

SFUMC Volunteer Infrastructure

Inventory, Briefing, and the 8-Lane Restructure

Part I. The Volunteer Infrastructure

Currently, the active membership of SFUMC sits around 330 (100 of which are children), with another 120 active non-members. At any given time, the life of Spanish Fort UMC depends on more than 100 people filling 121 distinct volunteer roles. Those roles add up to about 300 hours of volunteer time every week, or 15,600 hours over a year..

Over the first quarter of 2026, every ministry area of our church was counted. How many roles there are. How many slots per role. How often each role meets or serves. How many hours per year that adds up to. The full revised inventory appears as the appendix at the end of this document.

The volunteer infrastructure at SFUMC breaks down across eight ministry areas. Worship is the largest by a significant margin, accounting for about 40 percent of all annual volunteer hours.

Ministry Area	Roles	Unique Vols.	Weekly Hrs	Annual Hrs
Worship	32	~55	~120	~6,270
Discipleship & Groups	19	~30	~30	~1,628
Children's	18	~25	~40	~2,028
Missions & Outreach	16	~25	~30	~1,584
Administration & Governance	14	~40	~32	~1,644
Youth	8	~15	~25	~1,288
Family Life & Events	8	~50 (seasonal)	~7 avg	~385
Care & Stephen's Ministry	6	~12	~15	~780
TOTAL	121	175 to 200	~300	~15,607

What the numbers mean

A few observations are worth holding.

Let me start by saying our congregation does a great job of serving both inside and outside of this church. I'm not afraid to say that, on a person-by-person average, our congregation does better than most others in our tradition at helping members find a place to serve. I am not worried about ministries failing due to a lack of volunteers, and we are not yet stretched too thin. But this is a conversation to have now rather than when we get there, and our most faithful volunteers begin burning out.

The pool sustaining all of this is smaller than the roster suggests. We may have 229 people in worship on a typical Sunday and more on the rolls, but the active volunteer pool is smaller. I don't think we have a true 80/20 rule happening at SFUMC, where 20% of the people do 80% of the work. Most people who attend worship are involved in at least one area of volunteerism in the congregation. However, there is a small group of people who serve in multiple roles and carry a much larger part of the burden.

Role stacking is structural. With 121 roles, the math tells us that the average active volunteer holds at least one recurring role, and many of our heavily involved folks hold three to five. When you look at the ministries we offer and the pool of people we have to execute them, role stacking is what the system requires to keep functioning. It is not an artifact of any individual's overcommitment or any department's failure to recruit. The math itself demands it. So if we are going to continue doing ministry at a high level and launch new ministries, people who are already giving four to six hours a week cannot add more without something coming off their plate.

Worship and Children's Ministry account for roughly 53 percent of all volunteer hours. They are the roles that cannot flex or go unfilled on a given Sunday without affecting the public worship life of the congregation. Any honest conversation about volunteer sustainability has to begin with worship and children's, and recruitment into those areas deserves a dedicated pipeline rather than general appeals from the announcement slide. Elizabeth does a wonderful job communicating with her volunteers, but she could always use more.

New ministries launched in 2025 and 2026 have not been paired with retirements. The Community Dinner launched last year. The Thrift Store is launching this year. The unified Groups Ministry, the men's ministry framework, and the Building Committee all came online in this same season. Each of these is good and right, and I would not undo any of them. But together they represent several new volunteer roles and additional annual hours without a corresponding sunset of something else.

Governance work is time-intensive and often invisible. The Building Committee alone represents 54 hours over its 18-month term for each of its ten lay members. Council members average two or more hours per month not counting prep time. Members of Trustees, SPRC, and Finance Committee each give meaningful chunks of time across the year. These are substantial commitments that rarely get celebrated publicly because they are structural rather than visible.

A word about the people behind the numbers

None of this reads as a complaint. The volunteer infrastructure at SFUMC is, by any honest measure, a sign of life. A dying congregation does not generate thousands of hours of unpaid ministry work. This is what a healthy, faithful church looks like when people show up. The math is hard because the participation is real.

What I want is for us to know what we are sitting on. The people who give their time week after week deserve leaders who can see the whole picture and steward it accordingly. This document is the start of being able to do that.

Part II. The 8-Lane Restructure

What a lane is

A lane is a public-facing door. The test of a lane: can you stand at the Meet the Pastor in the parlor on a Sunday morning and tell a new family, "Here are the eight main ways you can connect to the life of this church. Each one has a leader you can talk to and a way to start small," without first explaining the difference between a committee and a ministry team and a council?

If not, the structure is still organizational rather than relational.

The current SFUMC structure asks new people to navigate insider distinctions. Worship Committee is one thing, Worship Team is another, and Worship Planning is a staff group that meets on Tuesdays. Missions Team is the umbrella body, but the Costa Rica trip and Community Dinner each have their own volunteer pipelines. A lane structure replaces all of that with names that a non-member can use.

The current ministries do not disappear. They become rooms inside the lanes. The men's ministry framework, for example, lives primarily in Adult Groups but crosses over into Missions when the seasonal service project runs.

The 8 Lanes

Each lane below includes its scope, current sub-teams, staff partner, lay leadership team, and a status note flagging anything that is currently dormant, in transition, or being built.

Lane 1: Worship	
Scope	Everything that makes Sunday morning (and special services) happen.
Current sub-teams	Hospitality (ushers, greeters, sanctuary setup, altar guild, communion, paraments, flowers); Arts (chancel choir, handbell choir, contemporary band, accompanist support); Production (sound, slides, livestream). Both traditional and contemporary services meet in the sanctuary.
Staff partner(s)	Mike Owenby (traditional), Andy Cloninger (contemporary), Woods (preaching). Worship Planning is the staff coordination group (Tuesdays).
Lay leadership team	Worship Committee. Leisa Younger serves as the Worship Committee Rep to Church Council. Committee chair currently unnamed in working canon. (Note: at SFUMC the term "Worship Team" is used interchangeably with the contemporary band. The choir and the worship team are the musical expressions of weekly worship. Worship Planning is the staff coordination group.)
Status notes	Largest lane by far. 32 roles, approximately 6,270 annual hours. Non-negotiable for weekly operation. Holiday services use the same volunteer corps.

Lane 2: Children's Ministry

Scope	Everything from nursery through 6th grade, including Sunday morning, Sunday evening, milestones, and seasonal events.
Current sub-teams	Sunday morning (nursery, classroom leaders and assistants, Children's Church); Sunday evening (Little Lights, Shine Kids, Connect; the third tier for grades 4 to 6); VBS; baptism support.
Staff partner(s)	Elizabeth DeRocher, Scott Clemons. Beth Allen now serves as volunteer following her staff departure.
Lay leadership team	Children's Leadership Team (CLT), being built to 6 to 8 members as of May 2026 and meeting quarterly. Reports through the Children's Team CC Rep.
Status notes	Second-largest lane. 18 roles, approximately 2,028 annual hours. Family Camp currently dormant. Confirmation restarting January 2027.

Lane 3: Youth Ministry

Scope	Everything 6th through 12th grade: Sunday morning, Sunday night (Remedy), retreats, mission trips.
Current sub-teams	Remedy small and large group volunteers; winter and fall retreats; annual mission trips; transportation drivers; confirmation mentors (restarting January 2027).
Staff partner(s)	Sean Harnas.
Lay leadership team	Youth Leadership Team (YLT, also referred to as Youth Parent Council; same body). CC Rep: Megan Bias. Being built as of May 2026.
Status notes	8 roles, approximately 1,288 annual hours. Healthy momentum under Sean since September 2025.

Lane 4: Adult Groups

Scope	All the ways adults connect to one another at SFUMC: learning groups, fellowship groups, affinity groups, men's and women's structures, and Family Life events.
Current sub-teams	Sunday morning classes (5 current: Light Seekers, Young Adult, Watermark, Gather In Grace, Ladies Group; sixth launching August 2026); short-term studies (Lenten, Women in the Word, Pastor Studies); fellowship groups (Mahjong, No Book Book Club, Woodworking); men's ministry (not yet activated); women's parallel (to come); Family Life events (Fall Festival, Easter Egg Hop, Beach Day, Movie Nights).
Staff partner(s)	Sarah Roberts (discipleship, fellowship); Margie Walters (Supper Clubs, Meals/Events).
Lay leadership team	TBD lay leadership at lane level. Currently spans Discipleship, Fellowship, and Family Life on the existing structure. This lane would benefit most from consolidation. Sub-team facilitators in place for each fellowship group.
Status notes	19 roles in Discipleship and Groups plus 8 Family Life roles totals 27 roles in this lane, approximately 2,013 annual hours. The lane with the most consolidation upside. Men's and Women's parallel both planned but not yet operational.

Lane 5: Care

Scope	Pastoral care infrastructure that walks alongside people in crisis, transition, illness, grief, and the long shape of life.
Current sub-teams	Stephen Ministers (dormant, planned for relaunch); S.A.L.T. ministry; bereavement coordination and meals; Primetimers outings; Membership Care Callers (will live under the Stephen Ministers relaunch).
Staff partner(s)	Sarah Roberts (bereavement, hospital visitation, prayer chain, support groups); Margie Walters (Membership Care portfolio).
Lay leadership team	TBD lay leadership at lane level. S.A.L.T. coordinators currently in place. Stephen Ministers structure resumes once relaunched.
Status notes	6 lay roles in the inventory, approximately 780 annual hours. Significantly thinner than other lanes because much pastoral care work currently sits with staff (Woods, Sarah, Margie) rather than volunteers. Stephen Ministers revival is the strategic priority for this lane and would meaningfully grow the lay footprint.

Lane 6: Missions

Scope	Outward-facing work: local outreach, partner ministries, collections, international missions, disaster response.
Current sub-teams	Community Dinner (monthly, launched 2026); Thrift Store (bi-annual, launched 2026); partner organizations (BFV, Family Promise, USA Wesley Foundation, Ronald McDonald House, Prodissee Pantry); collections (rotating drives, including Veterans Home and Embrace Alabama); Costa Rica mission trip; disaster relief.
Staff partner(s)	Sarah Roberts.
Lay leadership team	Missions Committee, chaired by Gay Desotell. Gay already operates as a de facto lane leader, assigning committee members to lead each collection drive. Rotation model already functioning.
Status notes	16 roles, approximately 1,584 annual hours. The closest of all the lanes to already being lane-shaped. Community Dinner and Thrift Store are the two newest adds and the most labor-intensive recurring efforts.

Lane 7: Communications

Scope	Everything public-facing that goes out under SFUMC's name: bulletins, weekly emails, monthly newsletter, website, social, photos.
Current sub-teams	Bulletins (one lay proofer); Spotlight (weekly email); Pastor's Notes (Friday plus longer letters); Churchwide Emails; Social Media; Calendar; SF Monthly newsletter; SF Guidebook (in progress); event photography (gap).
Staff partner(s)	Summerlyn Middleton (Communications Assistant, staff who anchors this lane).
Lay leadership team	TBD lay leadership at lane level. No current standing committee. Currently the thinnest lane by volunteer count.
Status notes	Essentially one ongoing lay volunteer role (the bulletin proofer). The biggest recruiting opportunity in the restructure, and the lane with the largest gap between current staffing and what the mind map says exists.

Lane 8: Administration	
Scope	The governance and operational machinery that keeps SFUMC running under the Book of Discipline: committees, property, finance, personnel, leadership development.
Current sub-teams	Church Council; Trustees (plus the currently-unstaffed Safe Sanctuary Coordinator and Facility Use Coordinator roles); SPRC; Finance Committee; Nominations and Leadership Development; Building Committee (18-month term through 2027); UMC Lay Members to Annual Conference (Asher Carmichael, Marilyn Sullivan, Bill Nelson); Preschool Board; ESO 501(c)(3) Board.
Staff partner(s)	Elisha Dozier (Finance, Trustees, Operations, ShelbyNext); Margie Walters (CC support, Nominations, SPRC support).
Lay leadership team	Each committee has its own chair; Council Chair Jason Lober oversees the whole. Administration is itself the UMC-required committee structure.
Status notes	14 roles, approximately 1,644 annual hours. Open question: does Administration belong as a public-facing "lane" at all, or should it be presented to the congregation in different vocabulary than ministry lanes?

Anatomy of a working lane

Each lane needs the same five elements to function. These are the things that have to be true before a lane can be considered "launched."

1. A lane leader

One named lay person accountable for the whole lane, who can recruit other team leaders and rotate them through sub-teams over time. This is not the same person as the committee chair. The committee chair handles governance. The lane leader handles people.

2. An elevator pitch

A single paragraph in plain English without acronyms or insider language. You should be able to read it from the pulpit, paste it into Spotlight, or hand it to a new member without translation.

3. Defined on-ramps

At minimum: a one-time helper slot for someone who wants to try the lane without committing; a regular weekly or monthly role for someone joining a team; a sub-team lead role for someone ready to coordinate; and a path into lane leadership itself for the person who grows into owning the whole thing.

4. A staff partner

Which staff member supports the lane day-to-day. Naming the staff partner formally is what makes follow-through actually happen.

5. A connection to the relevant UMC committee

Each lane needs to know which committee gives it cover under the Book of Discipline. Worship lane reports up to Council through the Worship Committee Rep to Church Council (Leisa Younger). Missions

lane reports through the Missions Team Chair (Gay Desotell). Administration is itself the committee structure. This keeps the lane structure compatible with the Discipline rather than competing with it.

Migration plan

The hardest part is not designing the lanes. It is the time it takes to implement and internalize. The pragmatic sequence is three phases.

Phase 1: Design (June through October 2026)

- Name the 8 lanes and confirm their scope
- Recruit one lay lane leader per lane
- Write the elevator pitch for each lane
- Build the on-ramp definitions for each lane
- Orient lane leaders internally (not yet a public announcement)
- Identify which existing lay leaders are already operating like lane leaders today

Phase 2: Pilot (November 2026 through February 2027)

- Run the new lane structure with 3 or 4 already-healthy lanes (Worship and Children's likely, with Missions close behind)
- Begin using lane vocabulary in the 2027 Visitor Class (Meet the Pastor) and in the SF Monthly newsletter
- Test the on-ramp pathways: are people actually moving through them?
- Gather feedback from the lane leaders running the pilot

Phase 3: Full Rollout (March 2027 onward)

- All 8 lanes named and active
- Spotlight and Pastor's Notes recruit by lane, not by individual role
- Annual State of the Volunteer Corps letter introduced
- Evaluation point: is a Volunteer Coordinator function (lay or paid) warranted based on the year of data?

Part III. The Bigger Conversations the Lane Work Opens Up

The lane structure is the spine for four other conversations that the inventory itself surfaced.

Public transparency about what the church asks of most-involved members

Roughly 30-40 people sustain 300 hours of volunteer work every week, and most of the congregation does not know that. An annual State of the Volunteer Corps letter, parallel to State of the Budget, would close that gap. Recruitment language can name actual time commitments up front rather than asking for vague help.

Sunsetting ministries that have run their course

Right now the implicit norm is that adding ministries shows vitality and ending them is decline. That norm has to flip before specific candidates can be discussed.

Volunteer Coordinator function (lay or paid)

Five responsibilities that nobody currently owns: central recruitment matching, onboarding pipeline (Safe Sanctuary, training, mentor pairings), tracking and reporting, burnout monitoring, sabbath enforcement so people can rotate off without quitting. Middle path under consideration: build a 3 or 4 person lay coordinator team owning clusters of lanes; evaluate after 12 months whether a paid coordinator or expanded staff scope is justified.

Honest recruitment language

"We just need a few more helpers" sounds modest, but for the person hearing it, joining means joining a small pool already at capacity. Naming the actual commitment up front ("this is a weekly role, here is the team you would be joining, here is what coming off the role looks like") is more respectful of both the recruit and the existing corps..