Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT)™
Executive Summary

Winnetka Presbyterian Church, IL

Date: June 24, 2026

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."
(Philippians 1:9-10)

Survey Overview & Vitality Measures

The Congregation Assessment Tool (CAT) was recently administered for Winnetka Presbyterian Church. Within the congregation, 86 persons responded to the assessment which is 101% of the average weekly attendance. These responses have been benchmarked against approximately 2,800 other congregations in the Holy Cow! Consulting database that have taken the CAT in the last seven years. This benchmarking helps determine what is typical and what is exceptional about the church.

Two things are needed to be a vital congregation: high levels of satisfaction and energy. Satisfaction is the sense of peaceful contentment when working with each other within the organization. Energy is passion with intention and a compelling sense of purpose within the organization.

Overall, approximately 36% of the responders are clearly satisfied with how things are in Winnetka Presbyterian Church. Approximately 40% feel there is a compelling sense of purpose or energy and people within the church are not just going through the motions in their work. In terms of satisfaction, 45% of the responders are on the fence and 44% are on the fence in terms of their feeling of energy. This indicates that a large portion of the people within the congregation are waiting to see what is going to happen next before affirmatively stating whether they are clearly satisfied or energized.

Compared to other congregations, the overall vitality of Winnetka Presbyterian Church is within the low range. While 21% of the responders stated that they are attending less than they were three years ago, 25% of the responders stated that they are attending more. When asked if church activities outside of worship are meaningful, 50% of the respondents clearly agreed, 43% of respondents were on the fence, and 7% clearly disagreed.

Strategic Position

Importantly, the level of energy within Winnetka Presbyterian Church is at an average range while satisfaction levels are in the low range. This indicates that the church is currently positioned in the Recovery quadrant. On the whole, members of the church can imagine a church more vital than they are currently experiencing. Somewhat lower levels of satisfaction can be motivating for change as long as members have a clear sense of direction,

some concrete, first steps to take, and are willing to contribute to the change instead of simply waiting for others to change.

Though the congregation is in the Recovery and Reinvention quadrant, they are very close to the Chaos Quadrant. Being this close to the Chaos quadrant might cause members of the church to experience a church with substantial energy. However, they may be struggling to know how to align the various aspects of its ministries to a common purpose. Confusion about ways to achieve goals or the vying of various groups for resources can generate a climate of uncertainty or even chaos. Members will need to have a clear sense of direction, some concrete, first steps to take, and willingness to contribute to the change instead of simply waiting for others to change.

Drivers / Areas of Focus

To determine how satisfied people are within Winnetka Presbyterian Church, they are focusing on five different areas or drivers. If people perceive the church is performing well in these five areas then the data suggests that their perception of their satisfaction will go up. Likewise, if people perceive that these five areas are not performing well, then their satisfaction levels will go down. The five areas of focus for people are:

Drivers of Satisfaction	Degree of Focus
Our former Pastor communicated with people in a way that kept us informed and connected.	High
The worship services at our church are exceptional in both quality and spiritual content.	High
In preaching, our former Pastor engaged people with a message that enriched their lives in the world.	High
The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible.	High

Our former Pastor helped us accomplish our mission by bringing out the best in everyone.	High

Additionally, to determine how energized people are within the church they are focusing on five different areas. If people perceive the church is performing well in these five areas, then the data suggests that their perception of their energy will go up. These five areas of focus are:

Drivers of Energy	**Degree of Focus**
The whole spirit in our congregation makes people want to get as involved as possible.	High
Our former Pastor made things happen.	High
Our church does a good job helping each member understand that he or she is called to ministry.	High
Our former Pastor communicated with people in a way that kept us informed and connected.	Moderate
In preaching, our former Pastor engaged people with a message that enriched their lives in the world.	Moderate

Clergy Focus

Because the top drivers of both satisfaction and energy heavily reference the former pastor's actions, Winnetka Presbyterian Church operates as a Clergy-Focused system. Clergy-focused churches can be very healthy if people in the congregation are able to feel connected to the clergy through worship and have clarity around how they are also responsible for the ministry of the church. Clergy-focused systems need to ensure that they are aware of any higher level of anxiety in the system around clergy, can move through conflict effectively, and continue to foster the growth of lay leadership. Because clergy-focused systems have a higher-than-average level of burn-out or flame-out for clergy, the church will need to create healthy boundaries with their clergy, providing support and space for clergy to reenergize and renew.

There are four areas of intentionality for clergy focused congregations that will need to be a part of any transition or strategic plan for the church. They are:

Accountability, Agency and Leadership skills	Built in consistent support for clergy
High level conflict management skills	Anxiety that is managed well about clergy changes (adaptive change)

Critical Success Factors (Reframed for Congregational Needs)

The original Critical Success Factors are highly focused on the pastor's performance. To empower the congregation, these urgent metrics could be reframed to highlight what the congregation is actually hungering for, moving the burden of success from the individual leader to the system as a whole.

- **From "Clergy communicates well" TO "A Culture of Transparent Alignment."**
  The Need: The congregation needs robust, multi-directional communication systems so that everyone understands the church's reality, mission, and next steps, removing the reliance on a single person to hold the narrative.
- **From "Clergy brings out the best" / "Clergy makes things happen" to "Systemic Empowerment & Mobilization."**
  The Need: The congregation needs a culture that actively expects, identifies, and deploys the talents of everyday members. They need to shift from waiting for a leader to initiate action, to being given the permission and framework to initiate it themselves.
- **From "Leaders representative" / "Leaders seek input" to "Inclusive and Responsive Governance."**
  The Need: The congregation needs to feel a sense of ownership over the church's future. This requires leadership bodies that actually look like the breadth of the congregation and actively collaborate with members before finalizing strategic directions.
- **From "Worship is excellent" / "Clergy preaching relevant" to "Transformational Spiritual Encounters."**
  The Need: The congregation needs spiritual depth that impacts their Monday-through-Saturday lives. They need corporate gatherings and messaging that prioritize authentic spiritual formation and practical application.
- **From "Spirit of involvement" to "A Passion-Driven Community."**
  The Need: The congregation needs a compelling, shared "why." They need a collective vision

that is exciting enough to pull them out of a static routine and inspire them to invest their time, energy, and resources into the shared work of the church.

Future Priorities

As the responders look at the future, they were asked to share what areas they would like to put energy into as a congregation. The top three priorities are:

- **Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy** to reach new people and incorporate them into the life of the church.
- **Make necessary changes** to attract families with children and youth to our church.
- **Create more opportunities** for people to form meaningful relationships (for example, small groups, nurtured friendships, shared meals, etc).

Benchmarking insights reveal that the desire to "Strengthen the pastoral response of the church in serving people in times of need" ranked as "Very High," while the goal to "Develop the spiritual generosity of the people to financially support the ministry of the church" ranked as "High" compared to national data.

Descriptive Indices & Culture

The CAT measures the culture of a congregation by looking at two descriptive areas. Those two areas are Theological Perspective and Flexibility Style. The Theological Perspective looks at four theological questions and measures the congregation's responses. These responses are used to determine if the congregation, as a whole, is more theologically conservative or more theologically progressive.

When asked the four theological questions, Winnetka Presbyterian Church as a whole is more theologically progressive. When looking at the theological diversity of the congregation it is average, indicating a moderate blend of individual viewpoints. The Flexibility Style asks responders to think about how adaptable or settled the congregation is as a whole when looking at change. When looking at the response to the four flexibility questions, the church is overall more adaptable than settled, indicating that the congregation is able to make necessary adaptive changes.

Magi Culture

With the overall theological perspective more progressive and the congregation more adaptive than settled in terms of flexibility, Winnetka Presbyterian Church falls into the church culture of the Magi. The Magi churches are ultimately concerned with the rational integrity of their faith, the just application of faith to life, and the journey of understanding. Adherence to these values shapes a community, which, at its best, exhibits deep knowledge, open discourse, and intellectual curiosity. A penetrating analytic culture makes the church a powerful ally for those in need of advocacy. It is common in Magi cultures to hear folks talk about issues from a systems perspective and the need to develop safeguards for those with minority status or who lack the power to protect themselves.

Magi cultures need to be mindful in their work and make sure they do not fall into the trap of overthinking their next steps or trying to be everything to everyone. It will be important to ensure that focus is placed on building deeper and meaningful relationships within the congregation. This will provide cohesion so that the church community can build an identity that is not focused on any particular issue but instead speaks to the broader mission of Winnetka Presbyterian Church.

Performance Indices

The CAT looks at eight different areas of church performance and benchmarks them to help build understanding around what is typical or exceptional about the church and where there are growth opportunities. A summary of these areas highlights specific strengths and vulnerabilities.

Measured Area	Percentile Rank	National Benchmark
Conflict Management	59	Average
Hospitality	54	Average
Engagement in Education	39	Average
Morale	31	Low

Governance	26	Low
Readiness for Ministry	20	Low
Spiritual Vitality	17	Low

Performance Summary: Winnetka Presbyterian Church currently demonstrates relative stability in *Conflict Management* (59th percentile) and *Hospitality* (54th percentile), indicating a baseline ability to manage disagreements and welcome individuals. *Engagement in Education* is also functioning at a typical national level. However, significant vulnerabilities exist in the foundational areas of organizational health. *Morale*, *Governance*, *Readiness for Ministry*, and *Spiritual Vitality* all rank in the Low category nationally. This cluster of low scores suggests a congregation that currently feels disconnected from decision-making, unequipped for personal ministry, and struggles to experience deep spiritual connection in their daily lives.

Transition, Clergy Search & Strategic Planning

The congregation has identified the following top three critical abilities for their next pastor:

- **Preaching:** Capacity to inspire and connect people to God's word.
- **Strategic leadership:** Capacity to cast a vision and lead the church toward realization of the vision.
- **Pastoral care:** Capacity to engage people empathetically and care for persons in times of need.

Clergy Search

Clergy serving within a Magi culture must be exceptionally strong teachers who can engage directly with the congregation’s inherent intellectual curiosity. These leaders should be adept at framing spiritual formation through the lenses of deep thinking and mental development, while remaining comfortable navigating high levels of theological diversity. Success in this role requires the capacity to help members work through complex questions, doubts, and a variety of viewpoints. Ultimately, the ideal leader will maintain a style that intentionally incorporates grace and empathy to create a sustainable path for spiritual growth.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning within a Magi culture requires engaging the congregation in the intensive work of deep thinking regarding the church's mission. This process focuses on developing high levels of mental flexibility, allowing the community to adapt its mental models as it transitions from its current reality toward a unique future vision. To achieve unity, leadership must intentionally facilitate the navigation of doubts and differing viewpoints. Ultimately, the goal of this planning is to establish a strong commitment that serves as the essential foundation for congregational action.

The next leader should be highly skilled in missional alignment and clarity, possessing the necessary experience or training to effectively assess the impact and effectiveness of various programs and ministries. They must also have a unique ability to foster an environment where members feel comfortable sharing their faith stories.

Module Summaries

Strategic Planning Module

The congregation recognizes a clear need for structural and strategic shifts. When asked about the level of change required to realize their vision for the church, 35% of respondents indicated "Moderate change" is needed, while 27% selected "Substantial change." An additional 34% felt "Some change" is required, signaling a broad consensus that the status quo is insufficient for the church's future effectiveness.

Supplemental Questions Summary

When determining how members prefer to receive information, 67% of respondents ranked email as their most effective communication method. Furthermore, 48% noted that "Conversations about hard questions or life matters" would be very helpful in living out their faith. Currently, 44% state their engagement level to impact the world is "Lower than I would like," and their decision to become involved is primarily influenced by the effectiveness of the opportunity (31% ranking this most important). Notably, 27% "Tend to disagree" that the church should continue in the same overall direction it has taken in the recent past.

"And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."
(2 Corinthians 9:8)

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