



Ruther Glen, Virginia

Potential & Possibility
Pre-Campaign Study Report
2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church – Ruther Glen, Virginia

In March 2022, Horizons Stewardship was asked to conduct Pre-Campaign research to determine the potential and possibility of a 2022 capital campaign for Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church of Ruther Glen, Virginia. The tested campaign would be to fund new construction and pay off the debt on church facilities.

Horizons discussed the project with the pastor, staff, and laity, reviewed significant statistical data and surveyed over 100 households from across the congregation. Seventeen (17) personal interviews were conducted. In addition, there were 90 respondents online. These combined figures, representing 107 total responses, reflect broad attention to our study.

Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church has ministered to Ruther Glen and Ladysmith, Virginia for almost two centuries. The church has carved a substantial place in the community over the past three decades with an extended pastorate which is exceptional in United Methodism. Charles Tillapaugh's tenure now puts the congregation in the top 1% of all United Methodist Churches. This allows for development of ministries many UMCs never get to pursue.

Wright's Chapel leaders have done admirable work in this time, creating 'signature' ministries for the developmentally and occupationally challenged people in the area. Chief among these is Cindy's Closet, which provides affordable retail goods to the economically challenged and employment opportunities to those who might find no other options for work. New construction to expand the space for this vital ministry is the priority for the church in this campaign.

A second need is to finish the church's mortgage and prepare for coming decades of ministry. The congregation is easily making payments on residual debt, left over from sanctuary and fellowship hall construction in the first decade of the 2000s. Monthly installments are low relative to the principal owed (roughly \$7000/month for \$85,000 annually on \$1.2 million principal). This reduces the urgency of the issue. However, at this point the loan is approaching 'senior status,' and these funds would be better spent on direct ministry costs. Following the current project, this matter should move to the top shelf.

At the end of 2021, Wright's Chapel's membership stood at 692 with an average worship attendance of 308 (including online participation). In 2021, the church received \$550,081 in ministry giving. Based on these figures, Wright's Chapel UMC received \$795 per member, and \$1,786 per worshipper. Compared to United Methodist denominational averages, these numbers are slightly to somewhat below average. (UMC averages are \$850/member and \$2,200/worshipper.) This is not unusual in the 2020s with attendance already trending downward nationwide before pandemic, and now very difficult to gauge online.

In 2021, the median annual gift, was \$700. This is the midpoint donation. Half of givers gave more, and half gave less. It is notable this figure doubled in the past two years.

In 2021, 280 households contributed total budget gifts of \$550,081:

1. **The top 10** (3.5%) households gave 35% of the total (\$193,237).
2. **The top 67** (24%) households gave 77% of the whole (\$425,291).
3. **The top 152** (38.2%) households gave 97% of budget gifts (\$531,129).

One hundred twenty-nine (129) contributors giving less than \$10 a week gave \$18,952 or 3.4% of the total. As is normally the case, almost one half the people on roll have not yet made a financial contribution.

The Wright's Chapel congregation has a considerable number of mid-range givers supporting its ministry. One hundred seven (107) households giving roughly \$20/week up to \$100/week accounted for \$242,403, or 44% of total operating donations in 2021. This group provides vital support to the church's ministry and their engagement is key to any campaign.

In our study, almost 2/3 of respondents are ready to contribute to a campaign before one has begun. In fact, the survey found givers ready to contribute almost \$350,000. This is a good start for a successful campaign.

Based on current information, meeting new construction quotes is feasible in the next three years. Accelerating debt payments will be difficult at this time. With what is known today, it is reasonable to think the church could succeed in raising \$715,000-\$850,000 over the next three years. These are conservative estimates and amounts normally grow over the course of a campaign.

Skepticism and doubt about this effort can be addressed in a major way if leadership gifts for the campaign surface early on. Experience has proven this can build momentum for success.

Any successful campaign will require the following:

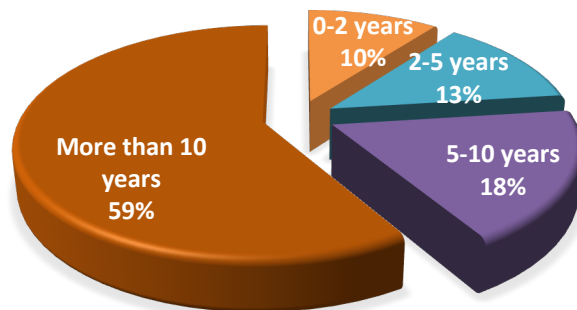
1. *A well-communicated vision of how a successful campaign will position the church to grow and change lives through enhanced ministry into the middle of the 21st century.*
2. *A highly committed and enthusiastic campaign leadership team of 20-24 households willing to lead by example in work and gift.*
3. *An early awareness of two to four high five-figure gifts, and five to seven mid-range five-figure gifts to help raise the belief level of the congregation.*

SURVEY RESULTS:

90 responses to survey link
17 households interviewed

1. How long have you been attending Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church?

0-2 years	9
2-5 years	11
5-10 years	16
More than 10 years	51
No response	20



ANALYSIS:

A majority of survey respondents are long-term members of Wright's Chapel. Several commented they had been a part of the church for more than 20 years. It is obvious this group has become familiar with the church over the course of their experience.

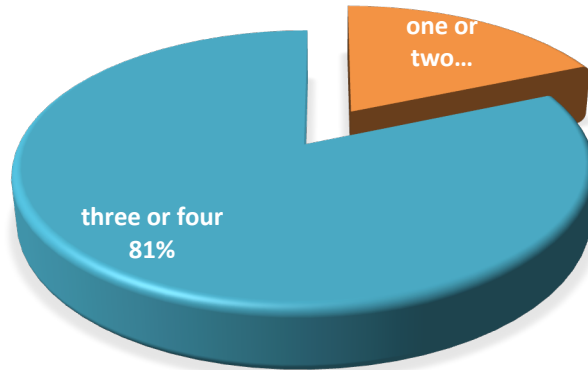
This also means it becomes more and more difficult to see the church – its building, interior space, and relational style – the way newcomers experience it. This is not wrong, but it is a factor to be considered.

At Wright's Chapel UMC, it is clear much of the strongest support comes from long time members. The hurdle, like that faced by many congregations, is helping newcomers take steps forward in stewardship.

Notably, one fifth of respondents connected with Wright's Chapel UMC in the past five years. This is healthy and shows a strength many churches do not have.

2. On average, how many times a month do you attend worship?

one or two	16
three or four	70
No response	21



ANALYSIS:

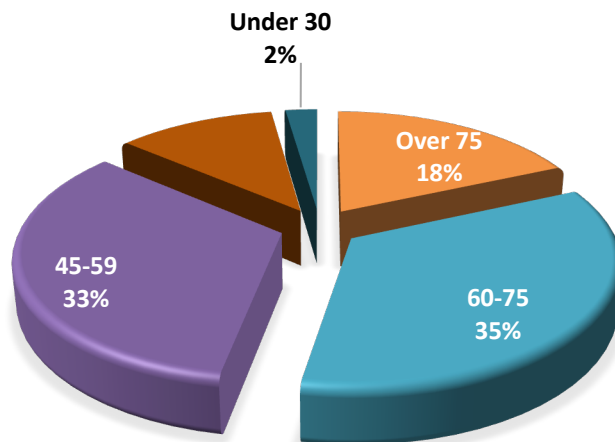
Every church has a variety of attendance patterns in the congregation.

1. The Inner Circle are those who are present 40-45 Sundays a year.
2. The '12 to 20s' are also significantly connected, attending worship 12 to 20 times a year.
3. The average attendance pattern in most mainline churches is now 1.1 times a month.
4. Another group is variously referred to as 'C&Es,' 'Creasters,' or the Christmas and Easter crowd.
5. Most mainline congregations have a significant group of inactives who have not attended worship in several years.

The vast majority of those surveyed are in the Inner Circle of Wright's Chapel.

3. What is your age range?

Over 75	16
60-75	30
45-59	29
30-44	10
Under 30	2
No response	20



ANALYSIS:

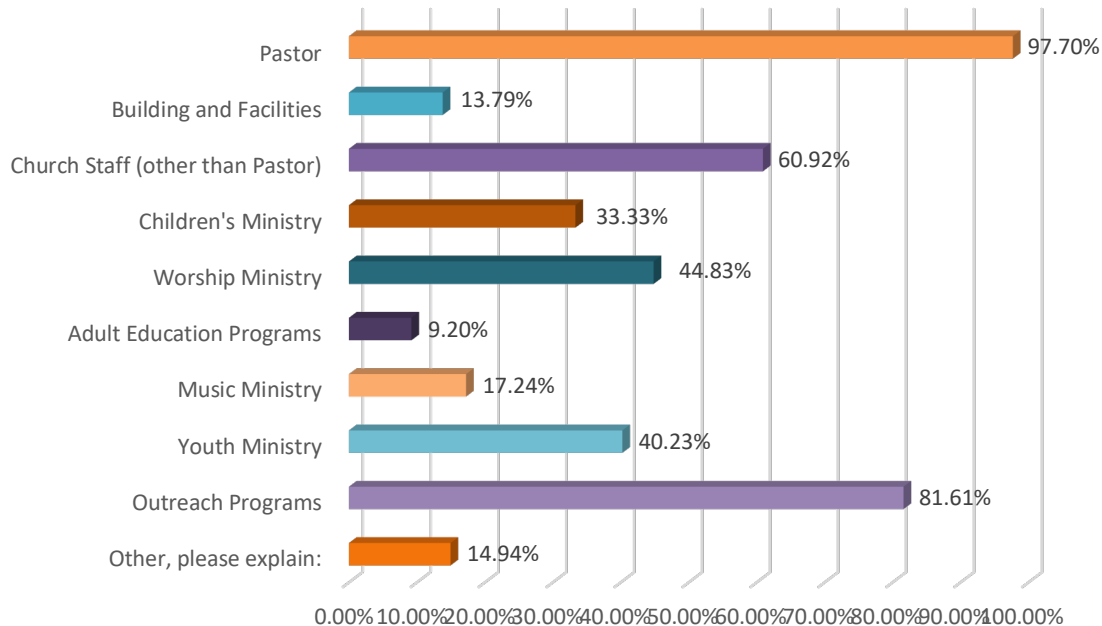
These responses are roughly average for most United Methodist congregations today. The denomination is aging rapidly in most parishes. The average age of a member in the United Methodist Church (nationally) is now 64.

Those 65 and above represent the best opportunity for gifts from stored wealth while those ages 35-64 are typically in their peak earning years and, for most American families, represent the best opportunity for significant gifts from earned income. In capital campaigns, most of dollars given come from stored wealth, while regular earnings and pension income normally represent the bulk of budget support in most congregations.

Wrights' Chapel United Methodist Church appears to have a very committed and involved group of congregational leaders with a considerable degree of loyalty and longevity with the church. Seeking God's vision for future direction is key. Prayer and discernment will be a vital step in addressing a capital campaign.

4. In no particular order, the greatest strengths of Wright's Chapel today, are: (select 3 to 5)

Pastor	85
Building and Facilities	12
Church Staff (other than Pastor)	53
Children's Ministry	29
Worship Ministry	39
Adult Education Programs	8
Music Ministry	15
Youth Ministry	35
Outreach Programs	71
Other, please explain:	13
No response	20



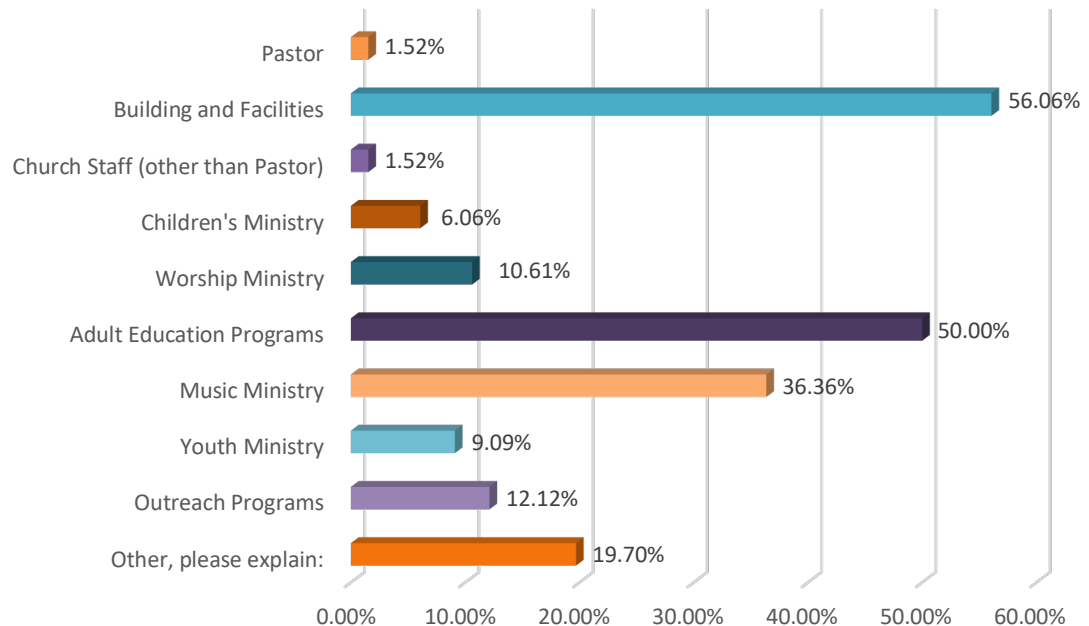
ANALYSIS:

When asked about the strengths of the church, respondents were clear the Pastor, Outreach, Staff, and Worship are strongest at Wright's Chapel. High marks were also given to Children's and Youth Ministries.

One of our chief goals in stewardship ministry is to identify the connection between positive life change through the church, and the giving that empowers positive change. There is always a sense of this connection in the mind of strong givers. As we clarify this relationship, we help others grow in their generosity.

5. Some areas that need improvement or more attention are: (select 3 to 5)

Pastor	1
Building and Facilities	37
Church Staff (other than Pastor)	1
Children's Ministry	4
Worship Ministry	7
Adult Education Programs	33
Music Ministry	24
Youth Ministry	6
Outreach Programs	8
Other, please explain:	13
No response	41



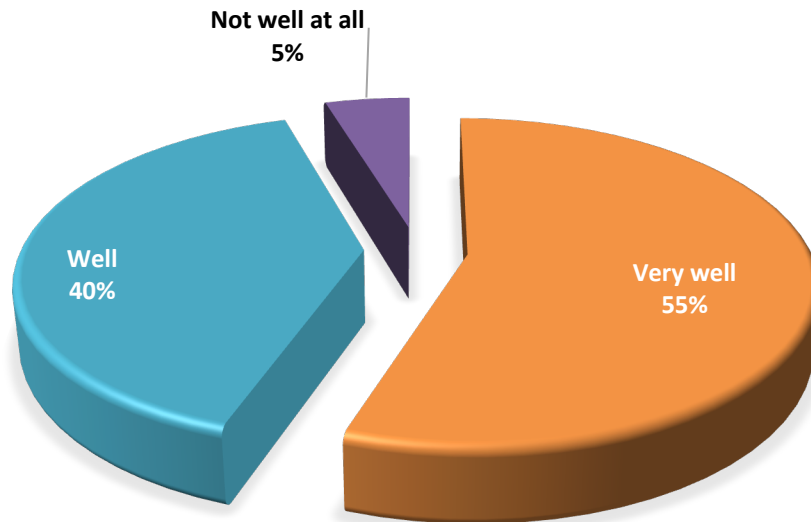
ANALYSIS:

Asked about needs for improvement, responses were strongly weighted toward Buildings & Facilities, Adult Education, and Music.

The comments include several additional points of feedback.

6. **How well does your church communicate with the congregation about programs, plans, and projects?**

Very well	47
Well	34
Not well at all	4
No response	22



ANALYSIS:

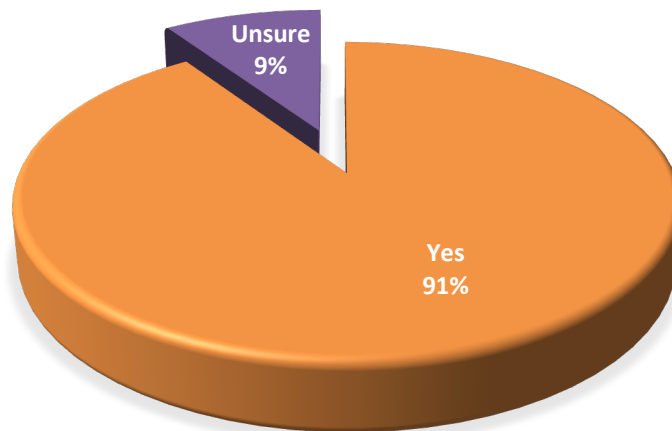
The responses here are remarkably positive. It is typical for Horizons to see churches with well over 25% of the committed core indicating communications within the church need to be improved. Wright's Chapel UMC's answers are in better shape than many congregations. The comments however, articulate a more mixed set of opinions.

Most churches experience a 'leaders/followers gap', in which leaders are ahead and more informed from their deliberations and studies, while the average person in the pew is less informed.

People will give sacrificially to causes they believe in and projects they understand. For success, leadership must cast vision and dispense factual information early and often. This is, once again, a situation that should be helped by a capital stewardship program that will have an overriding focus on promoting and clarifying vision

7. Do you think new facilities for Cindy's Closet and paying down the church's mortgage are important to the future ministry and mission of Wright's Chapel?

Yes	77
No	0
Unsure	8
No response	22



ANALYSIS:

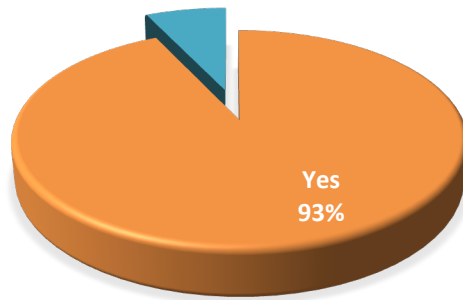
A critical key to success in a capital campaign is for the congregation to clearly identify the project as a current priority of the church's response to God's call. A substantial majority (91%) of those responding affirmed that the tested projects are a good idea for Wright's Chapel United Methodist.

'Unsure' votes at this point are not the same as 'no' votes. In most cases 'unsure' is an expression of the need for clarification and more information. A capital stewardship program will be focused on sharing information and clarifying the vision God is calling your church to fulfill.

New Construction does not make sense apart from ministry support. People give to people, so the message must connect with the people to be served. Many churches have been willing to pay on mortgage debt for the full term. This is seldom necessary. Promoting a capital campaign is vital to help supporters understand how their gifts will be utilized.

8. Do you currently participate in financial support for Wright's Chapel United Methodist?

Yes	79
No	6
No response	22

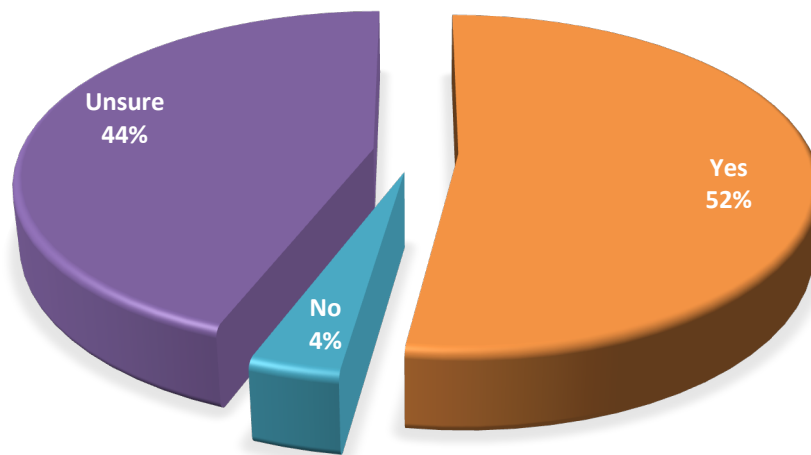


ANALYSIS:

The most likely source of capital funding for any church is from the group that already supports the church's ministry. Almost all the survey respondents were financial supporters of Wright's Chapel UMC.

9. If asked, would you be willing to make a three-year financial commitment (over and above your current annual contribution) to support expanding Cindy's Closet and paying down the mortgage?

Yes	45
No	3
Unsure	38
No response	21



ANALYSIS:

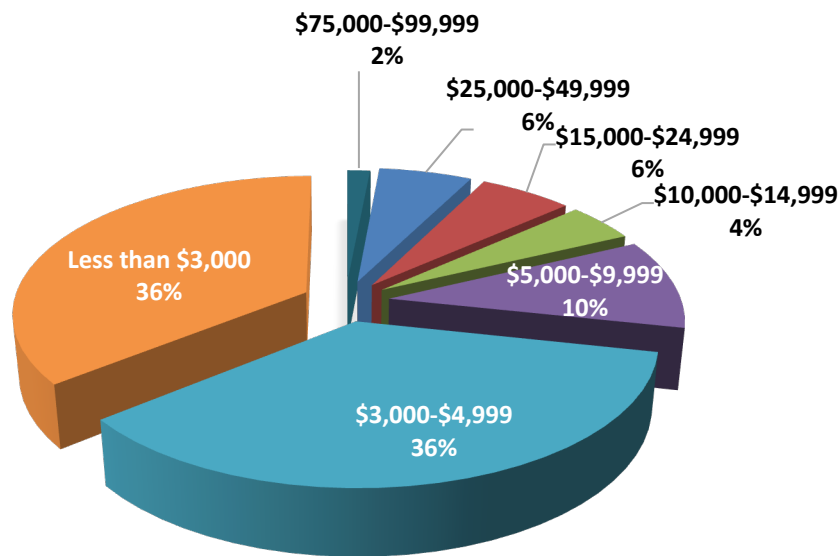
The willingness of a congregations' committed core to give is an important and foundation of any successful capital campaign. Over half of those responding said they would be willing to contribute to a campaign. Importantly, a significant portion of those 'unsure' on this question responded positively on the next question in the survey. This is encouraging at this very initial stage.

Normally, the 'unsure' replies here illustrate the need for more articulation of project details and the purpose of the campaign as it relates to future ministry. This is precisely why we undertake campaigns: to answer questions, present the vision of what can be done and the difference it will make, and connect all this to the ministry purposes of the church.

Taken as a whole, these data points show the discussion is only beginning about Cindy's Closet, residual debt, and the positive opportunities now available. The key task of a campaign will be to articulate these issues and invite people to a spiritual approach of discernment for God's direction at a personal level. Not everyone will give or give the same amount. But when people pray, God leads.

10. All members will play an important role in a successful Capital Stewardship Program. If you answered "yes" or "unsure" to the above question, please estimate a challenging and attainable gift your family would be willing to consider over a three-year period above regular giving. This is not a commitment, but a statement of opinion.

\$250,000-\$499,999	0	\$15,000-\$24,999	4
\$200,000-\$249,999	0	\$10,000-\$14,999	3
\$150,000-\$199,999	0	\$5,000-\$9,999	7
\$100,000-\$149,999	0	\$3,000-\$4,999	24
\$75,000-\$99,999	1	Less than \$3,000	24
\$50,000-\$74,999	0	No response	40
\$25,000-\$49,999	4		



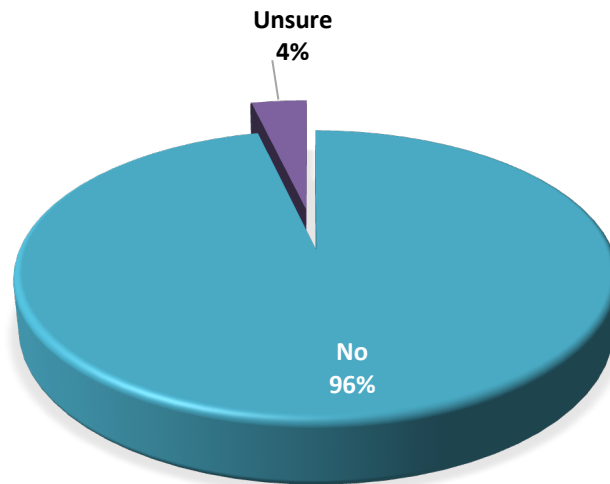
ANALYSIS:

Sixty-three percent (63%) of those responding are prepared to make a financial commitment to a campaign before it begins. Total considered gifts at this point are between \$348,000-\$495,000. These preliminary gift considerations position the church to take a significant step in capital development over the next three years.

Early recognition of major leadership gifts for the campaign will encourage others. God has placed in the hands of the people of Wright's Chapel the resources necessary to fund capital improvements. As the church has followed God's vision to take steps of faith in the past, we can trust that God will continue to work in the hearts of people in the congregation to grow gifts suitable to the current need.

11. Would your gift include any non-cash assets such as stocks, bonds, or real estate?

Yes	0
No	79
Unsure	3
No response	25

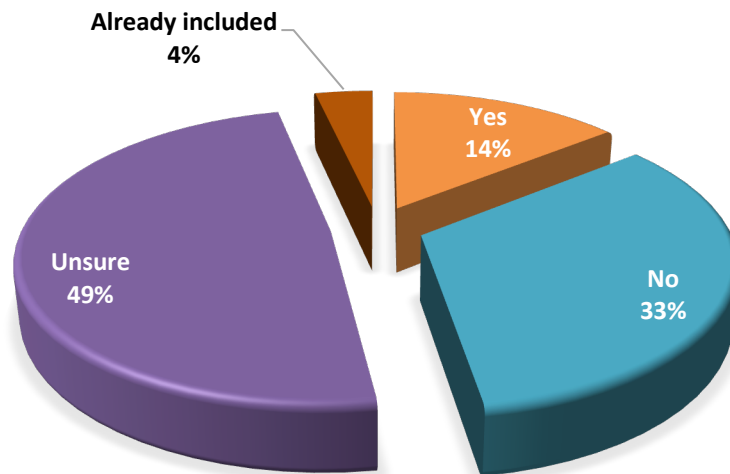


ANALYSIS:

This question is about helping people begin to think beyond cash gifts. It also allows us to assess the potential for larger assets in the congregation. At this point there are a few considerations of non-cash gifts, but as we articulate the exact plans for the campaign, this can often increase.

12. Will you consider including Wright's Chapel United Methodist Church in your will?

Yes	12
No	28
Unsure	41
Already included	3
No response	23



ANALYSIS:

People give to your church out of three pockets: the Income pocket (most budget gifts), the Asset pocket (most capital contributions), and the Estate pocket (often called Planned Gifts). The majority of churches ignore the Estate pocket to their great misfortune.

Given this information, the responses on this question are somewhat positive. Foundational work has been done at Wright's Chapel, and it is reflected here. Following your capital campaign, Horizons will provide resources for developing gifts from the Estate pocket that will enhance the long-term stewardship of the church.