are holdovers from a time when the church was much larger in regular participation. These structures are more complex and require more resources, both financial and people resources, than makes sense for a church of UMC Geneva’s size. One leader noted, “There is a leadership structure that has a lot of redundancy.” “This committee structure is based on a church of a larger size,” observed another leader. One member exclaimed hyperbolically, “We have 50000 committees.”

The Usual Suspects - Volunteers

UMC Geneva has dedicated volunteers, but as one listening group participant said, “It is the same people year after year after year.” The same people are regularly serving on councils and implementing the projects and programs as well. “The people that are taking responsibility are the same ones that are doing those roles [hands-on implementation],” shared a long-time member. Another person dreamed, “I wish we could have newer people involved in committees instead of the same faces.” Those serving over and over are dedicated but they are also fatigued, as one person articulated, “The long-timers are tired, but there is no one to hand things off to.” Another person wondered, “How do we find people to do things other than the core group of people that have been doing them so long.”

Rifts and Distrust from Lingering Hurts

Previous conflicts and points of friction are continuing to cast a long shadow over the climate of UMC Geneva, especially the situation around the potential welcome statement in 2014. “Divisiveness is still very much present,” confessed one person. “That situation and others have built-in a ‘who can you trust attitude?’” another listening group participant shared. The various tensions that have come up in the life of the church have never been fully addressed or resolved.

“We don’t often handle conflict well, and we don’t know how to talk to each other when we disagree with each other,” admitted a lay leader in the church. “There are people who do not agree, yet they hide away and don’t share but also dig in,” observed another person. The unresolved hurt is feeding a toxic undercurrent that is harming the church’s culture.

Too Many Programs

UMC Geneva has a lot of different ministries, programs, and initiatives going. This is often the case in churches where there is not a clearly articulated shared vision. The sheer breadth of things going on at UMC Geneva is creating a strain on resources, especially when it comes to people to lead these ministries and initiatives. A leader commented, “I’m sure there are a billion ideas, but you can’t do a billion things.”

Please, Sir, May I Have Some More - Technology

UMC Geneva has taken some steps to better utilize technology in response to the new needs created by the pandemic, but there is room for more growth in this area. Even more technological advances can be employed in the church. Listening group participants specifically expressed for more and larger display screens in the sanctuary and elsewhere in the church. The execution of the church’s current technology can also continue to improve. The staff is

working hard to leverage the church's new technology and to add to it, and the congregation is eager to continue to see the fruit of that effort.

External Factors

There are also external factors facing the church, that are not created or controlled by the members, attenders, and staff of UMC Geneva themselves. Families have much busier schedules than 30 years ago. In general, society has a different approach to organized religion than in past generations. There are a multitude of other external factors as well. External factors are not insurmountable. However, they present a particular type of challenge. UMC Geneva won't find success in trying to "remove" the external factors. Navigating these obstacles will require the church to get creative, engage some form of Design Thinking, and approach ministry in new ways.

Looking Back to a Golden Age

God told Lot and his family to move in order to avoid destruction and Lot's wife looked back. And, as they say, the rest is history. It is tempting for a church to look back to its past and think that recreating that situation is the key to a successful future. One listening group participant recommended, "We need to get that number [worship attendance] back up to where it was in the '70s when we had standing room only.

However, others recognized that recreating the past is hardly ever the recipe for the future and it is not usually what God is calling the church to become moving forward. One person said, "Too many people think of us as the big church we were many years ago." Another congregant asserted, "In order to attract new people to the church, we are going to have look beyond the things that were done 50 years ago." "Can we change enough to attract the families needed for this church to thrive?" wondered one listening group participant.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reframe the next 24 months as a time of building long-term infrastructure for the church. Understanding that the work will have incremental successes along the way and a target date of January 2024 when the long term goals for leadership will have sufficient infrastructure and support to provide long-term stability.
2. Establish a Prayer Team to undergird this transformation process.
3. Present this report to the Church Council, requesting that they endorse a 24-month strategic design process for the church.
4. Charge Church Council with the implementation or establish a Ministry Transformation Team, of five to seven volunteers who report regularly to the Church Council to focus on the recommendations below. These non-anxious, goal-oriented people will free up the staff to focus on providing day-to-day ministry, while the Ministry Transformation team ensures that the outcomes are achieved.
5. Engage the services of Ministry Architects to take responsibility for:
 - Chairing and leading the Ministry Transformation Team during the 24-month period of evaluation and momentum building.
 - Working with the staff and volunteers to ensure the achievement of the outcomes outlined in this report's timeline.
 - Assisting the staff and leadership in overcoming the obstacles that are certain to arise in the process of restructuring and fine-tuning the ministries.
 - Providing an all-church Vision Summit to set a clear path forward with goals and benchmarks.

BIG ROCKS

There are the five Big Rocks – areas that if addressed will provide UMC Geneva with the health and momentum to move forward in ministry and if left unaddressed will continue to stagnate the church's health and growth. Substantial work on Big Rocks one and five should be well underway within the next 90 days, with a substantial work on Big Rock number 3 within the next nine-month, from now. Work on big Rocks two and four will follow after significant progress has been made on Big Rock number one.

- 1. Heal the Hurt** - *Engage professional assistance in an intentional process of church reconciliation to provide the necessary conversations and healing for the congregation to move past the pain, loss, and resentment of the past.*
Challenges Addressed: Rifts and Distrust from Lingering Hurts, by extension all other challenges
Assets Leveraged: Caring People, Fantastic Clergy
- 2. Clarify the Vision** - *Involve all willing participants from the congregation to rework its current mission statement, a statement of defined core values, and a list of goals.*
Challenges Addressed: Vision Vortex, Looking Back to a Golden Age, Declining Participation, Aging Congregation, Commodity Mindset; Too Many Programs
Assets Leveraged: Clarity of Need
- 3. Restructure for Today and Beyond** – *Evaluate and rework the church's organizational models in a way that reflects and facilitates its vision and mission, considering both council structure and staff structure.*
Challenges Addressed: Bloated Leadership Structure, The Usual Suspects-Volunteers, Looking Back to a Golden Age
Assets Leveraged: Dedicated Volunteers, Clarity of Need
- 4. Reimagine Ministry to Younger People** – *Utilize Design Thinking to take a needs-based approach to engaging people under 40 years old.*
Challenges Addressed: Aging Congregation, Commodity Mindset, Declining Participation, External Factors
Assets Leveraged: Great Location, Missions, Caring People
- 5. Enfolding and Assimilating Guests into Church Life and Culture** - *As UMC Geneva reengages into this new ministry world with an intentional invitational mindset, creating a system for visitors is necessary. Evaluate and expand existing practices of visitor welcome, follow-up, and enfolding before solidifying and building upon them as a foundation.*
Challenges Addressed: Declining Participation, Aging Congregation, Commodity Mindset
Assets Leveraged: Caring People, Great Location

BREAKING THE ROCKS

Take the following steps to move each Big Rock.

1. Heal the Hurt

- **Create a Climate of Healing:** Conduct a church-wide reading of the book The Peace Maker by Ken Sande. Consider providing guided venues for people to discuss the book, experiment with concepts from the book, and ask hard questions about the book and about the church.
- **Get Help for the Hard Work of Healing:** Engage and contract with a family therapist, mediator, or other professional who will lead the congregation through a series of church reconciliation sessions.
- **Provide Continued Pastoral Care:** Allow space for members to heal from past pain and loss.

2. Clarify the Vision

- **Vision 2020 Analysis:** Complete an analysis of Vision 2020 identifying what went well, what stalled, and what should be done differently in the next iteration of vision casting at UMC Geneva.
- **Vision Summit:** Invite the church members to participate in a multi-session, on-campus/hybrid process of envisioning the future with Ministry Architects, resulting in the following documents which will direct the ministries and support the church's vision:
 - A Mission Statement
 - Defined Core Values
 - A Set of Three-Year Revolving Goals with One-Year Benchmarks

Vision Summits work best with a group representing pastors, staff, council, leadership teams, key ministry leaders, and an open invitation to the congregation.

- **Sharing the Vision:** Upon completion of the long-term vision and goal-setting process, create a game plan that will outline the best ways to communicate the vision, values, and goals of the church's ministry (sermon series, guidebooks, small group curriculum, etc.) Create a game plan that will incorporate the vision into the life of the church.
- **Evaluate Current Programs:** Evaluate the current programming with an eye toward retiring or combining the programs that inadequately reflect the current focus of the church.

3. Restructure for Today and Beyond

- **Structure Audit:** Invite members of the staff and key leaders to participate in a facilitated process of evaluating the current organizational structure for the church and clarifying the function and purpose of all church committees and teams.
- **Organizational Chart and Restructure:** Write out a current organizational chart. Create the ideal organization chart for continued growth. Upon examination of the current structure, restructure the organization in a strategic way in order for the church to be poised for success.



- **Strategic Staffing:** Develop a sustainable staffing model for the church that aligns with the church's current and anticipated resources.
- **Staffing Audit:** Gather feedback from staff members on their current job descriptions, understanding pressure points and suggested changes. Gather the chair of the personnel committee and the senior pastor along with Ministry Architects consultants to evaluate the current staffing descriptions and gather feedback, designing an overall staffing strategy that leverages current staff and identifies the holes that need to be filled or redundancies.
- **Strategic Staffing:** Develop a sustainable staffing model for the church that aligns with the church's current and anticipated resources.

4. Enfold and Assimilate Guests into Church Life and Culture

- **Hospitality Audit:** evaluate the current welcoming practices of the church and then supplement or create any processes that are not yet excellent, including the following:
 - **Hospitality Game Plan:** Build a hospitality strategy that will ensure a warm and engaging culture on Sunday mornings for guests and regular attenders that will ensure a strong relational connection with anyone who attends.
 - **Online Engagement Plan:** Research the best practice for engaging an follow-up with the online worshippers. Subsequently, develop a game plan for both engaging online worshippers and following up with them in a way that appropriately warm and welcoming.
 - **Visitor Follow-up:** Carefully develop a game plan for welcoming new families that visit the church. Consider a "streets to the seats" concept for welcoming newcomers in a more comprehensive way.
 - **MIA Follow-up:** Craft a plan for following up with adults and families that have become loosely connected to the church.
 - **Connections Brochure:** Create a clear list of the various opportunities for people to connect with each other at the church. Give a clear explanation of each, so that a person can make an informed choice about whether that group is a good fit. Include meeting times and contact information with a name, phone, and email. Make this information available in a brochure and on the website. Make sure that this brochure is easy to edit and update as the times and locations of events will change from season to season.
 - **Follow-up from Outreach Events:** Create a clear process to capture information from guests who attend outreach events and develop follow-up procedures to invite them into a next step with the church.

5. Reimagine Ministry to Younger People: Utilize all five stages of Design Thinking to develop a ministry that meets the needs of people under 40 and creates a mutualistic symbiotic relationship between younger people and the church:

- **Empathize** – Engage existing research and gather live input from local young people in order to learn what matters to people under 40 in the Geneva area.

- **Define** – Based on the information gathered in the previous stage, identify and articulate the top needs of young people in the Geneva area.
- **Ideate** – Create a list of at least 25 ideas for meeting the felt needs of people under 40 in the Geneva area.
- **Prototype** – Create a rough draft of at least one of the ideas from the previous stage and gather feedback from the young people engaged during the empathize phase.
- **Test** – Implement at least one of the ideas that has been prototyped for at least 3 months and then evaluate the impact of the initiative.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Host a “Quick Start” Summit:** Invite the Church Council (or, if recruited, the Ministry Transformation Team) key volunteers, and church staff to participate in a Quick Start Summit in which the transformation process is launched and the tasks outlined in the Assessment Report are addressed. The Summit tackles the items that need to be done first and builds momentum for the church’s transformation process. This will include the process of prioritizing a second-level of next steps and actions in order to continue to build out an appropriate timeline for the transformation process.
Addressed: All challenges will be addressed, at the very least in prioritizing
Leveraged: Clarity of Need
 - **Continue Building the Children’s and Youth Ministry Momentum:** Utilize the systems, goals, and benchmarks for the Children’s and Youth Ministries to ensure the continued growth of the programs and volunteers within each ministry.
Addressed: Aging Congregation, Declining Participation, Volunteers
Leveraged: Dedicated Volunteers
 - **Children’s and Youth Discipleship:** Review 2022 goals and benchmarks. Ensure necessary support is provided to meet the goals. Work with Children and Youth Councils as needed to evaluate and update goals benchmarks for 2023.
Addressed: Aging Congregation, Declining Participation
Leveraged: Fantastic Clergy (and staff), Clarity of Need
 - **Technology Enhancement Plan:** Create a backlog of all needed and/or desired technology improvements for the church. Prioritize the list by importance and urgency and size the list by cost and effort to implement. Pick at least one improvement per month and implement it.
Addressed: May I Have Some More Technology
 - **Staff Development:** Provide mechanisms for ongoing education and coaching for the church staff including coaching, reading, and continuing education.
Addressed: External Factors, Vision Vortex
Leveraged: Clarity of Need
 - **Staff Clarity:** Write or review written job descriptions for all paid staff positions in the church. Work with staff to ensure the job descriptions accurately match the work being done. Prominently include the role of building volunteer teams.
Addressed: Bloated Leadership Structure, Volunteers
Leveraged: Clarity of Need
- Sustainable Pace:** Help each staff member develop a “rhythmic week” including a Sabbath and “balcony” time (that is, time to look at the big picture and make strategic plans).
Addressed: Too Many Programs, Bloated Structure
Leverages: Fantastic Clergy
- **Volunteer Alignment:** Do an audit of all roles in the church and clarify their unique contribution to the church. Build a clear organizational chart for all volunteer roles in the

church and determine how best to align them for maximum impact in growing the church.

Addressed: Bloated Leadership Structure, Volunteers

Leveraged: Clarity of Need

- **Volunteer Leadership Development:** Develop a written game plan for combining the church's current volunteer leadership opportunities into a system that gives increasing load-bearing responsibility for mentoring and ministry leadership.
Addressed: Bloated Leadership Structure, Volunteers, Too Many Programs
Leveraged: Clarity of Need
- **Volunteer Clarity:** Draft and/or update written job descriptions for all volunteer roles in the church. Work with leaders to ensure the job descriptions accurately match the work being done, clarify to whom each volunteer is accountable.
Addressed: Bloated Leadership Structure, Volunteers
Leveraged: Clarity of Need
- **Committee Structure Review:** Annually evaluate and adjust the committee structure in the church to ensure that it aligns with the strategic and operational needs of the church for the upcoming year.
Addressed: Bloated Leadership Structure, Volunteers, Too Many Programs
Leveraged: Clarity of Need
- **Marketing and Branding:** Create a written game plan that will address how to introduce the church to the community around it in an inviting and welcoming way. Create an intentional strategy in order to be consistent with your marketing approaches (logos, graphics, etc.). Consider the following:
 - Church Signage
 - Upgrading the website with an engaging section just for newcomers
 - Identifying communication channels for reaching out to those outside the church family--flyers and mailers, posters, Facebook ad boosting, the NextDoor app, etc.
 - Identifying target programs for inviting newcomers.
 - Designing a database growth process.
 - Communicating regularly with other groups meeting in the building.

Addressed: External Factors, Commodity Mindset

Leveraged: Clarity of Need

- **Attendance:** Continue to record attendance for all programs (worship, Sunday school, bible studies, book studies, special events, etc.) and develop a written game plan to track attendance in a consistent way in order to identify MIAs.
Addressed: Declining Participation, Golden Age
- **Welcome Team:** Continue to hone and grow the welcome team into a group of people that will welcome visitors **and** partner to integrate them into the community and life of the church.
Addressed: Aging Congregation, Participation, Commodity Mindset, Golden Age
Leveraged: Caring People, Dedicated Volunteers
- **Calendar Evaluation:** Carefully review the special events of the church. Decide the purpose of each event and whether or not it meets the needs of the church. Look at the current calendar for offerings to church groups and community groups. Evaluate

seasonal offerings versus year-round offerings. Create a process for outside groups to be able to use the church facilities. Also explore fee structures for groups who use the buildings.

Addressed: Too Many Programs

- **Sharing the Building:** Take steps to help more outside groups utilize UMC Geneva's facilities. Create a process for outside groups to be able to use the church facilities. Also explore fee structures for groups who use the buildings.

Addressed: Commodity Mindset, Aging Congregation, Declining Participation

Leveraged: Great Location

- **Ministry Manual:** Develop a Ministry Manual, including the most recent directories, a 12-Month calendar, results-based job descriptions for staff and volunteers, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar, and notes for every major church event.
- **Compliance System and Management:** Ensure an Operations Manual is in place and updated annually. The manual should include all legal documentation needed for the ministry including background checks, financial documents, licenses, child protection policy, facility use policies, etc.

PROPOSED TIMELINE

The following provides UMC Geneva with a timeline that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of a healthy, sustainable ministry.

Many churches choose to use the services of Ministry Architects to provide coaching and experienced troubleshooting through this infrastructure-building process. If the church would like Ministry Architects to provide more specialized consulting in certain areas, particularly for the 24-month transition, we are available to help.

The following timeline outlines a sprint format providing the first three months of work based on the priorities of the Big Rocks. After the first three months, the team working on the recommendations will prioritize the next three months based on progress.

Month #1 – February 2022

Focus: Starting Right and Work Begins

Outcomes:

- This report has been presented to the Church Council for the strategic transformation of the church's overall ministry and the Church Council has given full support of this plan.
- A virtual Quick Start Summit has been scheduled for March.
- The Church Council or if determined Ministry Transformation Team has been recruited and the first meeting has been scheduled to take place during the Quick Start Summit.
- A prayer team has been recruited and charged with praying for the transformation process. They have received a copy of this report and timeline.
- The church has partnered with Ministry Architects to serve as the architect for the entire renovation process.

Month #2 – March 2022

Focus: Quick Start & Breaking the Big Rocks

Outcomes:

- A Quick Start Summit has taken place in which the transformation process was launched and the Big Rocks outlined in the Assessment Report are beginning to be addressed. The Summit tackled the items that needed to be done first to initiate the transformation process.
- A church-wide reading of the book The Peace Maker by Ken Sande has begun. Develop and a schedule guided venues for people to discuss the book, experiment with concepts from the book, and ask hard questions about the book and about the church..
- A church reconciliation mediator has been engaged to work with UMC Geneva.
- An organizational chart has been created reflecting the current structure of the church, including staff, councils, ministry teams, and major programs.
- An evaluation of the church's current welcoming processes has been completed.

Month #3 – April 2022

Focus: Breaking the Big Rocks

Outcomes:



- A staff meeting strategy has been developed that helps staff stay in regular conversation about the ministry of the church that leaves staff members feeling well-prepared to respond to changes in the ministry.
- The work of the reconciliation mediator has begun.
- Reconciliation sessions have been scheduled and “save the date” email has been sent to the church.
- The hospitality game plan has been created/updated and implementation has begun.
- Staff members and key leaders have participated in a facilitated process of evaluating the current organizational structure for the church and clarifying the function and purpose of all church committees and teams.

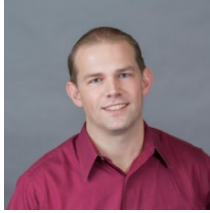
Month #4 – May 2022

Focus: Breaking the Big Rocks

Outcomes:

- Reconciliation sessions continue.
- Staff members and key leaders have participated in a facilitated process of evaluating the current organizational structure for the church and clarifying the function and purpose of all church committees and teams.
- The first time visitor follow-up process has been updated and implementation has begun.
- To be determined in March based on the current progress of the transformation process and current priorities at that time.

The *Ministry Architects* Team Serving UMC Geneva, Geneva Illinois



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Mike began serving in youth ministry in 2001. From 2008-2014, Mike was the youth pastor and children's pastor at the Van Buren, AR campus of Community Bible Church, and then he served on the staff of Church at the Red Door in Palm Desert of California until August of 2018. Mike graduated from Abilene Christian University with a bachelor's degree in Youth and Family Ministry and continued his education with a

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MerLynne has worked with Children, Youth and Families within the Episcopal Church for over 25 years. She has worked both nationally and locally with faith communities of various sizes. She has led children's and youth ministry formation programs, summer camps, Vacation Bible School, and now currently serves as Head of Operations at a church. Recognizing and supporting the voices of children and youth

throughout their faith journey continues to be her passion. MerLynne has a Certificate of Christian Education from The Seminary of the Southwest and a B.S. in Child Psychology from the University of Minnesota. Additionally, she has a Master of Public Affairs from the University of Minnesota with a focus on Nonprofit Management. MerLynne lives in Minnesota.



STEPHANIE CARO – SENIOR CONSULTANT

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Stephanie Caro has been involved in ministry to children, youth, and adults in the local church (both large and small) since...a long time ago. Her humorous, straightforward style keeps her busy presenting and coaching at conferences, training events, camps, mission trips, retreats, churches, etc. She is now Senior Consultant for Ministry Architects, which allows her to help

churches assess, vision, and formulate their ministry game plans.

Her books, *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches* and *99 Thoughts for the Smaller Church Youth Worker*, were published by Group/Simply Youth Ministry. Her latest book, *Smaller Church Youth Ministry: No Staff, No Money, No Problem*, was published by United Methodist Publishing House in December of 2016. Her next book, *Ten Solutions (to 10 Common Mistakes in Smaller Churches)*, comes out in 2019. Stephanie is a contributing author to several ministry resources like YouthWorker Journal and Group Magazine. Check out Stephanie's blogs at youthministry.com, youthspecialties.com, Princeton Theological Seminary, and others. Stephanie and her husband, Steve, live in Katy, TX