

Congregational Consultation Report

Peace Lutheran Church

Hutchinson, MN

March 31, 2019

Introduction: It has been a privilege to work with Pastor Pasche, the staff, lay leaders and members of Peace Lutheran Church. Everyone involved in this process has been helpful and provided us with information that guided us through the discovery process. Our prayer is that God will use this report to motivate the congregation to do great things for God and the people of this community.

Consultation Team Members:

Dr. Phillip Johnson, Asst. to the President for Mission Formation, MNS District

Faith Rattej, Community Outreach Director, St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Edina, MN

Jan Stockman, Director of Child Development Center, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, Plymouth, MN

Rev. Jacob Gillard, Executive Director, Central American Lutheran Mission Society

Observations:

- **Large Unchurched Population** – There is a sizable population of people in the Hutchinson area who have no connection to a Christian congregation or, seemingly, to our Lord Jesus Christ. Most notable in this population are the children and young adults.
- **Acknowledgement of the need to change** – Those we interviewed expressed their certainty that changes were necessary and imminent. There is a general sense that this is an important time of transition for the congregation.
- **A strong inward focus** – Most of those with whom we interacted expressed concern for the existing programs and ministries of the congregation. Little concern was expressed for people who had no relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- **Excellent Facilities** – Well-kept and well maintained, the building presents an inviting place for gatherings of all kinds.
- **Strong participation in the process** – Many people gave time and energy to the interview process and the report folder was very well organized and, for the most part, well populated.
- **Strong plan for use of the building / campus** – No evidence could be found that this plan translated into a similar plan for ministry outcomes.
- **Long-time staff** – Many staff have long tenures at Peace, however no evidence of a staff evaluation process was identified.
- **High Level of indebtedness** – Current debt servicing requirements seems to create a heavy burden for the congregation.
- **Lack of guest connection** – No evidence could be found for a deliberate process of welcome, inclusion and discipleship in the faith for guests or new members beyond the age of confirmation.
- **Communication Struggles** – The intention for good communication was evident, however those efforts did not always translate into anticipated results.
- **Ministry Flow Confusion** – There is a lack of alignment in the printed ministry / staff flow chart that presents itself in the daily operations of the congregation.

Commendations

1. **Recognition that change is necessary** – The people we interviewed and with whom we interacted expressed their certainty that changes were necessary and expected in order to turn around the downward slide the congregation is currently undergoing.
2. **Dedicated members** – There is a large group of dedicated members who invest their time and energy maintaining the programs and structures of the Congregation and Learning Center. Their sacrifice of time is commendable.
3. **Program Staff** – Peace is served by faithful, trusted pastors and program staff who lead the congregation with clear dedication to the Gospel and the people of the congregation.
4. **Facility & location** – The facility is clean and inviting providing the space to carry out a variety of ministries that may attract the people of the surrounding community.
5. **Early childhood program** – The Little Lambs Early Childhood program is clearly a strength of the congregation, receiving community recognition two years in a row, placing the congregation on the community grapevine. We believe that the congregation should view this program as one of their greatest assets as they seek to reach the surrounding population through this ministry to children and their families.

Concerns

1. **Lack of a clear, unifying, compelling vision** – The congregation has no agreed upon vision and has fallen into the habit of caring for themselves and providing for their personal preferences at the expense of reaching out to the un-churched people of their community. This lack of vision adversely affects the relationships, decision-making, and overall ministry of Peace Lutheran Church. This inward focus is a major contributor to the years of plateaued or declining worship attendance with only a handful of adults being baptized or confirmed and has led to numerous expressions of “filling the sanctuary” as a primary ministry objective. This lack of vision even contributes to division and conflict within the congregation and staff confusion and allows individuals to “go their own way” in enacting ministry decisions.
2. **Ineffective Congregational Structure** - The present governance structure of the church holds no one accountable for the results of ministry. This structure is dependent on one relationship – that of the Sr. Pastor. It leads to a dissipation of efforts and energy. With unclear authority and no unified plan for feedback and evaluation of individual efforts perception is unclear as to who makes final decisions and grants permission. Further, there is little or no coordination between the congregation and Little Lambs learning center administration.
3. **Financial Stewardship and Indebtedness** – Very few families represent a majority of congregational giving. Servicing the current level of debt is a weight that threatens to crush opportunities for mission and ministry and leads to a perception of scarcity and fear. The congregation has a dire financial picture which must be addressed with Biblical stewardship practices and long-term planning.
4. **Lack of Leadership Development** – The pastor and church council have no intentional plan for the development of volunteer leaders. Leaders that do exist seem to function independently without deliberate coordinated efforts or evidence of cooperation between church committees or church and preschool. The current leadership is further evidencing signs of burnout and yet are not training or mentoring others to take leadership positions. The lack of leadership development has also resulted in poor communication within the congregation.
5. **Need for a clear discipleship process, especially for young adults** – While Bible study is appreciated in the congregation, Peace does not have a clear path for developing disciples, especially among its young, post-confirmation members.

Prescriptions

1. **Vision**- In order to gain a clear, unified, compelling vision, the congregation will:

- a) By August 2019, with input from the Minnesota South District office, the congregation will begin to engage a facilitator to lead a comprehensive visioning process. This comprehensive process should include such items as community surveys and community based focus groups with the goal of understanding the needs of the community and the people living within the area.
- b) Once developed, the Sr. Pastor and staff will communicate the vision for ninety days throughout the congregation, exploring the potential changes needed to bring about full implementation.
- c) At the end of the ninety days of intentional vision casting the congregation shall meet to consider adoption of the vision. The target deadline is July 1, 2020.
- d) Leadership will develop a process that continually ensures every member knows the vision of the congregation and will reflect the new vision in the ministry plan and budget of the congregation.

2. **Structure** - Effective with the acceptance of these prescriptions the congregation will begin to explore an Accountable Leadership Model by contracting with Cornerstone Consulting or another organization dedicated to church / non-profit governance and leadership development.

- a) The facilitator will be chosen no later than October 1, 2019.
- b) The new model of governance should reflect a reduction in committees, a focusing of responsibilities for staff and clear lines of accountability for ministry development.
- c) The primary focus of the new structure will be clear lines of governance and operations. The Pastor's role will be to lead the church. The role of staff members will be to manage the ministries. The role of the congregation will be to conduct the ministries of the church.
- d) By September 1, 2020, the pastor will nominate members to fill the new governance structure. The congregation will select from the list of potential leaders. Potential leaders must meet the following criteria:
 - a) Members who are very regular participants in corporate worship and Bible study.
 - b) Members who are striving to or are giving a tithe.
 - c) Members who understand and support the mission and vision of the congregation.

3. **Stewardship / Indebtedness** –

By February 1, 2020 Leadership of the congregation will identify a team with the sole purpose of researching and recommending the development of a healthy, God-honoring financial strategy that includes:

- a) Participation in *Consecrated Stewards* process from Lutheran Church Extension Fund or another facilitated process of biblical stewardship education.
- b) Long-term plan for balancing the operations budget of the congregation,
- c) Clear plan for accelerated long-term debt retirement, and
- d) Facilitate a clear, long-term financial business plan for Little Lambs Childcare Center.

The new Financial Strategy will be developed with action plans no later than August 1, 2021

4. **Leadership Development** – By January 1, 2022, Pastor and Lay Leadership team must implement a process to

- a) Establish clear expectations of all staff and leaders in both technical and relational job skills and include those expectations in each position description.
- b) Develop a process of 360 degree feedback for all staff and key leaders that reflect position descriptions and provides feedback in all areas of job performance.
- c) Involve staff members in the development of processes to identify, recruit, and train future leaders of the congregation.
- d) Pastor Pasche shall convene a monthly learning community consisting key leaders of Concordia by May 1, 2022.
- e) By September 1, 2022, a Communication Task Team will be chosen to review and implement improvements for all aspects of communication within the congregation.

5) Discipleship Development

- a) Working with the MNS District the Pastor and leadership will arrange for a Season of Peacemaking – a minimum of six weeks of guided study led by trained facilitators from our Synod’s Ambassadors of Reconciliation. The six weeks will be completed by October, 2020.
- b) By November 1, 2020 a small Discipleship Task Force will be formed to develop an intentional process whereby mature Christian disciples are cultivated using such methods as:
 - i. Expansion of congregational small group ministry.
 - ii. Development of new affinity groups such as *Celebrate Recovery* that are available to both members of the congregation and members of the community.
 - iii. Development of a Youth Ministry model that trains and equips young people in spiritual disciplines (Bible Study, Prayer, Christian Fellowship, Worship) and prepares them for leadership in The Church.
 - iv. Implementation of discipleship development guides such as those offered through the LCMS Re:Vision, Lutheran Hour Ministries, Ambassadors of Reconciliation etc.

The congregation will vote to accept or reject these prescriptions by May 1, 2019. We strongly urge a time of prayer and serious deliberation prior to making this decision. Upon acceptance of this report, the Minnesota South District commits to “walk along side” Peace Lutheran Church by providing a “coach” for a minimum of one year to help the church implement these prescriptions.

Conclusion: We want to thank you for the opportunity to consult with you. We believe that by God’s grace your best days as a congregation are ahead of you and that the implementation of these prescriptions will prove to be an excellent next step in your mission formation process.