

2015 Learning Team Findings and Recommendations for Christ Lutheran Church

The Learning Team was charged with exploring CLC's unique character, articulating our community context, and seeking the answers to what God is planning for us and calling us to do. How will we welcome the next 50 people to Christ Lutheran Church? It's an exciting time. In 2017 we could be celebrating 50 years of service with 50 more members, and 500 years since the Reformation!

We considered this task prayerfully. We studied the current research on growing congregations. The Synod provided support and expertise.

It is the consensus of the Learning Team that we must welcome God's direction to grow, or risk pastoral burn out and a declining congregation. Examples of such stagnation exist. **We are called to grow.** The City of Ferndale is growing, with 7,000 more people expected in the next 20 years. It's fun to image what we will be by our 75th Anniversary in 2042. We hope to continue as a vibrant, growing congregation.

Growth may mean numbers, but it can also mean a renaissance of spiritual growth and companionship with our community. CLC has many strengths and God is calling us to share these as we walk forward with the community of Ferndale and Whatcom County.

Our services are meaningful, from the insightful sermons to the marvelous music. Our youth Program is vibrant. We are intentional about making newcomers welcome. We provide support for the needy in our community through agencies such as the Food Bank, the Other Bank, the Community Meal, Our House, and the Interfaith Coalition. We have these qualities and commitments, but we continue to seek ways to improve even in areas of strength.

God has called us to live in the world and wants us to accompany the citizens of our portion of Whatcom County as we grow together spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

Members of the Learning Team interviewed leaders in the Ferndale Community including the Mayor, City Planner, Police Officer and School Superintendent.

These individuals know of Christ Lutheran Church and appreciate the presence in the community. We are noted for our quality preschool and support of social programs.

These interviews identified needs that we can choose to address, on our own or in partnership with others:

- Help for those faced with poverty, especially if we can find ways not only to provide food and physical needs, but also to help them to improve the quality of their lives. This may include supporting financial counseling, or a community kitchen for healthy meals and cooking classes.
- Help for those with mental health issues and their families. Perhaps finding counseling and medical support as well as transportation to those services.
- Support for individuals and families facing domestic violence.
- Families who are the most at risk have the greatest trouble finding quality child care and rich pre-school, or after school experiences.
- Opportunities for a healthy life style, including outdoor activities. Perhaps we could adopt a park or maintain a trail.

Live in Christ and share His love with all people.

We do face challenges to growth.

- The physical space is limiting activities, such as adult education, youth activities, and community infant/preschool care.
- Our leadership and ministry skills need to be strengthened/developed with both paid staff and volunteers.
- We need to continue to improve our technology resources and the management of personnel.
- To address these challenges we need strategic fiscal and budget planning.
- We need strategic long range planning around CLC's mission.

We have many wonderful ideas. We are confident that God will show us which road to follow and provide the CLC members to spread the love of Jesus in the community and to share the knowledge that by grace are we saved through faith.

In the most immediate future we need to come together with a plan to address the barriers to growth and support our current paid staff and volunteers.

Recommendations:

We recommend that we continue to pray faithfully along each step of the way, to use the resources of the Synod office, and to think outside the box. The world is always changing and God has given us the ability to both stay true to God's Word and to change the way we meet the world. We also recommend the following:

1. Reactivate the building task force with a focus on creating welcoming and functional spaces for those who are already here and those who are coming.
2. Apply for a grant from the Synod for growing congregations, to be used to assist in creating a new position to support lay ministry, volunteer development and congregational spiritual gifts. This is contingent upon matching funds from CLC
3. Equip Pastor Jana in her changing role. This includes sending her to the Pastoral Leadership program at Seattle University.
4. Assure members that Pastor Jana will continue to shepherd our congregation and be available for significant life events. Some of her responsibilities and pastoral care will be shared among lay leaders and staff.
5. Seek ways to reach out to the un-churched.
 - a. What are the needs of the disenfranchised? Can we meet those needs?
 - b. What are the needs of the youth/Millennials of today? Do we understand their desire for Social Justice?

Live in Christ and share His love with all people.

While we recognize that addressing some of these recommendations has already occurred, we suggest that the CLC Council consider the following time frame:

Within the first three months of 2016

- Embrace God's call to grow
- Fund Continuing Education for Pastor Jana
- Continue the work on strategic planning, both fiscal and mission
- Charge the Building Task Force to consider
 - Expansion of the kitchen or a new kitchen to support the larger needs of the community (Community meal, cooking classes, etc.)
 - A youth room for both education and recreation
 - More and larger Sunday School classrooms
 - A place for adult education and community functions
 - A welcoming narthex
 - Coffee/Fellowship space with easy and clear access
 - Space for one-one praying and caring
 - Child Care space for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and grade school children
 - Improved office space with room for all staff members

Within the entire year 2016

- Create a plan for the growing congregations grant and apply for the grant, if matching funds are available
- Expand upon the work of the Preschool committee to formulate a plan to provide child care in the community
- Improve new member recruitment, orientation and assimilation
- Strengthen the 11:15 service (there is room to grow).
- Improve the CLC technology/equipment/hardware/software/training
- Continue the improvements in personnel management (organizational, supervision, evaluation) to meet legal requirements and growth requirements
- A stewardship campaign and fiscal planning for a capital fund
- Continue to seek and train lay leaders
- Support Pastor Jana as we transition together

2017 and Beyond

- Implement Intentional Small Group Ministry
- Provide infant/toddler and before- and after-preschool care to church and community members
- Discern and implement effective ministry to the un-churched

Our yearlong study has identified the strengths of our congregation, the unmet needs of our community, and the limits that our building places on our programs. We project continued growth of our CLC membership and mission in the future. Prayerful and proactive leadership by the council and membership at CLC will continue to serve our community and joyfully meet our Lord's calling. With faith, love, and commitment to meet the challenges before us, we can look forward to a vibrant future.

Live in Christ and share His love with all people.