

Congregational Vitality Report

March 21, 2026

State of the Presbytery

- Minister Report – See attached, page 7.
 - Rev. Sarah Bigwood met with Rev. Deb Peery-Berger (Minot) on Nov 18th, and Rev. Gretchen Graf (East Grand Forks) on Nov 24, and Rev. Darrel Cory (Thief River Falls) on Nov 24.
 - Rev. Dr. Leanne Simmons – we continue to hold Pastor Leanne in our prayers as she undergoes medical treatment. Rev. Deanna Reikow has been closely following Rev. Simmons’ journey.
 - **In November, the Leadership Pod accepted the dissolution of the following pastoral relationships.**
 - Rev. Mary Jo E. Holtey & The First Presbyterian Church of Fargo (exit interview with Deanna Reikow)
 - Paul Campbell, CLP & Westminster Presbyterian Church in Casselton (exit interview with Sarah Bigwood)
 - Mark Flaten, CLP & The First Presbyterian Church of Colgate (exit interview Sarah Bigwood)
 - Rev. Beth Kelsey & The United Parish of Bottineau
- Executive Presbyter – See separate report, pages 8-15.
- Congregational Vitality Grant Program – See separate report, pages 16-24.
- FREE websites for churches. The Presbytery of the Northern Plains has contracted with a service to provide a free one-page website for churches. We know that most people search for a church online before they will attend in-person. If your church needs a web presence and is interested in a website, please contact Jenn in the Presbytery office.
- FREE Small Church Growth Training – The Presbytery of the Northern Plains has contracted with a small church growth expert, John Fong. John specializes in helping small churches grow by applying practical outreach and growth strategies that fit their size and context. These services are free to all of our congregations. Several congregations have already begun working with John and are experiencing a resurgence of energy. If your congregation is interested in being a part of this growth training, contact Jenn in the Presbytery office.
- If you are a small church in need of guidance on soundboard or streaming, the Presbytery can help. Contact Sarah Bigwood.

Angus (Angus Tabor)

Argyle (Community)

Arvilla

Bismarck (FPC)

Rev. David Reiter is filling in The Rev. Dr. Leanne Simmons while she is on medical leave. His first Sunday was November 9, 2025. The church has joined with Mandan and Glencoe to create a shared Associate Pastor position with an emphasis on Evangelism. They have put the PNC process on hold until Rev. Simmons' treatments are complete. In Advent, the church began meeting in their Sanctuary again after a few months of meeting in the Fellowship Hall due to water damage that caused wet material to fall from ceiling. Repairs and cleanup are complete.

Bottineau (United Parish)

Deanna is now working with UMC mid-council representative, Kris Mutzenberger, to discern a path forward for the churches in this region.

Buffalo (FPC)

Calvin (Glenila Presbyterian Church)

Casselton (Westminster)

The church said good-bye to their pastor, Paul Campbell, in December. Sarah is their Moderator. They've elected RE Mike Faught to conduct their meetings. Travis Porter is training with the Presbytery to offer communion. Sarah met with Session in March to go over options. Casselton is working with growth consultant John Fong.

Cavalier

They received a legacy gift and will continue for the immediate future. The Cavalier church has successfully negotiated the Per Capita Forgiveness program and is current on all payments.

Colgate (FPC)

Colgate has extended an offer for long-term pulpit supply, Corday Goddard, who started in January 2026.

Cooperstown (FPC)

The congregation continues to meet at the Assisted Living and is enjoying making donations that help with needs in the area. Since the hospital and nursing home moved to the new facility, they no longer get people from the nursing home attending services but have from 2 to 5 who attend from the assisted living facility.

Crookston (FPC)

Trinity Lutheran is still in the mix with Crookston but need to complete their head pastor search before a formal arrangement can be discussed.

Devils Lake (Westminster)

Dilworth

Dan Billings visited in mid-December and found that worship was not being held. The congregation must have an informal system for communicating whether they will gather.

East Grand Forks (Mendenhall)

Mendenhall and Crookston have had discussions about sharing resources. Neither congregation is struggling to find pulpit supply. Mendenhall was awarded a \$2000 Congregational Development Grant to help with costs associated with upgrade in sound system.

Edgeley (FPC)**Ellendale (Presbyterian United Methodist Church)****Fairview (Community)****Fargo (FPC)**

Pastor Mary retired at the end of 2025 after 33 years of faithful steadfast service. Fargo has submitted project ready documentation to the National Fund for Sacred Places to release ½ the funds from their award. The Shine On campaign has over \$2M in commitments and \$280,000 in contributions. All indoor projects are nearing completion and will begin outdoor renovations as soon as the weather permits.

Baker (Baker Downer)

Baker Downer has contracted with John Fong to begin a yearlong program of growing the church. Their adventure began in November. They have plans to reach out to the neighborhood in early May inviting neighbors to consider the church a community center of sorts. There are also plans to recondition the ballfields on their property. They've been offered an opportunity by the local school district to purchase the land adjacent to the ballfield. It is currently maintained by the church.

Fordville

Fordville has declined to a few members in recent years. The CVP will work with their minister to discern what if anything is being discussed about their future plans.

Forest River (Community Presbyterian)

See Midway Parish

Gilby (Gilby Presbyterian)

See Midway Parish

Glencoe Sloan Memorial Church

The church has joined with Mandan and Bismarck to create a shared Associate Pastor position with an emphasis on Evangelism. Glencoe will take January through March off while many members are away for the winter and will resume gathering at Easter, including a celebration for a new class of confirmands. The following Elders have permission to administer the sacraments for another 3 years (until EOY 2028) Nancy Laschkewitsch, Josie Hornbacher, and Alan Wilson.

Grafton (Federated, yoked with Minto)**Grand Forks (FPC)**

Membership and giving are increasing yet increasing costs are putting pressure on the budget. Applying for BOP Assistance Program again this year.

Grandin

Grandin has started Livestreaming services on YouTube thanks to help with a retired gentleman who used to be the IT person at a local public school. He provided an used computer and helped set up a channel and has been advising them of what is needed for additional equipment.

They also took advantage of the free website which can now be found at <http://grandin.my-church.org/>

On Sunday, November 23, the church hosted a Fall Fest Community Dinner. PW organized and provided the food. The entire community is involved.

Hallock (FPC)

The congregation is moving forward in partnership with Skjeberg Lutheran near Drayton and is assembling a strong compensation package. A manse is available. Sarah has been in conversation with ELCA bishops as the process unfolds. The Lutheran congregation is transferring synods. Sarah visited on December 16, to hear the joint discussion and tour the Skjeberg church. An agreement between the two churches is drafted. A survey was distributed at the two churches. They can now proceed in drafting a Ministry Discernment Profile (MDP). Budgets are still being worked out. They intend to share more staff than just the pastor.

Hannah

Hunter (FPC)

Jamestown (United)

The doors damaged by summer storms are finally repaired. They express gratitude to the Presbytery for emergency relief. United Presbyterian is working with growth consultant John Fong.

LaMoure

Langdon

Lisbon (FPC)

Leadership Pod approved \$2000 Congregational Development Grant to assist with costs of purchasing a Hymnal Plus HT-400 US machine.

Mandan (FPC)

The church has joined with Bismarck and Glencoe to create a shared Associate Pastor position with an emphasis on Evangelism. They will begin the PNC process once Rev. Simmons' treatments are complete. Rev. Deanna Reikow will leave the Connectional Pastor position and return to full-time ministry at Mandan in March.

Minto (Knox, yoked with Grafton)

Midway Parish

Meetings with the Midway Parish were productive, and both the parish meeting and session meetings went well. They continue to negotiate pacing of the process. Overall, the parish is moving forward, and all required items are expected to be ready for approval by mid-January. They've received permission to post their MDP on the Church Leadership Connection (CLC).

Moorhead (FPC)

The session voted to contract with Jamie Norstog, CLP, for quarter time worship leadership and outreach pastor. Average worship has increased by 10-15 people over a year ago. An agreement was reached through the Per Capita Forgiveness Program and Moorhead took all of the necessary steps to ensure that they are current on Per Capita payments.

Oakes (FPC)

Park River (Federated Church)

Sarah Bigwood visited on Nov 18 and met with Carmen and Roberta (Bobbie). She took a tour of the facilities; the upgrades are very welcoming and appealing to younger generations. We also discussed per capita obligations. The Presbytery has been basing Park River's obligation on total membership and not on the number of PCUSA members. Ellen and Sarah reviewed their obligation and under the Forgiveness Program, the Park River church is current on all per capita payments. Park River is currently working on upgrading their sound system and streaming.

Pillsbury (Baldwin)

Portal (FPC)

A successful connection has been made with members. First Presbyterian Church Portal stopped weekly services in 2022. Building is being used as a community center of sorts under the direction of church members. When they are ready, we will help members figure out what to do with the building and land. There is no urgency.

Red Lake Falls (FPC)

Rhame (Lyle Presbyterian)

Updated exterior siding and foundation. Added handicap ramps, entryway decks and new heating system. Their kitchen & fellowship area renovations are coming along nicely. They continue to meet weekly for worship and meals even during renovations.

Rolla & St. John

Rugby (Emmanuel United)

Tower City

Tower City congregation hosted the summer worship schedule with one service for the parish. They feel privileged to have a rotation of ordained and lay pastors for each month as well as Moderator Donna Monteith to guide and direct their congregation. Coffee and treats are part of each Sunday fellowship time. They are thankful for a neighbor who keeps an eye on the church in various ways throughout the year including using a tarp to cover the steps for winter snow and ice. Clerk of Session, Phyllis Otterness, says, "the church is a blessing to all of us!"

Towner

Walhalla

In the October 2025 Presbytery Report, we mistakenly reported that Walhalla is gathering twice a month. They meet regularly and pulpit supply rotates, preaching a few Sundays each month.

Watford City (FPC)

Webster (Webster Chapel)

West Fargo (Community)

West Fargo continues the search process for a designate pastor. Rev. Bob Boyar has taken over helping them vet candidates. Members continue to fill the pulpit each Sunday.

Westhope (FPC)

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rev. Sarah M. Bigwood".

Rev. Sarah Bigwood

POD Members: Rusty Bender, Sarah Bigwood (chair), Dan Billings, Cathie Bishop, Bob Boyar, and Deanna Reikow. Advisors: Ellen Misialek (bookkeeper) & Sherri Stern (treasurer), Jenn Kolodka (PNP communications).

MINISTER REPORT

Installed Ministers of Word and Sacrament - PC(USA)

Rev. Dr. Leanne Simmons - Bismarck
Rev. Trudy Dumont - Devils Lake, Webster, Peace Lutheran
Rev. Sarah Bigwood - Fargo
Rev. Robin Dill - Grafton, Minto
Rev. Dr. Spencer Homan - Grand Forks
Rev. Robert Boyar - Jamestown
Rev. Deanna Reikow - Mandan

Installed Ministers of Word and Sacrament - PC(USA) serving other denominations

Rev. Ruth Sanders - Wesley UMC, Crookston
Rev. Elaine Sweet - Zion Lutheran, Minot
Rev. Mindy Meier - First Congregational, New Rockford & Westminster Camp Ajawah, Camp Director
Rev. Johnny Rhoad - Canadian Churches (Knox United Church, Alsask United, Cereal United, Oyen United)

Installed Ministers of Word and Sacrament – from other denominations serving PNP churches

Rev. J. Sue Kana-Mackey (UMC) - Langdon

Active CLPs

Pastor James Crandall, (CLP, UMC) - Angus
Pastor Bill Weispfenning (CLP) - Edgely, LaMoure
Pastor Casey Chapman (CLP) - Hunter, Grandin
Pastor Dave Schnackenberg (CLP, ??) - Rolla St. John
Pastor Merton (Randy) Kimpland (CLP, UMC) – Westhope
Chaplain Nancy Legerski (CLP) – Bismarck Area

Other CLPs

Carrie Lauber (candidate)
Corday Goddard (candidate)
Donna Preston (candidate)
Scott Halstead (candidate)

Other Pastors in our Jurisdiction

Rev. Cheri Danielson (Duluth)
Rev. Cheryl McCullough
Rev. Deb Burger-Peery
Rev. Dan Billings
Rev. Darrel Cory
Rev. David Suk
Rev. Donna Monteith
Rev. Gary Watts (WA)
Rev. Gretchen Daneke Graf
Rev. Joan Swanson
Rev. Marli Danielson (Duluth)
Rev. Martha McDowell
Rev. Mary Holtey
Rev. Michael Ozaki
Rev. Nancy Emerson
Rev. Richard Kargard

Long-Term Pulpit Supply

Dwight Netzer - Argyle
Raenelle Sorensen (UMC) - Arvilla
Rick Larsen - Dilworth
Tom Olson - Enderlin
Jesse Irvine - Fordville, Park River
Jamie Norstog (CLP) - Moorhead
Dave Montecucollo - Pillsbury
Terry Bagley - Rhame

Approved transfers

*retiring or leaving ministry in 2026

If you notice a name missing from this list or someone identified incorrectly, please contact Sarah Bigwood at sbigwood@firstpresfargo.org.

EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER PROPOSAL REPORT

March 2026

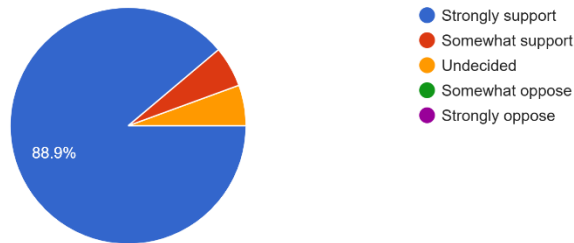
The Presbytery of the Northern Plains is proposing the creation of an **Executive Presbyter** role to provide relational, pastoral, and administrative leadership. Dates for Presbytery-wide Zoom meetings were January 22 and February 10 at 7pm. Invites were sent to churches via monthly newsletter.

These Zoom meetings were critical in understanding some of the biggest questions and concerns that members of our Presbytery have regarding this proposal. We'd like to share with you those findings.

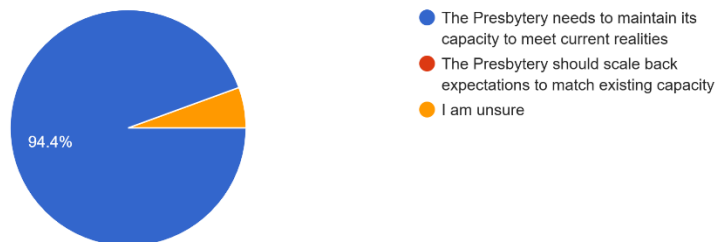
Survey Results

- 22 people representing 16 churches participated in the Zoom calls. 18 people responded to our survey.
- When asked based on what you know today, do you believe the Presbytery has reached a point where volunteer leadership alone is no longer sufficient? 100% of participants answered, Yes. 0% answered no or unsure.

If the vote were held today, how would you lean on the proposal to hire a full-time Executive Presbyter?
18 responses



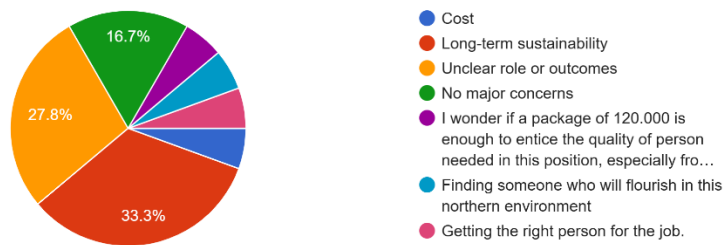
Which statement comes closest to your view?
18 responses



- Over a third of respondents were concerned about the cost and long-term sustainability of an EP role. Nearly a third were concerned that the job description has unclear roles or outcomes. Several respondents were concerned that we be able to attract a candidate that is a good fit for our Presbytery with one noting that our package might be too low to attract a good candidate.

What is your primary concern, if any, about hiring an Executive Presbyter?

18 responses



- Trust in presbytery leadership among survey participants is strong. Over 83% expressed clear trust and the remaining respondents expressed moderate trust, with no respondents indicating distrust.

Feedback

In addition to the survey, we asked participants to discuss these proposals with each other and learned several key things from those conversations.

Cultural Fit

Participants emphasized that past challenges with Executive Presbyters often arose when leaders did not understand the character of this presbytery. The Presbytery of the Northern Plains covers a large geographic region made up primarily of rural and small-town communities where churches often operate with limited staff and resources. Participants stressed that these congregations are resilient, well educated, and deeply committed to their ministries. They value humility, steadiness, and authenticity rather than institutional flash or complex programming. Because of this, there was strong support for seeking a leader who understands rural and small-town life, respects the wisdom already present in congregations, and builds trust through relationships rather than through new presbytery wide initiatives.

Relationships Over Programs

Closely connected to this theme was the desire for an Executive Presbyter whose work focuses on presence and relationship building rather than program development. Many participants expressed that congregations are already stretched and do not need additional presbytery programs that create more work. Instead, they hope for a leader who travels across the presbytery, visits churches, drinks coffee with pastors and members, celebrates the ministries already happening, and helps congregations learn from one another. The emphasis was on strengthening relationships between churches and between congregations and the presbytery so that people feel more connected to the broader body.

Clearly Defined Duties

Participants asked for greater clarity about what the Executive Presbyter would actually do week to week. The Executive Presbyter should serve as the primary point of contact for questions about the Book of Order, presbytery procedures, and available resources. The role also includes regular congregational visitation, preaching across the presbytery on Sundays, maintaining regular contact with churches and pastors, traveling throughout the region to maintain presbytery presence, participating in Leadership Pod and Congregational Vitality Pod meetings,

coordinating presbytery gatherings and worship, and assisting with administrative tasks such as background checks for incoming pastors.

Travel

Questions were raised about travel expectations and the resources needed to support them. Because congregations are spread across a large geographic region, there was concern that the position include a sufficient travel budget to make this level of presence realistic and sustainable. Participants noted that travel should be planned thoughtfully, coordinating visits when possible so that time and financial resources are used wisely while still maintaining a strong and visible presbytery presence among our congregations.

Compensation and Structure

Some participants wondered whether the proposed salary level would be sufficient to attract a strong candidate. Others asked whether the presbytery might consider creative ways to structure the position if necessary. One example discussed was defining the role as three out of four weeks per month, which might allow the presbytery to remain financially responsible while still maintaining clear expectations for travel, preaching, and presence.

Financial Sustainability

Participants asked whether the presbytery could fund the position at a full time level for several years and requested that leadership develop a longer term financial picture. In particular, there was interest in seeing a three year funding plan and budget projection so that the presbytery can understand how the position fits within long term financial realities.

Search Process

Participants asked for clarity about how the search process itself will work. Questions included how the search committee will be formed, how geographic and congregational diversity will be represented on that committee, and where the position will be posted and publicized. There was interest in ensuring that the search casts a wide and appropriate net so that the presbytery can consider a strong and diverse pool of candidates.

Presbytery Leadership

The conversations were also highly affirming of the work that has taken place since COVID to reconnect the presbytery. Many participants expressed appreciation for the efforts made to strengthen relationships, improve communication, and create meaningful opportunities for churches and pastors to engage with one another. Several noted that they feel more supported than they have in a while.

Much of this work has been carried by a small group of leaders who will not have the same capacity in 2026. These conversations therefore served as both affirmation and invitation. The presbytery is not an “other.” Together, we are the presbytery. Trust grows as more churches and individuals participate in the shared work of connection, leadership, and ministry across the body.

Summary

Participants consistently expressed the desire for a relational pastor who understands rural ministry, builds connections between congregations, offers clear guidance and support, and serves the presbytery with humility, steadiness, and respect for the communities that make up this region.

Feedback Response

In response to the feedback we received, we updated the Executive Presbyter job description to reflect several key themes from the conversations. The revisions emphasize cultural fit, prioritize relationships and congregational presence over new programs, and clarify core duties such as visitation, preaching, regular church contact, and serving as a point of contact for presbytery guidance.

We also prepared a short process addendum to accompany the job description. This document outlines how the leadership team will proceed if the presbytery grants approval, addressing questions raised about the search process, budget planning, committee formation, and how the position will be posted and publicized.

**Presbytery of the Northern Plains
Executive Presbyter Proposal
March 2026**

The **Presbytery of the Northern Plains** seeks a **relational and pastoral leader** to serve as Executive Presbyter. This role is centered on connection, care, and encouragement, helping to strengthen the life of our churches and pastors while fostering unity across the presbytery.

Our Context

The Presbytery of the Northern Plains spans a wide geographic region of 54 congregations. Many serve rural and small-town communities where neighboring churches may be hours apart and where there is little infrastructure beyond the local congregation. Travel across the presbytery is significant and regular presence matters.

Our congregations are resilient, well educated, deeply committed, and accustomed to doing much with limited resources. We value humility, steadiness, authenticity, and practical wisdom. We are not ostentatious and we do not seek complexity for its own sake.

We are not seeking a program architect. We are seeking a pastoral presence. We desire a leader who will travel, listen, build trust, drink coffee in fellowship halls, celebrate what is already happening, and strengthen the relational fabric between congregations and The Presbytery. We seek someone who approaches churches with curiosity and respect, honoring the wisdom already present within them.

Core Responsibilities:

Primary Point of Contact

- Serve as the first point of contact for churches and pastors with questions regarding the Book of Order, presbytery processes, required forms, appropriate pods for assistance, and available presbytery resources.
- Provide clear guidance or connect individuals to the appropriate body or resource in a timely manner.

Congregational Presence

- Preach in presbytery congregations 40 to 48 Sundays per year.
- Build relationships not only with church leaders but with members of congregations.
- Contact every congregation at least twice annually for intentional check ins.
- Visit congregations as needed to convey presbytery presence and care during times of celebration, transition, conflict, revitalization, or closure.

Pastor Care

- Maintain regular contact with pastors at large and those between calls.
- Offer pastoral encouragement and appropriate support.

Travel and Visibility

- Spend up to three days per week traveling within the presbytery meeting with pastors, sessions, and congregational leaders.
- Spend up to three weeks per month visiting congregations across the presbytery.
- Coordinate travel and congregational visits thoughtfully to minimize travel time and expenses while maintaining consistent presence throughout the region.

Presbytery Leadership

- Attend and contribute to monthly Leadership Pod meetings.
- Attend and contribute to monthly Congregational Vitality Pod meetings.
- Coordinate stated presbytery meetings in collaboration with Leadership Pod.
- Ensure presbytery gatherings include meaningful and well-prepared worship.

Administrative Oversight

- Manage staff and budgets responsibly.
- Respond in a timely manner to presbytery communications.
- Assist with background checks and required clearances for incoming pastors.
- Maintain familiarity with Board of Pensions matters and other PCUSA developments and communicate relevant information to churches.

Ideal Candidate:

- A **caring, friendly pastor** with a heart for people and deep love for the church.
- Experience in handling **administrative tasks** including managing staff and budgets, responding timely to requests from churches, being informed by the Book of Order, and organizing communication amongst pods, committees, and congregations.
- Skilled in **worship leadership, preaching, and prayer**, offering spiritual encouragement across the presbytery.
- Comfortable **adapting to changing environments**, meeting churches where they are.
- Naturally gifted in **building relationships** and fostering a sense of community among pastors and congregations.
- Willing to **travel often** to be present in the life of the presbytery.

Support Structure:

The Executive Presbyter will work alongside the **Congregational Vitality Pod (CVP) chair and Leadership POD** to ensure presbytery functions are carried out effectively. This role is designed for someone who thrives as a pastoral presence and can provide administrative oversight.

To Apply:

Interested candidates should contact _____.

Executive Presbyter Search Process

The Presbytery of the Northern Plains is seeking to call an Executive Presbyter whose role is primarily relational and pastoral, with clearly defined responsibilities for congregational presence, administrative guidance, and presbytery leadership.

Guiding Priorities

We will prioritize cultural fit, relational leadership, and experience in rural or small-town ministry. We seek a leader who values presence over program development, strengthens connections without increasing workload, and approaches congregations with humility and respect. Defined expectations for visitation, preaching, regular church contact, pod participation, and administrative oversight will guide evaluation.

Compensation and Sustainability

The presbytery will review whether the proposed salary is sufficient to attract a strong candidate. We may consider structuring the role creatively, such as three out of four weeks per month, if this supports sustainability while maintaining presence. A three-year funding plan and projection will be developed.

Search Committee and Posting

A search committee reflecting geographic and congregational diversity will be formed. The position will be widely posted through appropriate denominational networks. The process will emphasize transparency, fiscal responsibility, and prayerful discernment.

BUDGET PROJECTIONS - EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER

	2026		2027	2028	2029
	w/o EP	EP	EP	EP	EP
INCOME					
CASH FLOW - GENERAL FUND	\$ 160,000.00	\$ 160,000.00	\$ 165,000.00	\$ 170,000.00	\$ 175,000.00
INVESTMENT INCOME					
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 160,000.00	\$ 160,000.00	\$ 165,000.00	\$ 170,000.00	\$ 175,000.00
EXPENSES					
PER CAPITA	\$ 44,000.00	\$ 44,000.00	\$ 44,000.00	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 46,000.00
PERSONNEL	\$ 74,000.00	\$ 194,000.00	\$ 199,820.00	\$ 205,814.60	\$ 211,989.04
OFFICE & ADMINISTRATIVE	\$ 13,600.00	\$ 13,600.00	\$ 13,600.00	\$ 13,600.00	\$ 13,600.00
POD EXPENSES	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 6,000.00
MISSION & MINISTRY	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 45,000.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 182,600.00	\$ 302,600.00	\$ 308,420.00	\$ 315,414.60	\$ 322,589.04
INCOME LESS EXPENSES	\$ (22,600.00)	\$ (142,600.00)	\$ (143,420.00)	\$ (145,414.60)	\$ (147,589.04)

PRESBYTERY GRANT PROGRAM REPORT

March 2026

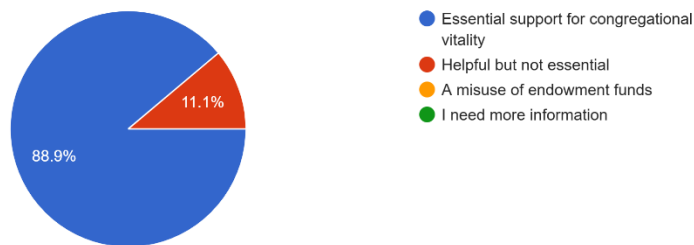
The Presbytery of the Northern Plains is proposing the creation of a Congregational Vitality Grant Program to support churches that are strengthening their ministries and expanding their witness in their communities. This program would provide financial support for projects that enhance congregational life, increase community engagement, and encourage thoughtful stewardship of church resources.

In order to gather feedback on this proposal, the CVP hosted Presbytery-wide Zoom meetings on January 22 and February 10 at 7pm. Invites were sent to churches via monthly newsletter. These conversations helped clarify both the goals of the program and the questions that congregations have about how it would function. We would like to share those findings.

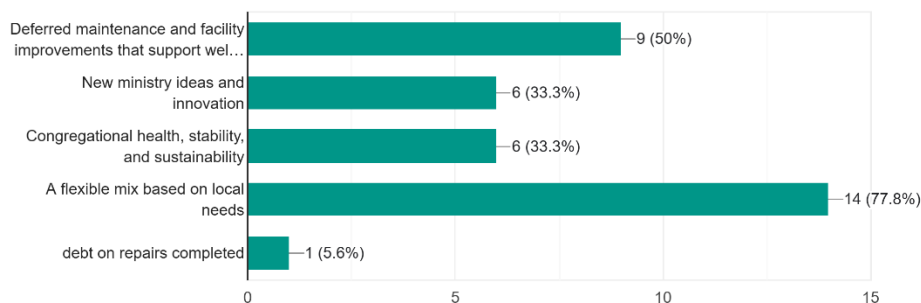
Survey Results

- 22 people representing 16 churches participated in the Zoom calls. 18 people responded to our survey.
- When asked if they support using endowment earnings to provide direct grants to congregations, 100% of participants answered, Yes. 0% answered no or unsure.

Which best reflects your view of the grant program?
18 responses

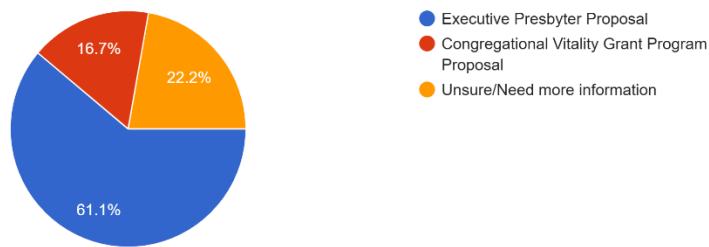


These grants are intended to support congregational vitality in ways not already covered by existing Presbytery funds. Which uses best reflect how you think they should function?
18 responses



If financial constraints require choosing only one proposal, which should be prioritized for funding?

18 responses



- Most participants felt some level of comfort at moving forward with a vote on this proposal with 72% responding that they would be ready to vote in March.
- Trust in presbytery leadership among survey participants is strong. Over 83% expressed clear trust and the remaining respondents expressed moderate trust, with no respondents indicating distrust.

Feedback

In addition to the survey, participants were invited to discuss the proposed Congregational Vitality Grant Program with one another. These conversations raised several questions and helped clarify how the program should function. The themes below summarize the most common areas of interest.

Financial Sustainability

One of the first questions raised was whether the presbytery can responsibly make up to \$50,000 available each year for this program. Participants wanted assurance that funding the grant program would not jeopardize other priorities, particularly the proposed Executive Presbyter position.

In response to these concerns, leadership clarified that up to \$50,000 may be made available annually depending on the health of presbytery accounts, with priority given to maintaining the Executive Presbyter position. The grant program is intended to operate within the financial capacity of the presbytery rather than placing strain on its long term stability.

Use of Funds

Participants also asked how grant funds could be used. In particular, several people wondered whether grants could support salaries or staff positions.

The preference of the program is not to fund ongoing salaries or personnel costs. Instead, funds are intended to support programs, ministry initiatives, and infrastructure projects that strengthen the work of the congregation. A congregation may propose a pilot program designed to test a new ministry initiative that could include a salary provided there is a clear plan for how the congregation would sustain that program beyond the initial grant.

Timing of Projects

Questions were raised about whether grants could be used to reimburse projects that have already

been completed.

The program requires that applications be submitted before work begins. This allows the Congregational Vitality Pod to review the vision for the project, confirm readiness through bids or documentation, and ensure that funds are used in alignment with the goals of the program.

Application Timing

Participants asked how often churches could apply and how the application cycle would function.

Churches may apply at any time during the year, and applications will be reviewed quarterly. To ensure that funding remains available throughout the year, half of the annual funds will be available during the first two quarters and the remaining half during the final two quarters.

When reviewing applications, priority will be given to congregations that demonstrate a clear and thoughtful plan for ministry growth and engagement.

Multiple Applications

Another question concerned whether a congregation could receive more than one grant.

Churches may apply for multiple grants over time, but priority will be given to congregations applying for the first time. This approach allows the program to support a broad range of congregations across the presbytery while still permitting churches to pursue additional projects when appropriate.

Transparency and Reporting

Participants asked how the presbytery would be informed about which congregations receive grants and how funds are being used.

To maintain transparency, the Congregational Vitality Pod will report at each presbytery meeting which churches have received grants. In addition, congregations that receive funding will be asked to share a story or newsletter article describing the project and how it is strengthening their ministry. These reports will allow the presbytery to celebrate the work happening across our congregations and learn from one another.

Decision Process

Questions were also raised about how grant decisions would be made and what governance structure would guide the process.

The Congregational Vitality Pod will review applications and make recommendations, while the Leadership Pod will vote on final approval. A 60 percent quorum of the Leadership Pod must be present for a vote to take place, ensuring that grant decisions reflect shared leadership within the presbytery.

Building Projects

Several participants asked whether the grants could be used for improvements to church

buildings.

Grants may be used for building related projects, particularly when those improvements help a congregation better serve its community or expand its ministry. As with other projects, preference will be given to congregations that can clearly demonstrate how the proposed project contributes to a larger plan for growth and engagement.

Purpose of the Congregational Vitality Grant Program

Participants also asked for greater clarity about the broader purpose of the program itself.

First, the presbytery has an opportunity to invest in congregations that have invested in the life of this presbytery. The grant program allows the presbytery to return some of those resources to congregations so they can strengthen their ministries.

Second, the program is designed to encourage thoughtful and intentional growth. If we want the Presbytery to remain strong in the years ahead, we must be willing to invest in ministries that reach new people, deepen community engagement, and expand the witness of the gospel. These grants provide practical tools that allow congregations to pursue those goals.

Finally, there is wisdom in actively investing the resources entrusted to the presbytery today. Holding funds indefinitely carries its own risks. By supporting congregations now, the presbytery strengthens ministries that are already serving their communities and ensures that these resources are used to further the work of the church in this region.

Summary

The Congregational Vitality Grant Program is designed to support congregations that are actively strengthening their ministries and seeking new ways to serve their communities. Participants consistently expressed interest in a program that is financially responsible, transparent in its decision making, and focused on projects that contribute to meaningful congregational vitality and growth.

Feedback Response

In response to the feedback we received, we clarified several aspects of the Congregational Vitality Grant Program. These clarifications include guidelines regarding the use of funds, expectations around project readiness, the quarterly review process for applications, and how the presbytery will be informed about grant awards.

We also emphasized that the program prioritizes ministry initiatives, infrastructure improvements, and pilot projects that strengthen congregational vitality rather than ongoing personnel expenses. These adjustments reflect the desire expressed in our conversations for a program that supports practical ministry growth while maintaining strong financial stewardship.

Congregational Vitality Grant Program

03-21-2026

Introduction

The Congregational Vitality Grant Program provides financial support to congregations within the Presbytery of the Northern Plains for projects that strengthen ministry and expand the church's witness in local communities. Because our churches faithfully support the shared work of the presbytery through leadership, participation, and financial contributions, this program returns some of those resources to congregations.

Program Overview

The Congregational Vitality Grant Program will provide financial assistance for projects that strengthen congregational ministry, deepen community engagement, or expand the capacity of churches to share the gospel.

The presbytery may make available up to \$50,000 annually from presbytery endowment funds to support this program. The amount distributed each year will depend on the financial health of presbytery accounts and will remain secondary to funding the Executive Presbyter position.

Program Details

- Congregations may request grants of up to \$50,000.
- The amount awarded may not exceed 150 percent of the appraised value of the church property.
- Accountability: Funds are released only after a congregation has provided project-ready documentation (such as bids, contracts, or detailed plans) along with a clearly defined vision for how the project will strengthen their ministry.
- Applications will be reviewed quarterly. To ensure funds remain available throughout the year, half of the annual allocation will be available during the first two quarters of the year and the remaining half will be available during the final two quarters.

Eligibility Criteria

Congregations applying for a Congregational Vitality Grant must meet the following criteria.

- The congregation must be a member church of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains.
- The congregation must demonstrate vitality through active engagement in ministry, outreach, or community service. We are flexible in how congregations define vitality within their context.
- The congregation must present a clear description of how the project will strengthen its ministry or support future growth.
- The congregation must be current on per capita payments or engaged in a repayment plan approved by the Presbytery Leadership Pod.

- Applications must include documentation of bids or plans or equivalent materials showing the project is ready to begin.

Note: Grants cannot be awarded for projects that have already been completed or for expenses incurred prior to approval.

Use of Funds

- Grants may be used for ministry programs, outreach initiatives, infrastructure improvements, building projects, or other efforts that strengthen congregational vitality.
- The program is not intended to fund ongoing salaries or permanent staffing positions. In limited cases, a congregation may request support for a pilot program that tests a new ministry initiative, provided the congregation includes a clear plan for how that program will be sustained beyond the grant period.
- Congregations may apply for more than one grant over time. Priority will be given to congregations applying for the first time in order to ensure broad participation across the presbytery.

Application Process

- Congregations will submit a formal application describing the project, its anticipated impact on congregational vitality, and documentation demonstrating project readiness. (Application form attached).
- Applications will be reviewed by the Congregational Vitality Pod, which will make recommendations to the Presbytery Leadership Pod.
- The Leadership Pod will vote on final approval of grants. At least 60 percent of Leadership Pod members must be present for a vote to occur.
- Funds will not be released until all required documentation has been received and approved.
- Congregations receiving grants will be asked to submit a brief report or newsletter article describing the project and how it has strengthened the ministry of their congregation. These stories will be shared with the presbytery so that churches may celebrate and learn from one another's work.
- The Congregational Vitality Pod will also report regularly to the presbytery regarding grants that have been awarded.

Conclusion

The Congregational Vitality Grant Program reflects the presbytery's commitment to nurturing strong congregations and encouraging faithful stewardship of shared resources. By providing accessible funding with clear accountability, the presbytery seeks to support ministries that strengthen congregations, expand community engagement, and share the good news of Jesus Christ across our region.

CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY GRANT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much funding is available?

Up to \$50,000 may be available each year depending on the financial health of presbytery accounts. Funding for the Executive Presbyter position will remain the presbytery's first financial priority.

How large can a grant be?

Churches may request grants of up to \$50,000. The grant may not exceed 150 percent of the appraised value of the church property.

When can churches apply?

Churches may apply at any time during the year. Applications will be reviewed quarterly.

To ensure fair access, half of the annual funds will be available during the first two quarters of the year and the remaining half during the final two quarters.

Can a grant be used for staff salaries?

The program is not intended to fund ongoing salaries or permanent staff positions. However, congregations may request funding for pilot programs that test a new ministry initiative if they include a plan for sustaining that work in the future.

Can grants be used for building projects?

Yes. Building improvements may be funded when they help a congregation expand ministry, strengthen community engagement, or support future growth.

Can grants reimburse projects that have already been completed?

No. Applications must be submitted and approved before work begins.

Can a church apply for more than one grant?

Yes. Congregations may apply for multiple grants over time, but priority will be given to churches applying for the first time.

Who decides which churches receive grants?

The Congregational Vitality Pod reviews applications and makes recommendations. The Presbytery Leadership Pod votes on final approval. At least 60 percent of Leadership Pod members must be present for a vote.

How will the presbytery know which churches receive grants?

The Congregational Vitality Pod will report regularly to the presbytery. Churches receiving grants will also be asked to share a short story or newsletter article describing how the grant supported their ministry.

**Presbytery of the Northern Plains
CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY GRANT PROGRAM
Application (outline)**

Church Information

Church Name
City / Town
Primary Contact Person
Contact Email
Contact Phone
Pastor (if applicable)

Application Information

Date of Application
Amount Requested
Total Project Cost
Brief Project Title

Project Summary (100 word limit)

In 3–5 sentences, describe the project for which you are requesting funding. This summary may be used when reporting to the presbytery about awarded grants.

Purpose of the Project (100 word limit)

Describe the need or opportunity this project addresses. Explain why this project is important for your congregation at this time.

Congregational Vitality (100 word limit)

Describe how this project will strengthen the vitality of your congregation. Examples may include:

- *expanding ministry in the community*
- *increasing participation in congregational life*
- *supporting outreach or mission*
- *improving the congregation's ability to serve neighbors*
- *strengthening programs that support growth in faith or membership*

Growth Vision (100 word limit)

Explain how this project connects to your congregation's broader vision for ministry and growth. How will this project help your church reach new people, deepen engagement, or strengthen its presence in the community?

Project Description (500 word limit)

Provide a clear description of the project including:

- *what will be done*
- *who will carry out the work*
- *the expected timeline*
- *when the project will begin and be completed*

If the request involves a pilot ministry program, describe how the congregation plans to sustain the program after the grant period.

Project Readiness (100 word limit)

Describe the current status of the project and how the congregation is prepared to begin the work.

Required Documentation

Applications must include documentation showing that the project is ready to begin. Please attach the following where applicable:

- *contractor bids*
- *vendor estimates*
- *project plans*
- *architectural drawings*
- *program plans or budgets*

Note: Grants cannot be awarded for projects that have already been completed or for expenses incurred prior to approval.

Project Budget

Please provide a breakdown of project costs.

Amount the Congregation Will Contribute

Other Funding Sources (if applicable)

Use of Funds (250 word limit)

Describe specifically how the grant funds will be used.

Note: Grants are intended for ministry programs, outreach initiatives, infrastructure improvements, or building projects that strengthen congregational vitality. The program does not fund ongoing salaries or permanent staffing positions. Pilot ministry programs may be considered if the congregation provides a plan for sustainability.

Congregational Commitment (100 word limit)

Describe how the congregation will support this project through volunteer leadership, financial contributions, or other resources.

Expected Impact (250 word limit)

What changes or outcomes do you hope this project will create for your congregation or community?

Reporting and Storytelling

Congregations receiving grants will be asked to share a short report or newsletter article describing how the grant supported their ministry. This may be shared with the presbytery.

Do you agree to write and share your story with the wider presbytery?

Certification

By submitting this application, the congregation affirms that:

- the project has not yet begun
- the information provided is accurate
- the congregation agrees to provide required documentation before funds are released
- the congregation agrees to share a short report about the project if the grant is awarded

Name and Title of Person Submitting Application

Signature

Date