

NHRC 2025 Congregational Feedback Survey

Short Answer Question Analysis

done by OpenAI's Chat GPT 5.1

Question 34

What are specific ministry gifts that are especially important for our next pastor to possess (for example: strong, energetic, charismatic leader to be our next pastor)

Summary of Key Insights and Themes: Desired Ministry Gifts for Our Next Pastor

This data set reflects a high level of unity in what the congregation values in the next pastor. While individuals used different words, the same core expectations appear repeatedly across nearly every response. The following summary organizes the findings into clear themes, highlights the most frequently mentioned qualities, and provides interpretive insights that can guide the pastoral search process.

I. Overarching Takeaways

1. The congregation desires a pastor who is both spiritually grounded and relationally strong. Nearly every response emphasizes strong faith, scriptural confidence, the ability to preach meaningfully, and compassion toward congregants.
2. Energy, charisma, and enthusiasm are recurring expectations. Many responses ask directly for an energetic, charismatic, passionate, or motivational pastor who can inspire both long-time members and younger families.
3. Communication — especially preaching — is the most frequently mentioned skill. Over half the responses specifically reference clear, relevant, engaging, or inspiring sermons.
4. Connection across all ages is a major concern. Many members feel gaps between generations and strongly desire a pastor who can connect with children, youth, young families, older adults, and everyone in between.
5. Openness to new ideas and innovation is consistently highlighted. Members want a pastor who can lead the church into the future while still respecting the church's traditions and heritage.
6. Pastoral care is expected to be warm, personal, and hands-on. Words like approachable, good listener, caring, empathetic, and confidential appear frequently.
7. Leadership is desired but not authoritarian leadership. The congregation values vision, direction, and delegation — but also humility, collaboration, and flexibility.

II. Most Frequently Mentioned Themes

1. Compassion, Caring, and Relational Warmth

This was the single strongest theme across the entire dataset. Members want a pastor who is:

Caring, compassionate, empathetic
Approachable and personable
A good listener who offers emotional and spiritual support
Engaged in members' personal lives (visiting shut-ins, counseling, being available)

Interpretation:

People want to feel known, valued, and supported. A relational pastor is viewed as essential to the health of the congregation.

2. Strong Preaching and Teaching

One of the most repeated expectations was the pastor's ability to:

Preach clearly, sincerely, and from the heart
Deliver sermons that are relevant to daily life , spiritually meaningful, and not overly long
Use Scripture confidently and thoughtfully
Teach with enthusiasm and integrity

Interpretation:

Members look to the sermon as the anchor of Sunday worship and the weekly spiritual life. Effective preaching is seen as a primary ministry gift.

3. Energy, Enthusiasm, Charisma, and Motivation

Words such as energetic, inspiring, charismatic, enthusiastic, modern, and driven appear very frequently. People want a pastor who:

Brings positive energy into worship
Motivates the congregation
Inspires participation and growth
Shows passion for ministry and people

Interpretation:

There is a desire for revitalization and momentum. Members want a pastor who brings life, uplift, and forward movement.

4. Leadership, Vision, and Innovation

Respondents often mention:

- Strong, confident leadership
- Ability to delegate and collaborate
- Vision for growth
- Skills in navigating diverse personalities
- Openness to change and new approaches
- Ability to “move the church into the current world”

Interpretation:

The congregation is looking for a leader who can unite people, revitalize ministries, and strategically position the church for future sustainability.

5. Inclusivity, Acceptance, and Community Building

Many emphasized a need for:

- Welcoming spirit
- Strong acceptance of all people
- Ability to bridge generational divides
- Creating a strong sense of family and community
- Representing and engaging all age groups

Interpretation:

Members value a pastor who embraces diversity (of age, opinion, background) and intentionally strengthens community ties.

6. Ability to Connect Across Generations (Especially Youth and Young Families)

A major repeated focus is:

- Attracting and engaging young families
- Relating to children and youth
- Being present in their lives
- Offering relevant programs
- Understanding how to appeal to multiple generations at once

Interpretation:

There is concern about demographic imbalance and a desire to re-engage younger generations for long-term sustainability.

7. Strong Faith, Scriptural Knowledge, and Spiritual Grounding

Members desire a pastor who:

- Preaches Scripture confidently
- Demonstrates strong personal faith
- Lives out Christian values
- Is spiritually mature and grounded
- Has integrity and moral character

Interpretation:

While relational and dynamic qualities are essential, the pastor's spiritual depth is seen as the foundation of their ministry.

8. Communication Skills and Approachability

Members frequently mentioned:

- Being easy to talk to
- Clear speech
- Good interpersonal skills
- Ability to mediate conflict
- Communicating across personalities and age groups

Interpretation:

Communication — both public and personal — is viewed as crucial to healthy leadership.

III. Additional Notable Expectations

- Humility paired with leadership ability
- Sense of humor and not taking themselves too seriously
- Involvement in church activities and community life
- Technological fluency to support ministry
- Respect for tradition while being forward-thinking
- Confidentiality and emotional maturity
- Ability to work well with Consistory and empower lay leaders

IV. Overall Takeaways for the Pastoral Search Process

1. The congregation wants a balanced pastor — someone who is spiritually rooted, relationally warm, emotionally intelligent, and organizationally capable.
2. Energy and charisma matter, but not at the expense of humility, compassion, or collaboration.

3. Sermon quality and communication skills are top priorities , with emphasis on relevance, clarity, and inspiration.
4. Growth — especially among young families and absent generations — is a widespread concern.
5. The next pastor must embrace both tradition and innovation , helping the church move confidently into the future.
6. People want a pastor who genuinely knows them , cares for them, and builds community.
7. The church is seeking not just a preacher, but a spiritual leader, a motivator, and a unifier.

Question 35

What do you feel are the qualities of a good sermon?

Summary of Key Insights and Themes: Qualities of a Good Sermon

The responses reveal an exceptionally consistent vision of what the congregation values in effective preaching. Across all age groups and preferences, several themes appear with overwhelming frequency: biblical grounding, relevance to daily life, clarity, engagement, sincerity, and memorability. The following two-page summary organizes these insights into core categories and highlights what the congregation finds most meaningful, memorable, and spiritually nourishing in sermons.

I. Overarching Takeaways

1. Members overwhelmingly value sermons that connect Scripture to everyday life. The clearest and strongest theme is a desire for the Bible to be explained, interpreted, and applied to modern challenges, personal struggles, and contemporary culture.
2. A good sermon must be memorable and give the listener something to carry into the week. The notion of a “takeaway,” “nugget,” “focus point,” or “message that sticks” occurs repeatedly.
3. Clarity, structure, and organization matter. People want a sermon to have a purpose, a clear theme, and a logical flow — not meandering or overly academic.
4. Storytelling, real-life examples, and relatable illustrations greatly enhance engagement. Personal stories from the pastor, biblical background explanations, humor (used carefully), and analogies to current situations are all valued.
5. Tone and delivery are as important as content. Respondents emphasize warmth, sincerity, enthusiasm, appropriate humor, a non-monotone voice, and genuine pastoral heart.
6. Sermons should be biblical, not merely motivational talks. While people want relevance and relatability, they also want firm grounding in Scripture, theology, and the historical context of the text.
7. Most members prefer sermons that are focused, not overly long, and stay on topic. Several explicitly mention time expectations, avoiding tangents, and the importance of pacing.

II. Most Frequently Mentioned Themes

1. Scriptural Grounding and Biblical Fidelity

This theme is present in nearly every response. Members want sermons to be:

Rooted in Scripture

Clear about biblical meaning and theological truth
Historically and contextually informed
Christ-centered and connected to the Gospel

Many note that the pastor should read from the Bible, explain the passage, and teach its meaning before offering application.

Interpretation:

The sermon is expected to be an act of teaching, not opinion-sharing. The congregation desires depth, theological integrity, and faithful interpretation.

2. Relevance to Daily Life

Another near-universal theme: sermons must show how Scripture speaks to present-day life. Members repeatedly describe a good sermon as one that:

- Connects biblical truth to real-world struggles
- Makes sense in “today’s world”
- Applies clearly to personal, family, work, and community experiences
- Helps navigate modern challenges as Christians
- Offers guidance that can be used throughout the week

Interpretation:

People are seeking help integrating their faith into daily living. Relevance is not optional — it is essential.

3. Memorable Message or “Takeaway”

A large percentage of responses stress:

- Having a single, clear theme
- A focused point the congregation can remember
- A “nugget” or idea to carry into the week
- A sermon that sticks with you, not one that is forgotten by lunchtime

Interpretation:

Members value sermons that provide clarity, direction, and spiritual nourishment in concise, memorable ways.

4. Storytelling, Examples, and Engagement

Key elements people appreciate include:

Personal stories (from the pastor's own life)
Analogies and illustrations
Humor (light, appropriate, not distracting)
Real-life scenarios that connect Scripture to human experience
Vivid imagery and relatable narrative

Interpretation:
Stories bring Scripture to life and make truth easier to understand and remember.

5. Delivery, Tone, and Presence

Many responses focus on the pastor's delivery:

Sincerity, warmth, and pastoral compassion
Engaging voice and cadence (not monotone)
Eye contact and connection
Enthusiasm, energy, and authenticity
Ability to keep attention
Not too long; avoid tangents

Interpretation:
People value sermons that feel alive, not performed or academic. Delivery should reflect genuine care and conviction.

6. Structure, Cohesion, and Clarity

Members consistently ask for:

A coherent theme
Logical flow (Scripture → explanation → illustration → application)
Staying focused and organized
Avoiding repetition or rambling
Clear beginning, middle, and end

Several also mentioned:

Ending strongly
Summarizing key points

Interpretation:
The congregation appreciates structure. A good sermon should feel thoughtfully constructed.

7. Hope, Encouragement, and Uplift

A common emotional expectation is that sermons should:

- Inspire
- Encourage
- Offer hope
- Strengthen faith
- Help people cope with life and the world

Interpretation:

People are looking for spiritual fuel and emotional support, not guilt, fear, or discouragement.

8. Length, Timing, and Practical Considerations

A smaller but notable portion of respondents emphasized:

- Concise sermons (often around 10–15 minutes)
- Starting and ending on time
- Avoiding excessive music or filler

Interpretation:

Attention spans vary, and many prefer focused sermons that do not drag or feel repetitive.

III. Additional Observations and Helpful Insights

Members appreciate humor sparingly and purposefully , but dislike silliness or distractions. Visual aids, historical context, and background information are welcomed when they clarify the message.

Consistency matters. Members value sermons that are reliable in tone, structure, and clarity week after week.

People want the pastor's humanity.

They appreciate hearing about:

- personal experiences
- struggles
- joys
- lessons learned through faith

This builds trust and relatability.

“Fire and brimstone” preaching is explicitly discouraged.

Members prefer hope, love, grace, practical direction, and encouragement.

IV. Overall Guidance for the Pastoral Search Process

1. The next pastor should be an excellent communicator — warm, relatable, and clear.
2. Biblical fidelity paired with practical application is the congregation's top priority.
3. Sermons must be engaging, memorable, and connected to everyday life.
4. Storytelling and personal vulnerability are strengths, not liabilities.
5. Members want teaching that deepens understanding, not just inspiration.
6. Delivery matters as much as content. Passion, clarity, and tone shape how the message is heard.
7. People value sermons that give hope and direction in a complex world.
8. Most prefer concise, focused sermons with a clear central point.

Question 50

Are there any ministries you feel we should restart? (for example: Stephen ministry, Christ Care)

Summary of Key Insights and Themes: Ministries to Restart or Rebuild

The responses to this question reveal several clear trends in what congregants miss, what they value, and where they believe opportunities exist for ministry revival. While many participants were unsure or unaware of past ministries, the answers from those who did respond with specifics illuminate several priorities: pastoral care support , Stephen Ministry , youth and children's ministries , community-building events , and intergenerational fellowship programs

What follows is a structured two-page summary of the themes, insights, and key takeaways for leadership as they consider whether to restart or reshape ministries in the next season of church life.

I. Overarching Takeaways

- 1. Stephen Ministry is by far the most frequently mentioned ministry to restart.
Multiple respondents explicitly named it — more than any other ministry — and many commented on its value for pastoral care, emotional support, and nurturing congregational relationships.*
- 2. Youth and children's ministries are a major area of concern.
There is repeated emphasis on restarting or strengthening:

Youth Group (weekly)
Sunday School
Vacation Bible School
Programs for young families
Activities that integrate children into worship and church life*
- 3. Community-building events are deeply valued and widely missed.
Responses repeatedly cite:

Birthday Dessert event
Potluck dinners
JOY Group
Veterans Dinner
Lenten dinner programs
Congregational fellowship gatherings
Caroling to shut-ins*
- 4. Aging congregation needs are on people's minds.
Several respondents recommend:

Parish Health Nurse or Parish Health Committee*

*Support for older adults
Expanded pastoral care
Ministries that address health, loneliness, and visitation*

5. *Many respondents don't know what existed previously.
A significant portion said:*

*"Not sure"
"No opinion"
"I wasn't here"
"I don't know what we had before"*

This signals:

*A gap in communication about ministries
An opportunity to reintroduce or explain the ministry landscape
The need for clear onboarding or orientation for newer members*

6. *There is a desire for ministries that build intergenerational relationships.
Comments highlight:*

*Couple groups
Young adult groups
Fellowship across age groups
Rotating events to accommodate different work schedules
Ministries involving both children and adults*

7. *There is hesitancy to restart too much before the new pastor is in place.
Several responses say:*

*"Let this arise after the new pastor comes"
"Focus on what we have first"
"We have our hands full right now"*

This suggests a desire for intentional pacing and alignment with incoming leadership.

II. Core Themes from the Responses

1. Strong Desire to Restart Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministry was mentioned more than any other program, with comments such as:

*"Please bring back Stephen Ministry."
"Stephen Ministry was a great resource."
"Stephen Ministry to help the pastor."*

Even those unsure about older programs frequently singled this one out.

Interpretation:

Members value structured pastoral care support, especially in a congregation that is aging and facing increasing pastoral care needs.

2. Rebuilding Youth, Children, and Young Adult Ministries

This is one of the clearest themes in the entire dataset:

Youth Group

Sunday School

VBS

Summer college-aged group

Young adult programs

Youth involvement in worship

Community-oriented children's activities (e.g., day camp)

Comments like:

"We need SOMETHING for young adults."

"Restart Vacation Bible School — absolutely must."

"Focus on getting youth before anything else restarts."

Interpretation:

There is a strong congregational concern about generational gaps and the desire to draw in families and younger members.

3. Fellowship and Community-Building Programs

Many respondents desire a revival of fellowship staples such as:

Birthday Dessert

Potluck dinners

Lenten dinner programs

JOY Group

Veterans Dinner

Adult social outings or trips

Lunch/Dinner for 8

Parsonage gatherings

Christmas caroling to shut-ins

These events are viewed as:

Fun

Memorable

Community-building
Attractive to newcomers

Interpretation:
Relational connection and shared experiences are central to the congregation's identity.

4. Pastoral Care & Congregational Support Ministries

Recurring responses include:

Parish Health Nurse
Pastoral support ministries
Grief follow-up (booklets, support groups)
Shepherd Groups
Visitation-oriented ministries

Interpretation:
With many members aging and more pastoral care needs emerging, these ministries meet real spiritual and emotional needs that a single pastor cannot fulfill alone.

5. Community Outreach & Service Ministries

Some members expressed interest in restarting or strengthening outward-facing ministries:

Midnight Run
Work camps or mission trips
Partnerships with other churches
Participation in parades, fairs, charity walks
Community Thanksgiving services

Interpretation:
Congregants want NHRC to be visible and active in the wider community — not just internally focused.

6. Interest in Bible Studies and Spiritual Formation

Specific desires include:

Adult Bible Study (especially Old Testament)
Afternoon studies for older adults
Rotating schedules to be inclusive of working adults
Programs for the nursery school families

Interpretation:

Members want opportunities for deeper learning and spiritual growth, but with scheduling flexibility.

III. Additional Observations

Many suggested waiting for the new pastor to guide direction , showing trust in future leadership and a desire for unified planning.

Several expressed that the church is already stretched thin , encouraging focus rather than expansion until capacity grows.

There is a recurring theme of wanting ministries that foster connection across age groups , not only segmented programs.

There is a recognition that volunteer capacity is a limiting factor , especially for resource-intensive ministries like VBS or Stephen Ministry.

IV. Key Takeaways for Leadership

- 1. Stephen Ministry is the clearest priority to evaluate for reinstatement.*
- 2. Youth and young family ministries should be considered essential for long-term congregational vitality.*
- 3. Fellowship events and community-building gatherings hold strong emotional value.*
- 4. Pastoral care support (including health-related ministries) should be part of strategic planning.*
- 5. Communication about available ministries needs improvement , given the number of respondents unaware of past programs.*
- 6. Community outreach and mission involvement interest is growing.*
- 7. Timing matters — many want to wait for a new pastor to shape the next phase of ministry life.*

Question 52

Do you have any additional comments or suggestions that you would like to share with the search team?

Summary of Key Insights and Themes: Additional Comments for the Search Team

The responses to “Do you have any additional comments or suggestions that you would like to share with the search team?” paint a clear picture of a congregation that is grateful, hopeful, and realistic about the task ahead. While many respondents simply offered “no” or “none,” those who did comment provided valuable direction in several key areas: support for the search team, openness to change, desire for younger families and youth engagement, preferences in worship and music, views on the pastor’s role, and communication expectations.

This summary highlights the most common themes and important takeaways to guide the search team’s discernment.

I. Overarching Takeaways

- 1. There is strong prayerful support and appreciation for the search team.
Many respondents explicitly thank the team, acknowledge how hard the task is, and promise ongoing prayer.*
- 2. The congregation wants thoughtful, not rushed, discernment.
Comments like “Take your time. Get it right.” and notes about thorough vetting and preaching observations show a clear preference for quality over speed.*
- 3. There is a strong desire for openness to new ideas, change, and “thinking outside the box.”
Multiple responses mention the need to move beyond “this is how we’ve always done it” and to consider innovation—especially for engaging younger families.*
- 4. Attracting and engaging younger families is a major concern.
Members repeatedly mention youth, nursery school families, worship times, modern music, and learning from other growing churches.*
- 5. There are differing, but honest, perspectives on tradition vs. contemporary expression.
Some want more modern praise music and updated approaches, while others express love for traditional hymns.*
- 6. People care about the pastor’s relationship to the congregation and the property.
Comments reference living in or not living in the parsonage, involvement with nursery school, presence on campus, and even building maintenance issues (like rotting windows).*
- 7. Communication and transparency from the search team are important.
Several respondents ask for survey results to be shared and for open communication throughout the process.*

II. Recurring Themes

1. Gratitude, Prayer, and Encouragement for the Search Team

Many comments express:

“Prayers for your research and work.”

“Thank you for your hard work. It is much appreciated.”

Blessings and benedictions over the committee’s work.

Recognition that the process may involve setbacks and discouragement, paired with encouragement to trust God’s guidance.

Takeaway:

The search team is not alone; the congregation is spiritually behind you and wants you to know your work is seen and valued.

2. Desire for Openness to Change and New Ideas

Several respondents mention:

Avoiding a rigid “this is how we’ve always done it” mindset.

Being open to new ways of worship, ministry structure, and outreach.

A pastor who is “modern,” “outside the box,” and willing to “change things up a bit.”

Blending tradition with new approaches—keeping core beliefs while trying new methods.

Takeaway:

There is a strong desire for a pastor and leadership culture that are willing to adapt, innovate, and explore different approaches while staying rooted in the faith.

3. Younger Families, Youth, and Nursery School Connection

This is one of the most consistent concerns:

Requests to revive youth group and provide adventure, fellowship, and service opportunities for teens.

Emphasis on Vacation Bible School as “a necessity.”

Comments about nursery school children being in the building weekly and the need for better connection between them and the church.

Suggestions to learn from growing churches about how they attract young families.

Desire for ministries and worship styles (music, timing, programming) that are appealing to younger generations.

Takeaway:

The church is very aware of generational gaps and sees youth and family engagement as central to its future.

4. Worship Timing and Accessibility

At least one detailed response highlights:

Considering different worship times or additional services to better accommodate family schedules (work, childcare, sports, etc.).

Recognizing that scheduling conflicts often compete with worship attendance.

Takeaway:

Flexibility in worship times is viewed as a potential strategy for making church participation more realistic for busy households.

5. Music: Modern vs. Traditional

Comments reflect a mix of views:

Multiple mentions of wanting more contemporary or praise music, possibly using recorded music if musicians are scarce.

Belief that younger people are not drawn to “200 or 500 year old hymns” without updated arrangements.

At least one person clearly stating, “I love traditional hymns.”

Takeaway:

Music is a significant identity marker. The congregation seems open to more modern music to attract younger people, but there is also affection for traditional hymns. A blended or balanced approach may be wise.

6. Profile and Role of the Next Pastor

Several recurring ideas emerge about the pastor’s profile:

Age and experience:

Many encourage considering younger pastors with energy and fresh ideas.

Others emphasize that this should not be a “starter position” and would like “someone somewhat experienced.”

Openness to candidates:

Some encourage looking beyond the RCA to other denominations.

Others stress openness to younger candidates who interview well and have strong references.

Living arrangements:

Mixed views regarding the parsonage:

One suggests the pastor not live in the parsonage.

Others express desire for a pastor who does live on premises, views NHRC as home, and is present for meetings and daily life.

Political neutrality:

Strong comments about keeping politics out of the pulpit, wanting church to be a refuge from polarization and anger.

Leadership style:

Desire for a pastor who:

Inspires and educates

Thinks outside the box

Works well with councils and committees, respecting their autonomy

Helps bridge gaps (particularly with nursery school families and the wider community)

Takeaway:

The desired pastor is energetic, relational, innovative, spiritually grounded, and able to navigate both tradition and change, while remaining non-partisan and collaborative.

7. Process: Thorough, Transparent, and Communicative

Several respondents comment on the search process itself:

Encouragement to take time and “get it right.”

Desire for rigorous vetting, multiple interviews, and preaching observations.

Requests for transparency and frequent communication with the congregation.

Interest in sharing survey findings so members can see the broader picture.

Takeaway:

The congregation values careful discernment and wants to be kept informed, not left guessing.

8. Facilities, Property, and Practical Concerns

A few comments note:

*Rotting windows and the need for building maintenance.
The importance of strong property and outreach committees.*

While not the central theme, this points to an awareness of the practical side of church life.

III. Key Takeaways for the Search Team

- 1. You are appreciated and prayed for. The emotional and spiritual support behind your work is strong.*
- 2. Do not rush. The congregation prefers a well-discerned match over a quick appointment.*
- 3. Consider both youth and experience in candidates. Younger pastors with energy and strong references are welcome, but there is also a desire for someone who is not entirely "green."*
- 4. Prioritize a pastor open to change and innovation, especially for engaging younger families.*
- 5. Be attentive to worship style and music. Explore ways to blend tradition and contemporary expression.*
- 6. Look for a pastor who is collaborative, respects councils and committees, and avoids divisive political messaging.*
- 7. Communicate clearly, consistently, and transparently with the congregation, including sharing survey findings.*
- 8. Keep youth, families, and nursery school connections at the forefront of strategic planning.*
