



# Mission Study Report

## Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church

*Swannanoa, North Carolina*

*February 2025*



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## **INTRODUCTION**

*"Behold, I am doing a new thing;...do you not perceive it?"*  
**Isaiah 43:19**

Every time a pastor leaves a congregation, that congregation is plunged into what we identify as a "transitional season," but in a real sense, communities of faith are called always to live in such intersectional spaces—drawing strength from experiences of God's faithfulness in the past, even as they step out in faith to embrace the challenges of the new day.

We are formulating this Mission Study Report in the wake of an historic storm which has left Western North Carolina changed in ways that will take time to discover. But the Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church community has a long record of pulling together to face challenges with ingenuity, commitment, and confidence in God's provision.

In this report, we want to introduce ourselves to you, name the challenges and opportunities we see ahead, and celebrate the God who supplies all that is needed for the church to accomplish its mission. We are looking for a pastor who will come and join our community of "seekers, doers, and loving spirits," as we seek to be faithful to the one who has called us here, together, for such a time as this.

## **Embedded in the College—Our Early History**

The story of our congregation cannot be told apart from the story of Warren Wilson College. Because we are uniquely located within the campus of the college, our roots and current sense of ourselves are woven into that of this environment of learning, service, and ideals of social justice. Our history and current relationship with Warren Wilson College are foundational to understanding who we are today.

The earliest incarnation of the school was a project of the Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church USA (the northern branch of Presbyterians,) built on land purchased in 1893 on the Swannanoa Valley near Asheville.

At the time, public education was limited in rural North Carolina. Faithful Presbyterian women in the North believed that providing education was the surest way to offer opportunity to those they deemed disadvantaged. Originally conceived as a boarding school to provide rudimentary education to farm boys and young men (many of them illiterate,) the original Asheville Farm School for Boys allowed its mission—and its name—to change as needs evolved.

In the early decades of the 1900s, as North Carolina's legislators began to commit to the early grades of public education, the Farm School added consecutive grades, by 1924 it offered a full twelve-grade education.

By 1936, as the Depression made obvious that many high school graduates did not have the necessary skills to secure employment, the school instituted a two-year job training program.

In 1940, evening shop courses in mechanics and electricity were added, in response to needs articulated by the National Defense Program.

Then in 1942, just as enrollment was dropping as young men enlisted in the war, the Asheville Farm School for Boys was presented with the opportunity to welcome the Dorland-Bell School for Girls onto its campus. The two schools merged, forming a complete junior college division. Again, the school



re-positioned itself, re-purposing buildings to accommodate female residents. The newly-merged institution was renamed Warren H. Wilson Vocational Junior College, in honor of a Presbyterian pastor, sociologist, and reformer, whose ground-breaking work focused on the importance of rural communities.

Following the war, the improvement of roads made public high schools more accessible to rural students and the Farm School saw its enrollment decline. At the same time, the Board of Home Missions recognized a need for a conference center to serve historically black and white colleges from all over the south. The Hazen Conference was born in 1943, with that purpose in mind. This early commitment to hosting rural pastors and community workers, without making distinctions based on race, continued to stretch the community toward a more faithful and inclusive vision of life together.

While none of these changes was painless or universally embraced, the community had the courage, creativity, and resilience to keep reinventing itself, as needs and opportunities arose. Those qualities are still part of the congregation's DNA.

### **Becoming Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church (WWPC)**

From its beginning in 1894, the church and college were one. All students studied the Bible, participated in daily chapel services, and walked with faculty and staff to attend Sunday services at Riceville Presbyterian Church two-and one-half miles away. Soon this journey was replaced by services on campus anywhere the congregation could find room to meet. A preacher from one of the Asheville mission schools traveled to lead the Sunday service. As enrollment of the school grew, the need for its own congregation became apparent. On November 22, 1925 the French Broad Presbytery recognized the sixty-one charter members as the Farm School Presbyterian Church.

As today's Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church anticipates celebrating its hundredth anniversary in the fall of 2025, here is some of what will be remembered:

Through the 1920's and 1930's missionary connections sent Cuban students to Warren Wilson, beginning the formative tradition of a strong international presence on campus.

In 1939, the school enrolled a refugee from Hitler's Germany, a Jewish Christian student. His enrollment came at the urging of both the national headquarters of the Presbyterian Church and the American Friends Service Committee.

In 1942, two Japanese-American young women, whose families had been relocated to an internment camp in Arizona, came to study at Warren Wilson. The Board of National Missions helped to bring that possibility to fruition.

In 1952, prior to desegregation in the South, the church/college admitted the first Black resident student a young man from the local area. He was 17-years-old when he was invited to become one of the first African-Americans to enroll at a previously all-white college or university in the South.

This same impulse continues today in our Circles of Welcome—Refugee Resettlement welcoming families and individuals from Vietnam and Afghanistan.

*"When strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall do them no wrong, the strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as natives among you and you love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."*

**Leviticus 19:33-34**

As the institution moved into the second half of the twentieth century, it continued to evolve, graduating its last high school class in 1957.

Between 1925 and 1958, a dozen pastors served the Warren Wilson church. They stayed, on average, less than three years. But when the Rev. Frederick G. Ohler arrived in 1958, a new chapter began. He stayed until his retirement in 1994, leaving an indelible imprint on the place. Later, the campus area encompassed by the chapel and fellowship hall was dedicated as the Ohler Spiritual Center.

In the spring of 1966, the college became a four-year school, known as Warren Wilson College.

Beginning in 1962, denominational support for the school (through the Board of Missions) began to diminish. By 1973, the college was completely independent of such support, with the Board of Missions having deeded over the campus property to the college's Board of Trustees. This separation coincided with the decision to suspend the requirement for students to attend Sunday morning services in the chapel.

Continuing in Reverend Ohler's footsteps as long-term pastors were Rob Martin (1996-2003) and Steve Runholt (2005-2023).



*It says something about this place that in the aftermath of the storm, as college students were patrolling with chainsaws to take care of fallen trees, they also took a moment to carve this lovely mushroom along the path to the chapel. Life comes back.*

## MISSION STUDY PROCESS

When it came time to appoint a Mission Study Team, the session decided that in addition to being an active church member, everyone who served should be able to: work as part of a team, listen to differing viewpoints, voice a minority opinion, follow through on commitments, and put congregational needs above individual preferences.

Somewhere on the team, the following gifts/skills needed to be represented: computer/research skills, organizational skills, writing skills, hospitality.

As much as possible, we sought to be representative in terms of: age, gender, ethnicity, family configuration, length of membership, areas of ministry involvement, and relationship to Warren Wilson College, where our sanctuary is located.

The session appointed the following persons to the team: Sally Broughton, Don Collins, Natalie Daugherty, Barbara Griswold, Pat Levi, Sharon Lytle, Ken Murchison, and Brent Roberts (Chair).

The team gathered for the first time on March 16, 2024, under the leadership of our Transitional Pastor, Margaret Lamotte Torrence. In addition to team-building, defining the scope of our work, and dividing responsibilities, we had an extended conversation based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, particularly focusing on what it might mean to be “ambassadors for Christ...entrusted with a message of reconciliation.”

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup>So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*  
**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**



*“Holy Conversations”*

We noted that ambassadors are chosen to carry another’s message; they do not act with their own interests in mind. Even though they live abroad, they retain citizenship in their home country. At the

same time, ambassadors are called to learn and respect the culture, customs, and language of the people to whom they are sent—to form deep and trustworthy relationships. Ambassadors hope to represent their home (and the one who sent them) in such a way that strangers will want to know the place and person for themselves.

As one Biblical scholar puts it: *“God will be judged by the way we live.”*  
How might we live in such a way that others are drawn to God’s love?

We kicked off our Mission Study Project on April 14, 2024, with a luncheon and presentation to the committee by Dr. Jeffrey A. Keith, Professor of History, and Warren Wilson College Archivist. Jeff suggests that *“history is shaped by where its author starts the story, as well as how the reader conceives their relationship to the end of that story.”* He gave us much food for thought.

As a church community we are inspired by and seek to follow the example and teachings of Jesus and the Hebrew prophets in whose footprints he walked. Woven through this document you will find scripture passages members cited as central to their understanding of our common call.

Our first congregational conversation was held over lunch the following week, on April 21. This session focused on who we understand ourselves to be. We placed pins in a map to get a picture of the distances we travel to be together; we added dots to a timeline to signify when we began attending the church, and filled in important dates and events on that sketch of the church’s journey. Around our tables, we identified what we value. Then, after posting our timeline over the fireplace, longer-term members had a chance to share stories with newer members, and newer members had a chance to ask questions and offer observations. We sought to identify places of celebration and challenge in our story—how we grew, and how we lived out our faith.

In May we took a close look at our existing Vision Statement, formulated eight years earlier, and considered where we are currently involved in mission. Overall, we found that the statement still works for us, though it felt important to add our *“hands”* to this vision of how we live out our faith: *“We aspire to be a vibrant, thriving community that values head, hands, and heart; that puts love over fear; and that seeks to be the body of Christ in this time and place”*.

### **Examples of living out our faith:**

- In 2016 when anti-Islamic tensions were running high in our community, an invitation to Imam Taha and members of the Asheville Islamic Center resulted in a public forum on building bridges of peace and understanding along lines of faith. Some four hundred people attended – from local Presbyterian churches, from Warren Wilson College, and members of the larger community.
- In years when the college cafeteria closes for holidays, we have supplied food pantry items and grocery vouchers, and hosted abundant Thanksgiving dinners for any students who didn’t travel home, as well as for campus residents and congregants.
- When Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry began construction of housing for mothers and their children who were experiencing housing insecurity, our congregation agreed to sponsor an apartment, providing furnishings and support.



- To highlight the unconditional love we are called to share, we display a “rainbow” or pride flag by the outside chapel doors. We hope the symbols and text, hanging on either side of the cross, will invite a rich conversation about showing up in the world, learning from our neighbors, and experiencing the transformative love of God.



*PCUSA Moderator Heath Rada and Imam Mohamed Tahamof the Asheville Islamic Center on building bridges of peace, understanding and friendship between our two faith traditions*

*SVCM relies on partnerships with our local churches to support women and their children.*



*Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church*

We are a “hands on, yes we can” church, and forming partnerships with the community has always been important to us. We have served monthly meals at the Veterans Restoration Quarters since 2010. We

have helped build more than thirty Habitat for Humanity houses. And we find ways to pivot when circumstances change. In 2020, when Covid 19 created a potential health crisis for unhoused people, Homeward Bound and the city of Asheville secured a motel to accommodate over 80 people. Our congregation formed a “Sandwich Brigade” and delivered bag meals each week. While providing a much-needed service, it was also a vital way for members to stay in community. Though unable to meet in groups, volunteers made bag lunches at home, then met in a parking lot to consolidate the lunches for delivery.

*Sandwich brigade was not only sustenance for people at risk of homelessness, but a lifeline for congregants seeking connection during Covid-19*



When Hurricane Helene exposed a need for after-school care for local kids, we explored the possibility of hosting a program here on campus in cooperation with the college, but ultimately, we joined an ecumenical effort hosted at the local middle school. Member-volunteers report that this was an important part of their own recovery from the storm.

With the end of the academic year, much of our community disperses for summer travel. In 2024 we chose to use the summer for interviews with Mission Partners, Community Leaders, and College Representatives, and to host occasional stand-alone gatherings.

As a congregation, we celebrated each *Wonderful Wednesday* in June with a dinner and various activities. The first week we met for a party in nearby Owen Park, giving thanks for the long service of our Church Administrator, Donna Eagle Joslin, on her retirement. Everyone brought food to share at the pavilion, and then we danced on the basketball courts until the sun went down. We could not have imagined that the park would be destroyed by Hurricane Helene in just a few short months.

*“Sometimes, if we’re lucky...  
We find a great match.  
A place of hope, guidance and healing.  
Where grateful people help each other to love and grow,  
And teach the giving ways of the heart.  
That place is this church. Those people are you.  
Thank you for all you have given me.”*

Donna Eagle Joslin  
Former Church Administrator



On the remaining three Wednesdays, we explored new mission opportunities.

- On June 12 a presentation about becoming a Circle of Welcome for a refugee family led a committed core of volunteers to say “yes” to that need.
- On June 19 we learned about individual volunteer opportunities at the Western Correctional Center for Women (and possible future congregational support for the college’s Inside-Out program at the Correctional Center).
- On June 26 we heard about increasing needs in our valley, and how we might partner with Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministries to address them.

In early September we welcomed students back with lunch after church and helped to fill 100 bags with towels and toiletries for homeless neighbors, who were coming to use new shower facilities at Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry in nearby Black Mountain. Little did we know that members of our church community would end up needing those bags when their own home sustained catastrophic damage in the hurricane just a few weeks later.



*Fellowship Hall*



*Shower accessory tote bags collected and filled for nearby SVCM organization.*

Further plans for the fall were sidelined by the arrival of Hurricane Helene on September 27. Bridges washed away; many roads were impassable; homes and businesses were destroyed. We were weeks without electricity, water, and reliable internet service. It was almost two months before potable water was restored to the area. We put Mission Study plans on hold as the church’s attention shifted to immediate needs. During this time, we learned much about who God is calling us to be.

On the weekend of the storm, when the campus was completely isolated, we were moved to discover that students had held worship in the chapel on their own.



*The following weekend, those of us who could get to campus worshiped in the Fellowship Hall, though we were without power and water.*  
**(Attachment 2)**



The last quarter of 2024 was filled with sadness, loss, mourning, community gatherings, a slow move back to worship, construction, and checking in with one another. There was little movement toward completing this Mission Study, and it was clear that life in the Swannanoa Valley had shifted.

Due to family and personal needs, our Transitional Pastor, Margaret Lamotte Torrence, expressed her intent to leave Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church at the end of 2024.

Laurie Furr-Vancini was identified to be our Transitional Pastor for 2025, and a contract was agreed upon. Laurie began her work and walking alongside Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church in January 2025.

At that time, the Mission Study Team began in earnest the last pieces of the Mission Study, most notably a questionnaire that went out to the congregation on January 24, 2025 (**Attachment 4**)  
Time was given for the questionnaire/survey instrument to be completed and returned, both online and in hardcopy form. The Mission Study Team collated and distilled the information therein. (**Attachment 5**)

The Mission Study Team began completing this report in February 2025. Session had time to consider the report and voted on the final version at their February 2025 session meeting.

We are reflecting on the information we gathered last year. We want to share with you what we have learned.

## **MISSION STUDY FINDINGS**

### **How We See Ourselves**

We are **generous**: generous of spirit, generous in community service, and generous with financial offerings in support of our wider community and our church.

We are **ambitious in our outreach**: many members volunteer individually in diverse community organizations; small groups within the church regularly volunteer together with Habitat for Humanity, meal preparation at the Veterans Restoration Quarters, and as a Circle of Welcome for refugee families.

We are **friendly and welcoming**, reporting: “I’ve always felt seen,” “I was welcomed on my first visit,” “This church helped me overcome my anti-Christian attitude,” “People are genuine, never fake.”

We are **happy together**: We enjoy our fellowship, linger over coffee hour and conversation, gather at potlucks.

My church feels: **accepting, non-judgmental, compassionate, caring, faithful, inclusive, inspiring, like home, “gives me a sense of place.”**

We see ourselves as **intelligent, yet down to earth**. We value education and seek to learn about all sorts of things. We hope to be seen as progressive and open-minded. We’re comfortable with questions and with not having answers. We see ourselves as part of the world and active in our community.

We are **involved with our congregation**—many members pitch in where needed and according to our gifts and abilities.

We are **physically hidden**. Folks see our building and think it’s solely a college chapel. Many in the community don’t know we’re a congregation of the PCUSA. More than one participant used the phrase “hidden jewel.”

We are **small but mighty**. We are **aging**.

We **long to be more connected to the college campus**, but “we do not have a pipeline,” as one WWC student put it.

We **love music**. We love hearing our choir, our pipe organ and our bell choir. We are glad to learn new hymns.

We **love our children and youth**. We love it when they participate in our worship services. We love intergenerational gatherings.

We **like the architecture of our building**, the natural wooden appearance. Its features, details, and origins, which include WWC student builders, are sacrosanct to many. It has a rustic feel which suits us.

### **How Others See Us - Community Interviews**

In pairs, sixteen of our congregants interviewed fifteen representatives of our larger community. We sought conversations with community members from three groups: our closest neighbor, Warren Wilson College; mission partners – organizations with whom we have interacted through service over the years; the larger community from Swannanoa and the county. These were our questions:

- *Will you describe how the community you serve views our church and its role in the larger community?*

- *Can you describe the past work of our congregation with your agency and the communities you serve? Does WWPC have particular strengths that are helpful in your work? Have you experienced any challenges working with us?*
- *What unmet or emerging needs do you anticipate will be faced by the populations you serve in the next five years?*
- *Do you foresee ways that our congregation might partner with you to help address those needs?*
- *Is there anything else you think our church should consider as we seek deeper relationships with neighbors?*

Two of our interviewees were **county commission members**, one who knew us well as a member, and one who really had only interacted with the college, not the church, through joint projects. Their primary lens was the concerns that the county government and its constituents are facing: high costs of housing, inadequate stock of affordable housing and homelessness, and the need for affordable childcare and enrichment programs for children. The county aims to be inclusive and supportive and recognizes that our church shares that perspective. Governments cannot work in a vacuum and rely on non-profits and volunteers. It was pointed out that churches are landowners and sometimes have extensive unused space, and some are leading the way with offering shelter, converting parsonages or other buildings into housing. One council person is urging churches to maximize the use of space by offering daycare facilities and after-school programs; to find ways to interact in the community to see what young people want and need. One of them knew we had been hosts in the Room in the Inn sheltering program, participated in Habitat builds, and experienced our congregation as a community that recognizes needs and acts to address them. It was also noted that WWPC is seen as associated with WWC, the college, as an environmental leader. This commissioner would like to see churches as good stewards of our environment, and commends *Energy Savers Network* to us (volunteers work with low-income and elderly householders on basic weatherization to make homes more livable and energy efficient).

We conducted five interviews with **college personnel**. Their responses offered a wealth of information about how students perceive WWPC, “the church,” Christianity, and organized religion. These faculty/staff also shared ideas about how WWPC can represent itself, engage with students and be the Light that Christianity offers to the world, in service, and in love. While college roots are in the Presbyterian Mission and the church’s roots are in the college community, many students are not aware of our shared history. The church’s impact on college life has been significant to a few students and unimpactful to a large percentage. These interviews confirmed the widely held observation that the college students of 2024 have been considerably impacted by the Covid pandemic. Increased isolation and access to the digital world have left them more anxious than their counterparts of the past. A large percentage of students identify in the LGBTQIA+ community. They perceive Christianity and the church as judgmental, if not hostile, towards them; and with that being generalized to our congregation that means we’re not seen as trustworthy. All interviewees offered ways to help overcome that perception. These faculty/staff acknowledge the value of spiritual life in general and for students. They appreciate the openness and acceptance the church has shown toward students, and our engagement in service to our wider community. They acknowledge that not all faculty/staff hold organized religion in equally high regard and our chapel with its Christian symbols does not necessarily feel like sanctuary.

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.*

**Galatians 3:28-29**

The college interviews encourage WWPC to clarify and convey our beliefs in our messaging, to engage with students where they are: come to campus events (performances), participate in student led activities on-campus (voter registration), work hand-in-hand with partnerships in the community (BeLoved). Seek out students for personal interactions whenever possible – companionship, small groups for support of specific interests. Participating in student-led events in the Fellowship Hall (such as Empty Bowls) conveys our appreciation for their priorities.

There is hope on campus that our next minister will take an active role engaging and supporting Spiritual Life activities on campus and continuing their presence in college worship services. There is a sense that conveying the compassion and love of our spiritual community through interest, acknowledgement, respect, and support, can help heal the trauma of recent events and bring about greater resilience for students.

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loosen the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

**Isaiah 58:6-8**

Our **mission partners** comprised another set of interviews. These are organizations through whom we offer our hands and resources: Habitat for Humanity, Homeward Bound, Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry, the Veterans Restoration Quarters, Swannanoa Middle School, the Presbytery. These folks noted that while their clients are largely unaware of who our church is, their staff and other volunteers perceive us as a progressive, open, and accepting church with an active outreach ministry. They each spoke also of how the pandemic may have lessened or curtailed our active involvement but acknowledged our engagement with them as loyal and committed in the past. These groups all recognize that church demographics have changed; we may send fewer volunteers, and some may have aged-out, but our ongoing financial support has been significant. There was agreement among several organizations that across the spectrum of faith communities, active participation has been waning. In that context, WWPC is seen as a leader in continuous connection. Challenges being experienced by these organizations included shortage of workforce housing, English as a second language, 25% of the population of Swannanoa seeking assistance, crime being blamed on the homeless population, and a constant need to expand programs with fewer volunteers.

Since we have had many members who live at **Givens Highland Farms Retirement Community**, we also interviewed the Social Services Navigator there. This retirement facility has been expanding in recent years and continues to open newly built residences. The facility would welcome any support the church and its members would care to offer such as leading support groups for caregivers or grief groups. They would be happy to share information about events or on-going programs our church might offer. They would appreciate our leading any kind of interfaith or spiritual programs on their campus.



**Conclusion:** Knowledge of our church has been contingent upon our making our presence known through our service outreach. Many social issues are shared by those working in our community. They see and would welcome opportunities to receive us into their programs and visit us to share about their work.

## **What We've Learned**

**Physical Space:** Our congregation has shrunk considerably since the construction of our chapel, built to hold an entire student body when chapel attendance was required. This leaves worshipers scattered widely in the sanctuary. Not all appreciate the distance between congregants and worship leaders when our pulpit and lectern are used. Current lighting doesn't fully illuminate the room and is challenging to maintain.

**Ministry with Youth and Children:** While we love our children, finances have not permitted us to call an on-going Associate Pastor for Education, so our children's programming has ranged from stellar to spotty over decades. We've often relied on parents to offer programs.



*Thanksgiving service with children and a sheep from the college.*

*Playground installed in 2019 which is now fenced in.*



**Music:** We are currently blessed with gifted music leadership from an Interim Director of Music and a volunteer bell choir director, both of whom are building and training their choirs to be effective worship leaders. But we have had difficulty over the last ten years attracting a long-term Director of Music. Through the diligent efforts of our Interim Director of Music, we are thrilled to have purchased, in 2024, a high-quality, beautifully maintained grand piano for the chapel. This will augment the presence of a very fine Schantz pipe organ. We hope these beautiful instruments will keep us flexible in changing circumstances and help us to attract a musician who might make a home with us for years to come.



*Our recently acquired Yamaha C7 Grand Piano.*

*Handbell Choir performing during an Easter service.*



**Church-College Relations:** The only formal link we have with the college is through our Church-College Covenant, which is intended to be reviewed annually, including a meeting of church and college leadership. (This year's review was disrupted by events surrounding Hurricane Helene.) Its focus is the use and maintenance of shared physical space of the Ohler Spiritual Center, comprised of the chapel and Ransom Fellowship Hall.

We are much blessed by warm and committed relationships with Director of Spiritual Life and Chaplain of the College, Dr. Shannon Spencer (UCC), and with Dean of Students Tacci Smith (a member of our congregation.) They regularly attend monthly Church-College Relations meetings (re-instituted this year) and work to help connect the church and college, where feasible. In 2024 we co-sponsored two evening events (one on campus, one in the chapel), as well as maintaining traditions such as a spring ice cream social, a potluck to welcome students in September (to which we attached a joint service project), and Cookies and Carols in December. A Thanksgiving meal is expected to return in 2025—Hurricane Helene impacted campus schedules in 2024. New this year were two student-led worship services: one in March and one in September (both coordinated by Shannon Spencer). They were very well received, and plans are in place to continue that pattern. A few students have become occasional liturgists on Sunday mornings, but most of the time, only a handful of students attend. The congregation longs for real connection, and a few members have reached across the divide to form personal relationships: taking students to lunch, helping an international student learn to drive, listening during stressful times.

During the academic year we also benefit from the efforts of students who help care for our facilities through their work on the Chapel Crew (usually one or two students assigned for a term). During the last year, one of those students acknowledged that she arrived in late 2022 quite wary of Christian communities. She credits the loving interactions with WWPC members as a significant influence in the discovery of her own Christian faith.

We have learned from meetings with students and college administrators that many students are suspicious of institutions generally, and particularly wary of organizations labeled Christian. More than 50% of WWC students identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Many of them believe that churches offer little beyond judgment. Given such painful experiences and assumptions, many have

difficulty walking into a space that is so dominated by large crosses, because they associate the cross with exclusion, patriarchy, and violence. The church may want to explore whether the call to embody the love of Jesus in this context has implications for how our space is appointed. Because the chapel has more seating capacity than any other space on campus, it is used for graduations and other large-campus gatherings.

*Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another.*

**Romans 14:13**

**Location:** We are indeed hidden, and we have not been creative in making ourselves visible beyond the campus. We don't see ourselves as "evangelical" people, in an assertive sense, so we don't do a lot of inviting. Our only public face is when we volunteer as a group. In the past we have had a newspaper advertisement, but it seemed to get little response and got expensive. We have minimal signage. We do use social media and hope to attract a pastor who will have interest and experience in this area. An active and gifted Communications Team works on these issues. We learned from necessity how to live-stream our Sunday service, but now are challenged to find ongoing support of a person to operate the equipment on a regular basis.

**Membership and Stewardship of Gifts:** Our membership is slowly shrinking, and many folks wear many hats to keep the church vibrant. We are enormously grateful for a dedicated, ingenious staff and session! Some have suggested we should sharpen our community-service focus, and question whether we have the resources for all the projects to which we are committed. We are financially fortunate to be able to carry over the largest budget surplus we have had in recent years.

**Adult Education:** We value education and learning, but we don't always have continuously running adult education programs. Members prefer to volunteer to lead only one or two sessions, resulting in a lack of continuity. There has been a dedicated group that attends Sunday morning classes. Occasional other educational opportunities at a different time of day will bring in more members, but such programs require additional planning and responsibilities for people already wearing multiple hats. In 2023, we offered an End-of-Life planning series over lunch, with outside speakers. Made public, those events were very well attended. This year we hosted "Wonderful Wednesdays" during the month of June, which featured different mission partners and included dinner. They were also well received. We like to gather for good conversation over a meal.

**Inclusivity:** We see ourselves as inclusive to the point that we've never felt we needed to call attention to it. (A neighboring pastor described WWPC as "*More Light* before there was *More Light*.") In a season during which the LGBTQIA+ community may be facing increased scrutiny, some have asked whether we should identify with an advocacy group within or outside of the PCUSA. To this end we are now displaying a large pride flag outside the chapel. In the past, we've had a table at Asheville's Pride Festival.

**Final Thoughts:** Some are leaders, some are doers, some are folks who show up for worship. We serve our congregation, and the people we encounter in need of assistance. We seek leadership. When it's absent, we jump in, however skilled (or not) we are in leadership. We could probably benefit from formal leadership training or mentoring.

We are prone to become habitual in our ways and blind to our surroundings. We can lose sight of what is beautiful and what is threadbare. We accumulate things: lost and found items, old technology that no longer works, projects our children made years ago. We have spent the last year trying to see our space with new eyes—clearing out offices and classrooms, preparing for a new beginning. Hurricane Helene

accelerated that process by bringing water into our basement classroom—which had not yet received our attention. We will start 2025 with new roofs on both buildings, new windowpanes and carpet in our fellowship hall; new flooring in our main kitchen and fellowship hall bathrooms, new paint and carpeting in two of our offices, and new finishes in our basement classroom.

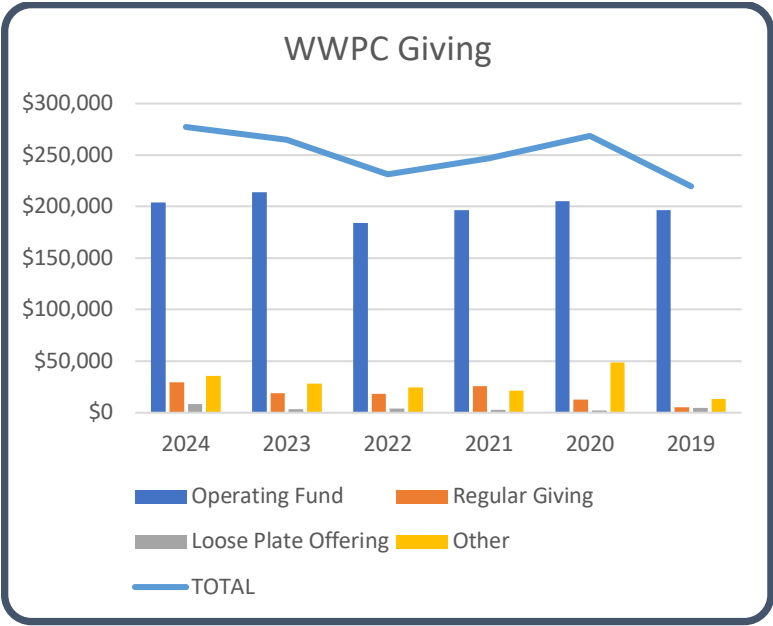
We seek to attract more young families, and to lean into our roots as a diverse congregation.

***We are poised for a new chapter of life together!***

## **FINANCIAL SUMMARY**

- Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church has a solid balance sheet for a small congregation. As of December 31, 2024, the church had assets of \$665,000; with \$494,500 of that in investment accounts.
- An unexpected bequest in 2012 led to our Endowment Program designed to help with expenses not covered by the operating budget. The Session adopted a conservative approach for using the endowments, which have grown substantially in the intervening years. Currently the program has balances of:

General	\$217,000
Community Engagement	\$32,000
Spiritual Nurture	\$25,000
Worship & Music	\$24,000
Church/College Relations	\$23,000
- In 2019, the church received another unexpected gift from the estate of Steven Williams, who was the congregation's organist for more than 30 years. The Session used \$120,000 from this gift to create an Organ Preservation and Music Enhancement Endowment Fund in 2020. It is used for maintenance of our pipe organ as well as other needs of our music program. The fund balance is now over \$173,000.
- The church's financial position has been stable for the past decade. The budget has grown from \$223,000 in 2016 to \$266,000 in 2025. Over the last several years, the congregation has accumulated a substantial surplus as the result of a combination of giving exceeding projections and some spending categories not having returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- Giving trends have roughly kept pace with inflation over the last decade. The 2024 total giving was \$254,000, with nearly 86% from commitment giving.
- Unlike most churches, Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church does not own the buildings in which it worships and operates. Warren Wilson College owns both the chapel and the office/education building. However, the church has exclusive use of the office and classroom portion of the office/education building. The church also has priority use of both the Fellowship Hall and the chapel during regular worship hours. Pursuant to an agreement with the college, the church pays for one-half of the utilities, repair and maintenance of both buildings.
- The only real property that the church owns is the Warren Wilson cemetery, which is located on property donated by the college. The intention has been to transfer that property to a newly created Warren Wilson Cemetery corporation, but that plan has not made much progress since the pandemic.





## **LOOKING AHEAD FINANCIALLY**

### TWO FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

- For the last decade the church has tried to fund from the operating budget a part-time pastoral position focusing on Christian education. Although the congregation has had such an individual for approximately half of the years since 2015, the budget has never completely funded the position from recurring revenue. The Session wishes to restart this position in the near future. However, ongoing funding will require annual increases in the recurring revenue to support the position.
- The second challenge is to expand the base of commitments to the annual budget. Although the amount of commitment giving rose between 2016 and 2025, the number of commitments declined. Fortunately, 2025 was a step in the right direction with the number of commitment units increasing from 36 to 38.

**Attachment 1 - WARREN WILSON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MISSION STUDY TEAM MEMBERS**

**2024-2025**

Margaret Lamotte Torrence, Transitional Minister 2024

Laurie Furr-Vancini, Transitional Minister 2025

Brent Roberts, chair

Pat Levi

Sharon Lytle, member of session

Barbara Griswold

Ken Murchison

Don Collins, member of session

Natalie Daugherty, member of session

Sally Broughton, Clerk of Session, Session liaison

## Attachment 2 - INSIGHTS SHARED AT THE POST HURRICANE HELENE SERVICE

- We have to listen hard for where the need is—don't just assume (flush brigade as example)
- “bring what you have/ask for what you need” (guy in the parking lot offering to sharpen chain saws)
- How can we rebuild more equitably?
- I will never think about my neighbors in the same way
- I learned I have way more capacity for others than I knew
- We spend so much time with our screens—discovered a lot when that was taken away
- We learned something about how to gather with others who are not our usual companions—the mix of folks at distribution sites was moving
- It's odd that isolation brought connection, especially with neighbors

*“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.”*

**Isaiah 43:2**

### Attachment 3 - SNAPSHOT COMMENTS, A RANDOM COLLECTION

#### Quotations from newer members/attendees

- *I've had people in my life who were there for me, but I've never been in a place that feels like it is there for me.*
- *The community is transparent, there's a sense of playfulness, it's permission-giving.*
- *I've found a level of liberation here that I don't associate with church. God wants us to be who we are—I think that should be included in the report.*
- *There are a lot of people who come to church by themselves and aren't diminished by that—there's a real sense of welcome here.*
- *We are a community of seekers, doers, and loving spirits.*

*"The members there are some of the most loving, generous, spiritually deep, hard-working folks I've ever worked alongside, with a heart for children, education, and social justice mission."*

**Grace Boyer**, former pastoral associate,  
describing the WWPC community in an email late in 2023.

**Importance of Art** – The church holds a collection of art pieces which hold both history and spiritual significance to the community.

**Connected to the land** – There is a deep sense of space in these mountains, on this campus, and in the ground.

**WWPC is often ahead of the curve on social justice issues, inclusivity**

**Green community**—we take stewardship of the earth very seriously

**Wary of dogmatism, creeds, labels**—more interested in faith lived out in compassion, seeing justice

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

**Micah 6:8**

The college's emphasis on **learning, work, service** are values that run deep in the church as well.

Because both **neuro-divergence and identification within the LGBTQIA community** are markers of the student population at WWC—there may be a call for the congregation to become further educated and consider ways supportive and serve the student and larger community.

The church and college have a deep commitment to the **Thanksgiving/Harvest celebration**. It is moving to think that tradition began during the Depression and has continued ever since (started by our own Ernst Laursen's father) exemplifying some of the core values of the congregation.

*I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well- fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.*

**Philippians 4:11-12**

**Church College Relationship(s)** – There are ongoing questions/negotiations/covenant drafting/a lovely dance around the church and college relationship. Ongoing care and intentionality in communication is necessary as we consider the sharing of history, ideals and physical space. An open relationship with the president, cabinet, and board of Warren Wilson College is very important to the symbiotic relationship between the entities.

*“Some college folks have expressed reluctance to hold WWC events in the chapel due to the religious symbolism. We grow through discomfort. We need to be flexible and committed to negotiating difference. I am open to visual sanctuary – the sanctuary is a place of openness, of encounter. No one is proselytizing. We need to build resilience through engagement. Let’s change the conversation from trauma to resilience. I’m looking forward to closer chapters, to joint openness.”*

*-Damien Fernandez, President, Warren Wilson College*

## Attachment 4 - SURVEY INSTRUMENT



The Mission Study Team would appreciate you and any member of your household completing the questionnaire below.

**Are you currently a member of WWPC?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, but I'm in the process of becoming a member
- ☐ No, but I regularly participate here
- ☐ No

**Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community (visitation, evangelism, outreach, community service, social justice)? (Mark all that apply.)**

- ☐ Yes, in evangelism or outreach activities
- ☐ Yes, in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities of this congregation
- ☐ No, we don't have such activities
- ☐ No, I am not regularly involved
- ☐ Other Activities. \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups not connected to WWPC? (Mark all that apply.)**

- ☐ Yes, social service or charity groups
- ☐ Yes, advocacy, justice, or lobbying groups
- ☐ No, I'm not involved with such groups
- ☐ Other community service, social service, or advocacy groups. \_\_\_\_\_

**How satisfied are you with what is offered here for children and youth (less than 19 years of age)?**

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Satisfied
- ☐ Mixed feelings
- ☐ Dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied
- ☐ Not sure or not applicable



**Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?**

- ☐ Yes, a strong sense of belonging that is growing
- ☐ Yes, a strong sense—about the same as last year
- ☐ Yes, but perhaps not as strong as in the past
- ☐ No, but I am new here
- ☐ No, and I wish I did by now No, but I am happy as I am
- ☐ Not applicable/Unsure

**Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three options.)**

- ☐ Wider community care or social justice emphasis
- ☐ Reaching those who do not attend church
- ☐ Traditional style of worship or music
- ☐ Contemporary style of worship or music
- ☐ Sharing in Holy Communion, Eucharist, or Lord's Supper
- ☐ Social activities or meeting new people
- ☐ Sermons, preaching, or homilies
- ☐ Bible study or prayer groups, other discussion groups
- ☐ Ministry for children or youth
- ☐ Prayer ministry for one another
- ☐ Practical care for one another in times of need
- ☐ Openness to social diversity
- ☐ Adult church-school or Sabbath-school classes

**Before you started coming WWPC, were you participating in another congregation?**

- ☐ No, I've come here for most or all of my life
- ☐ No, before coming here I had not been attending any congregation for several years
- ☐ No, before coming here I had never regularly attended
- ☐ Yes, immediately prior to coming here, I was participating in another congregation

**Which statement best describes the people who currently live in your household?**

- ☐ I live alone
- ☐ A couple without children
- ☐ One adult with child/children
- ☐ Two or more adults with child/children
- ☐ Some adults living in the same household

**What is your present relationship status?**

- ☐ Never married
- ☐ Previously married or in a committed relationship but now single
- ☐ In first marriage
- ☐ Remarried after divorce
- ☐ Remarried after death of spouse
- ☐ Living in a committed relationship

**What is the ZIP Code where you live?**

**How long does it usually take you to get here?**

- ☐ 1-5 minutes
- ☐ 6-10 minutes
- ☐ 11-15 minutes
- ☐ 16-20 minutes
- ☐ 21-30 minutes
- ☐ More than 30 minutes

**Compared to 2 years ago, do you think you participate in activities of the congregation more, less, or about the same amount as you did then?**

- ☐ Participate more
- ☐ About the same participation
- ☐ Participate less
- ☐ Not applicable (been coming less than 2 years)

**Which of the following is the best description of the style of ideal leadership of a pastor?**

- ☐ Leadership that tends to take charge
- ☐ Leadership that inspires people to take action
- ☐ Leadership that acts on goals that people here have been involved in setting
- ☐ Leadership where the people start most things
- ☐ There is currently no leader here
- ☐ Don't know

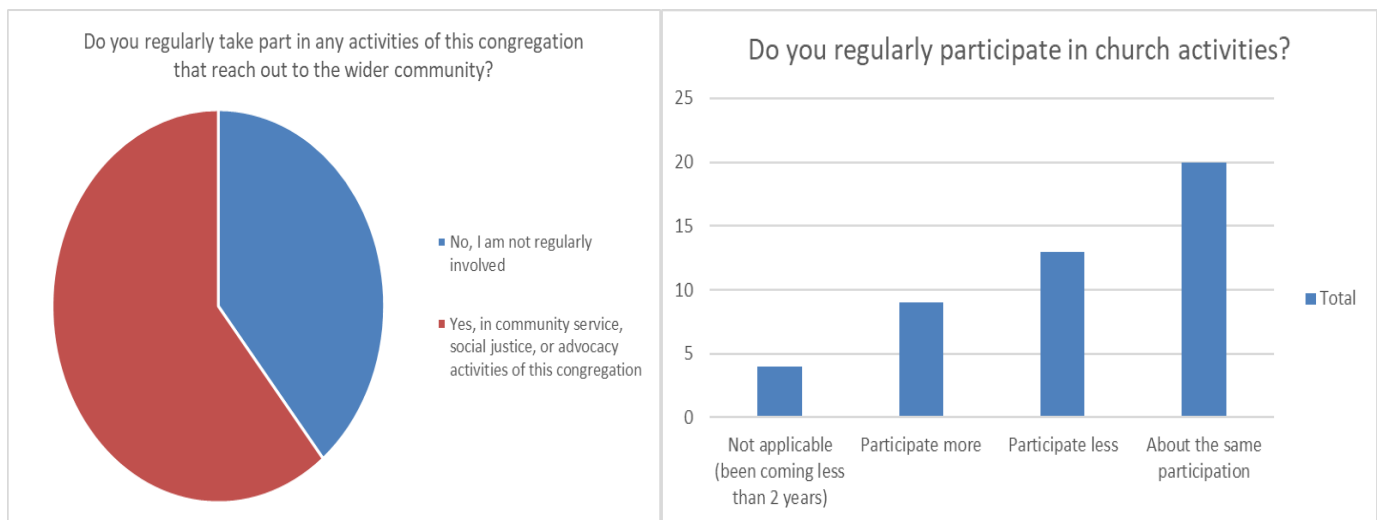
**How many people in your household (including you) participate here? Please enter the age and number below.**

Thank you for completing this survey!

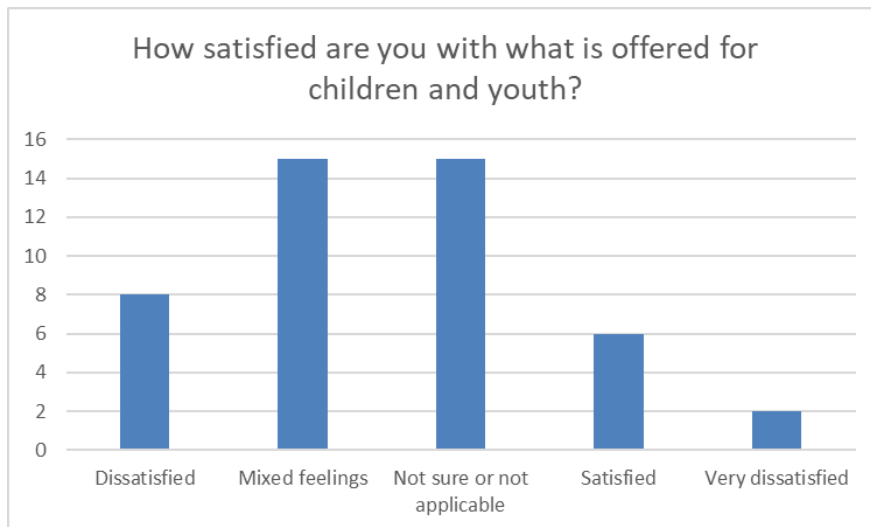
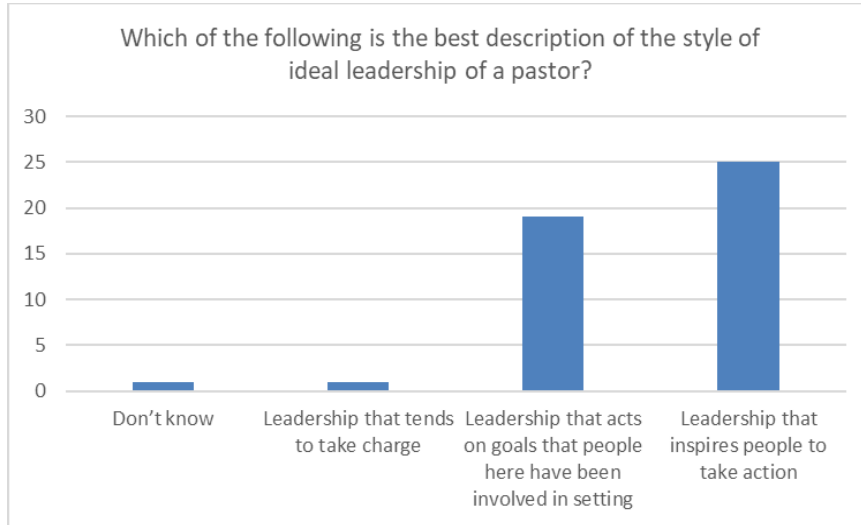
## Attachment 5 - SURVEY RESULTS

In order to help the Mission Study team finish telling the story of our congregation, members and regular participants were surveyed by electronic and paper instruments to gather input. Approximately 46 surveys were returned, representing various individual and family units within the church. While the survey reiterated some demographic data already known to the church, and represented elsewhere in this report, it also allowed the team to view a more complete picture of how our congregation interacts with the community, and what our hopes for the future are.

Within activities for community service, social justice, and advocacy that the church organizes or sponsors, 28 of the respondents, or just over 60%, indicated they participated in at least one activity. Activities within the church, such as choir, coffee hour, Veterans Restoration Quarters, and SVCM (Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry) were named as areas of focus for some participants, highlighting the importance of community involvement to the congregation. With the value placed in serving the larger community, roughly 90% of the survey participants indicated they had a sense of belonging to the church. In addition, most participants found they have maintained their involvement in the church over time.



When asked about what aspects of the congregation are most valued, participants listed four main focuses: Wider community care or social justice emphasis; Sermons, preaching, or homilies; Social activities or meeting new people; and, Openness to social diversity. While most of these aspects continue to highlight the congregational passion for community involvement and social justice, the congregation values sermons and preaching as well. Supporting that focus, when asked what ideal leadership style spoke most to them, participants indicated that being inspired to take action and speaking to goals that the congregation has set were most important to consider. Also important to note; when asked about their satisfaction with children's programming, the participants responded that they are not sure, have mixed feelings or are dissatisfied. This points to the need to consider how future leadership styles might speak to the younger members of the congregation as well.



## Attachment 6 - CONSTRUCTION OF OUR CHAPELS

**Building of Williams Chapel:** Although the French Broad Presbytery recognized Farm School Presbyterian Church in 1925, it was many years before a building was erected to house the congregation, or a dedicated supply pastor came to serve the Farm School Church.

When the Depression strained finances, and the Board of National Missions denied the congregation's request to fund a new building, that didn't stop this resourceful community. Pine trees were felled in the surrounding forest, and between 1933 and 1937, a log chapel was erected by staff and student work crews. Financial support came from alumni and friends of the school. Dedicated in 1940, the Elizabeth B. Williams Memorial Chapel housed worship services, theater productions, concerts, and free movie nights, for the next twenty-four years.

**Building of the current chapel:** The Pew Memorial Trust provided a \$50,000 challenge grant; the congregation raised the rest. As expected, the community pitched in with gifts, practical as well as financial. The landscape crew did the final grading and prepared the ground for buttresses. Other students collected local stone from nearby fields, and later did much of the interior carpentry and electrical work. Everyone offered the gifts that were theirs.

A Schantz pipe **organ** was purchased through the generosity of local benefactors. It has been maintained and augmented using a digital Walker system in subsequent years and is one of the finest pipe organs in the area.



## Attachment 7 - 2024 ANNUAL STATISTICAL REPORT

2024 Church Statistical Report			
<b>Church</b>	Warren Wilson	<b>PIN</b>	3497
<b>Presbytery</b>	Western North Carolina		
<b>Address</b>	101 Chapel Ln, Swannanoa, NC 28778		
<b>Phone</b>	828-298-9092	<b>Fax</b>	
<b>Email</b>	info@warrenwilsonchurch.org		
<b>Web Site</b>	www.warrenwilsonchurch.org		
<b>Membership</b>			
Prior Active Members	129	Adjusted membership	129
<b>Gains</b>		<b>Losses</b>	
Certificate	2	Certificate	
Youth Professions		Deaths	5
Professions & Reaffirmations	3	Deleted for any Other Reason	
<b>Total Gains</b>	5	<b>Total Losses</b>	5
<b>Total Ending Active Members</b>	129		
<b>Baptisms</b>			
Presented by Others	0	Average Weekly Worship Attendance	49
At Confirmation	0	Friends of the Congregation	12
All Other	0	Ruling Elders on Session	6
		Do you have Deacons?	No
<b>Age Distribution of Active Members</b>			
17 & Under	0	<b>People with Disabilities</b>	
18 - 25	3	Hearing impairment	5
26 - 40	9	Sight impairment	3
41 - 55	18	Mobility impairment	5
56 - 70	30	Other impairment	1
Over 70	69	<b>Gender Distribution</b>	
<b>Total Age Distribution</b>	129	Women	87
		Men	42
		Non-Binary	
<b>Youth in Congregation</b>			
Age 4 and under		Middle School (6th – 8th grade)	2
Elementary School (K-5th grade)	2	High School (9th – 12th grade)	2
		<b>Total Youth</b>	6
<b>Racial Ethnic</b>			
Asian/Pacific Islander/South Asian	0	Native American/Alaska Native/Indigenous	0
Black/African American/African	3	White	125
Middle Eastern/North African	1	Multiracial	0
Hispanic/Latino-a	0	<b>Total Racial Ethnic</b>	129
<b>Budgeted Income</b>	246,544		
<b>Budgeted Expense</b>	246,544		
<b>Receipts</b>			
Regular Contributions	293,628	Bequests	
Capital Building Fund	4,825	Other Income	1,600
Investment Income	76,908	Subsidy or Aid	1,024
<b>Expenditures</b>			
Local Program	210,814	Investment Expenditures	
Local Mission	35,594	Per Capita Apprt	
Capital Expenditures	41,546	Other Mission	17,641
<b>Friday, February 14, 2025</b>			
<b>Page: 1 of 1</b>			

Average attendance in 2024 was 51. There are 37 people volunteer on ministry teams or some other regular capacity in the church.

Attachment 8 - 2024 WARREN WILSON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ANNUAL REPORT

[Warren Wilson Presbyterian Church 2024 Annual Report](#)

