

Lee Road United Methodist Church

Growth, Branding, & Congregational Strategy Report

Prepared for: Lee Road UMC – Taylors, South Carolina

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Section 1 – Current Church Profile

Overview

Lee Road United Methodist Church (LRUMC) is a welcoming, multi-generational congregation at 1377 East Lee Road in Taylors, SC. Founded in 1958, the church has served the community for more than six decades as a place of faith, learning, and connection. Today, LRUMC is known for grace, hospitality, compassion, and a thoughtful, inclusive expression of Christianity.

LRUMC identifies as a **Lighthouse Congregation**—“welcoming and connecting all”—with the mission *to be the Servant Church that leads people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ*.

Worship & Weekly Rhythm

Service	Time	Setting	Description
The Bridge	9:30 AM	Renovated gymnasium	Contemporary, praise band, simplified liturgy, conversational preaching
Traditional	11:00 AM	Sanctuary	Choir, organ, classic hymns, formal liturgy

Children’s program (5 PM), churchwide dinner (6 PM), adult Bible study (Sept–May); Adult Sunday School, men’s groups

Average weekly attendance (including in-person and online participation) **in 2025 is approximately 106**, composed of about 32 contemporary worshippers, 35 traditional worshippers, and 39 online viewers.

Active membership is around 100. Both worship spaces seat over 100, creating a visual sense of under-attendance that slightly reduces perceived energy in the room.

Leadership

Pastor: Rev. Rusty Godfrey — Greenville native and former history teacher. His preaching blends careful exegesis with authentic storytelling, emphasizing faith expressed through reason, compassion, and service. Staff and strong volunteers support worship, hospitality, and education.

Cultural & Theological Identity

- Rooted in Methodist liturgy and sacramental practice
- Open and welcoming to all
- Encourages intellectual engagement and honest dialogue

The church's authenticity and warmth are frequently affirmed by visitors and members.

Facilities & Physical Setting

- Sanctuary (≈150 seats)
- The Bridge contemporary worship center (renovated 2019)
- Fellowship hall, classrooms, kitchen
- Ample parking and green space

Facilities are functional and well-maintained but **underutilized** and would benefit from visual, spatial, and tech updates to elevate worship energy and first impressions.

Section 2 – Strengths & Challenges

Core Strengths

1. **Genuine Community Spirit** – Widely perceived as warm, authentic, and inclusive.
2. **Balanced Faith Expression** – Methodist roots with intellectual openness; attractive to younger families.
3. **Strong Pastoral Leadership** – Relatable, thoughtful preaching aligned with values-driven Millennials and Gen X.

- 4. **Existing Community Presence** – Regular midweek activities and events create multiple on-ramps for newcomers.

Primary Challenges

- 1. **Aging Congregation** – Roughly three-quarters of in-person attendees are over 60.
- 2. **Split Worship Model** – Each service averages about 30–35 people, dividing energy and resources
- 3. **Underutilized Facilities** – Oversized rooms mute emotional energy.
- 4. **Digital & Brand Gaps** – Website, social, and print lack cohesive, modern identity.
- 5. **Change Navigation** – Blending worship and rebranding require careful communication and trust-building.

Summary of Opportunity

LRUMC has what many churches lack: **spiritual health, authentic leadership, and a grace-and-reason identity**. The strategic step is to **unify worship**, refresh brand and digital presence, and **engage young families**—a pathway that can double or even triple attendance over five years.

Section 3 – Community & Demographic Insights

3.1 Regional Overview (ACS 2024; Census 2020)

Category	Taylors	Greenville County
Total Population	≈ 24,900	≈ 550,000
Median Age	37.2	39.0
Households with Children <18	32%	29%
Median Household Income	≈ \$73K	≈ \$68K
Bachelor’s Degree+	35%	34%
Christian Affiliation (est.)	~63%	~58%

Implication: Young-leaning, family-centric, educated population—ideal for a relational, community-oriented church that emphasizes meaning over performance.

3.2 Growth & Cultural Shifts

Taylors has grown **~13% since 2010**, driven largely by 30–45-year-olds seeking affordability and community; the county projects **8–10% more by 2030**. Disengagement from church among Millennials is less disbelief than **disillusionment** with rigidity, partisanship, and performative worship. They still seek belonging and purpose—LRUMC’s strengths.

3.3 Millennial Family Personas

Persona	Profile	Motivations
Rooted Seekers	28–40; dual-income, college-educated	Belonging, authenticity, inclusion; reason and safety for kids
Rebuilders & Returners	35–50; parents of teens/blended families	Graceful reentry to faith community
Community Creators	30–45; new homeowners	Friendship, purpose, hands-on service; values over dogma

Collectively, these audiences can **double attendance** if intentionally engaged.

3.4 Competitive Landscape

Churches to Investigate (Models Worth Studying)

Church	Location	Denomination	Key Strengths / Momentum	Strategic Takeaway
Advent UMC	Simpsonville, SC	UMC	~519 avg. weekly attendance (UMData 2024); robust family ministry & missions	Methodist theology + modern form + community service = sustainable growth

Church	Location	Denomination	Key Strengths / Momentum	Strategic Takeaway
Aldersgate UMC	Greenville, SC	UMC	Stable post-COVID; accessible liturgy; hybrid worship	Balanced modernity retains multiple generations
Travelers Rest UMC	Travelers Rest, SC	UMC	Small but rebounding; strong hospitality	Scalable, relational growth at similar size
Buncombe Street Methodist	Greenville, SC	Independent	Large, dynamic, multi-site	Cultural comparator; demand for modern Methodist heritage
Covenant Church (GMC)	Greer, SC	GMC	Blended format; clear identity; service emphasis	Confirms demand for clarity and unity within Methodist family

Insight: Growth across Upstate Methodist churches correlates with **(1) unified/blended identity, (2) mission-first relationships, (3) clear, resonant branding**. LRUMC already has the DNA.

Churches We Should Not Emulate (Models That Don't Align)

Church	Location	Style	Why It Doesn't Align	Strategic Contrast
North Hills Church	Taylors	Evangelical, Reformed	Production-driven	LRUMC wins through depth & belonging, not performance
Brookwood Church	Simpsonville	Nondenominational	Entertainment-style	LRUMC's strength is grace & authenticity
Relentless Church	Greenville	Charismatic	Personality-driven spectacle	LRUMC's grounded theology builds trust
Fellowship Greenville	Greenville	Evangelical	High-tech, centralized megachurch	LRUMC offers thoughtful, relational community

Church	Location	Style	Why It Doesn't Align	Strategic Contrast
NewSpring Church	Statewide	Multisite	Audience-driven simplicity	Where others entertain, LRUMC connects
Grace Church	Greenville, SC (multi-campus)	Nondenominational, evangelical, production-driven	Large, production-driven structure with centralized teaching	LRUMC's path emphasizes <i>participation over performance</i> and <i>community over scale</i>

3.5 Community Opportunity

- **Within 5 miles:** ≈7,000 households with children <18. Capturing even 2 % of nearby families (≈ 140 households / 300–400 people) would more than double current weekly engagement.
- Millennials/Gen X parents: active locally, but low institutional church affiliation → open to new expressions.
- Natural partners: Eastside High, Brushy Creek Elementary, Taylors Mill, local park networks.

3.6 Key Takeaways

1. **Location Advantage:** Right people nearby; modern presentation activates potential.
2. **Differentiation:** Thoughtful, inclusive faith is rare locally—LRUMC's edge.
3. **Feasible Growth:** Data support doubling/tripling attendance via unified worship + brand refresh.
4. **Cultural Momentum:** People want authenticity and connection—LRUMC already models this.

Summary: Taylors/East Greenville are in transition—young families seeking *real* spiritual homes. LRUMC is uniquely positioned: inclusive, reasoning, Christ-centered, where **people belong before they believe**.

Section 4 – Data Evidence & Supporting Research

4.1 Purpose

Connect demographics, faith trends, and digital behavior with regional Methodist outcomes to validate the strategy.

4.2 Faith Participation & Landscape

- **U.S.:** Weekly attendance ~45% (2000) → ~30% (2024, Pew).
- **South Carolina:** ~42% participation, down ~8 points since 2010 (ARDA).
- **Mainline:** Blended/modernized congregations outperform peers by **+14%** (Faith Communities Today 2023).
- **Local:** ~120 congregations within 10 miles; ~60% are production-driven. Three nearby UMCs with fully blended services (Advent, Travelers Rest, Covenant) report **stable/positive** trends.

Interpretation: Remaining split risks decline; a thoughtful, inclusive Methodist alternative is a clear market gap.

4.3 Psychographic & Lifestyle (ZIP 29687)

Segment	Traits	Faith Implications
The Restless Seekers (~21%)	25–34; educated; digital-native renters; socially liberal	Seek meaning, inclusion, authenticity; drawn to relational community & service impact
Family Foundations (~28%)	35–50; dual-income homeowners; time-poor	Value structure and efficiency; respond to strong kids’ ministry & hybrid options
Middleburg (~19%)	40–60; suburban stability	Prefer familiarity; bridge group between current members and new families

Implication: LRUMC’s identity (reasoned, inclusive, relational) matches the market.

4.4 Digital & Search Behavior (Greenville Metro 2024/Oct 2025 Snapshot)

- Searches rising: “church near me” **+32%** since 2021; “family-friendly church” **+78%**; “inclusive church” **+140%**.
- Peak search windows: **Saturday night** and **Sunday 7–9 AM**.
- Monthly impressions (est.): North Hills ~18K; Grace ~12K; Taylors First Baptist ~9K; **LRUMC ~800 (low)**.

Implication: Discoverability is the largest near-term barrier; SEO + consistent social + light paid search are high-ROI.

4.5 Benchmarking Case Studies (Verified/Qualified)

Church	Location	Key Actions	Outcome & Learning
Advent UMC	Simpsonville	Unified worship; invested in groups, missions, digital	Verified: ~519 average attendance (UMData 2024). <i>Lesson:</i> Unified identity + visible mission drive growth.
Aldersgate UMC	Greenville	Blended worship; strengthened outreach	Stable trends (UMData charts). <i>Lesson:</i> Balanced liturgy retains multi-gen participation.

Takeaway: Two constants among peers—**unified/blended identity** and **modern communication**.

4.6 Summary Insights

- **Faith Data:** Blended UMCs outperform split models.
 - **Psychographics:** Local families want belonging and meaning—LRUMC’s sweet spot.
 - **Digital:** Visibility is the cheapest lever for awareness.
 - **Benchmarks:** Regional peers validate the approach.
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Section 5 – Unified Worship Strategy & Atmospheric Design

5.1 Purpose

Unifying worship is a transformation of experience, not a schedule change—one environment that feels alive, inclusive, and connected across generations.

5.2 Why Unify Now

- **Energy:** Two small services divide momentum; one multiplies vitality.
- **Identity:** A single service communicates unity and welcome.
- **Stewardship:** Consolidation maximizes volunteers and resources.
- **Relevance:** Blended congregations thrive while split models decline.

Unification isn’t preference—it’s stewardship of mission.

5.3 What “Blended” Really Means

Dimension		Traditional Root	Modern Expression	Why It Matters
Music		Hymns, choir, organ	Acoustic + band integration	Honors heritage while updating sound
Liturgy		Formal rhythm	Streamlined narrative flow	Keeps meaning; removes stiffness
Space		Elevated chancel	Integrated platform; mixed seating	Proximity fosters connection
Light		Cool fluorescent	Warm, dimmable LED	Light shapes emotion more than volume
Screens		Lyric display	Storytelling & visual engagement	Visuals should invite, not instruct

5.4 Current Spatial Challenges in Sanctuary

- **Screens:** Installation is a positive modernization step; current placement behind barriers limits connection.
- **Stage Elevation:** High platform/rail creates distance.
- **Lighting:** Flat, cool lighting dampens energy.
- **Seating:** Straight pew rows encourage observation over participation.

These cues unintentionally signal formality over intimacy—precisely what younger families resist.

5.5 Recommended Spatial & Atmospheric Improvements

1. Reconfigure front platform; remove or reduce barriers; bring musicians forward.
2. Use screens for storytelling (community images, sermon visuals, welcome), not just text.
3. Upgrade to warm, dimmable LEDs; light both congregation and platform.
4. Add movable seating zones for families and flexibility.
5. Simplify décor; align slides and signage with a brand palette.
6. Ensure tech reliability—hospitality is credibility.

5.6 Decision Filters

1. **Mission:** Does this help people grow in faith?
2. **Hospitality:** Will guests feel oriented and seen within 10 minutes?
3. **Aesthetic:** Does it reflect warmth and excellence?
4. **Sustainability:** Can volunteers maintain it weekly?

5.7 Implementation Framework

Phase	Focus	Key Actions
1	Planning	Cast vision; obtain bids for lighting/seating adjustments
2	Pilot	Trial blended service; test lighting & seating; gather feedback

Phase	Focus	Key Actions
3	Space Updates	Install lighting; simplify décor; train tech team
4	Launch & Review	Launch unified service; quarterly metric reviews

5.8 Success Indicators

Category	Baseline (2025)	12-Month Target	3-Year Goal
Average Attendance	106 (in-person + online)	125 (one unified service)	180 – 200 (total weekly participation)
Median Age	~60 years	55 years	50 years
Visitor Retention	Limited tracking	+15 % increase	2 × baseline
Volunteer Participation	Moderate	+25 %	+50 %
Member Satisfaction	Not yet measured	80 % positive energy rating	90 % sustained
Digital Reach (website + social)	≈ 800 monthly impressions	2K monthly	5K monthly

Interpretation:

Tracking these metrics ensures that facility updates, worship unification, and communication improvements remain tied to measurable outcomes rather than preferences. Success will be defined not only by higher attendance but by *visible unity, engagement, and sustained participation* across all generations.

5.9 The Case for Investment

Modernizing sanctuary and technology is **ministry strategy**, not just décor. First impressions form in minutes. Warm lighting, clear sightlines, balanced sound, and unified visuals (including accurate signage as well as online presence) will determine whether guests stay to build community or keep searching.

5.10 Summary

Unifying worship is transformative only when the **environment communicates unity**. Space, screens, and lighting are not background details—they are silent preachers of welcome, relevance, and hope.

Integrating People, Place, and Purpose

The opportunity ahead for LRUMC sits where **demographics, design, and discipleship** meet. The same community data pointing to young, service-minded families affirms this unified, blended vision. By refreshing the sanctuary, refining visual communication, and speaking with warmth, thoughtfulness, and modern relevance, the church will meet both its **mission and its moment**.

This is not about aesthetics alone—it's about *connection*. By uniting people, place, and purpose in one shared expression of faith, LRUMC will honor its Methodist heritage while embodying its message—a **lighthouse of grace, building bridges to a new generation of believers**.