

BELC Revitalization Plan

- Revitalization Plan Background -

Bethlehem already has everything we need, at hand, for revitalization. If God can save any person, God can revitalize any church. We have a Biblically based Mission Statement, Purpose Statement, and Guiding Principles. From this we can identify the Biblically based Principles that will guide our (God's) mission and ministry. We have an ever-present God that has been and will continue to be at work through the mission outpost that is Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Bethlehem chose to remain in our neighborhood, and God put us at 549 E. Mt. Hope for a reason. Bethlehem has at least three reasons we need to revitalize:

1. We no longer reflect our neighborhood. Most of our members no longer live near the church.
2. We are an aging congregation.
3. We have not been very effective at reaching our community with the Gospel of Christ. This will involve inviting them to know Jesus and helping everyone to *practice* the Marks of Discipleship.

The process of revitalization is the process by which a church becomes healthier over time. It is true that if God can save any person, God can lead a church to better health. Revitalization is about revitalizing our individual lives as disciples as much as it is about revitalizing the congregation to which we belong. Because the church IS the people, not some building or separate entity.

The #1 reason for the need for church revitalization in churches is that people are attending less frequently. One of our Marks of Discipleship is about encouraging regular Worship attendance. One thing that is true 'after' the pandemic is that the people we have at Bethlehem are here because they really want to be here.

As I write this Revitalization Plan for Bethlehem, I am ever mindful of Proverbs 16:9, "The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps." We may know where we *think* we want to go, but it is God who leads the way, as God always has throughout the almost 100-year history of Bethlehem.

What follows now are the building Blocks, everything that we need, which we already have, to begin revitalization. We have been guided by our identity as baptized children of God and:
The Great Commission

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Great Commandment

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:38-39).

These scriptures and the history of our calling led Bethlehem to produce our faith-filled Mission Statement (Adopted May 7, 2000):

Mission Statement for Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

As children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are called to share God's Word, His love and saving grace by:

- worshipping together
- inviting and welcoming everyone
- studying the Scriptures
- praying
- serving the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of each other, our community, and the world.

From this Biblically based Mission Statement it is clear that we value Christ, Baptism, Worship, Fellowship, Studying Scripture, Prayer, Each Other, Our Community, and Our World.

This mission statement was amplified by an enhanced statement of purpose and guiding principles that was adopted by the congregation on January 29, 2017:

Statement of Purpose and Guiding Principles for Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church

God's purpose for our church, as disciples of Jesus Christ, is to share with all people God's word, love and saving grace. We will pursue this purpose by:

1. Being a Christ-centered, joyful community of baptized believers who gather regularly for worship, the Lord's Supper, study, and prayer.
2. Inviting, accepting, and supporting all people as we build attentive, respectful relationships.
3. Taking action and risks with bold faith, acknowledging our imperfection, while trusting in Christ.
4. Actively engaging in community outreach near and far.
5. Being faithful stewards of our time, talents, possessions, and all of God's creation

From this we can also see that we also value Centeredness, Joyfulness, Eucharist, Welcome, Acceptance, Attentiveness, Respect, Action, Risk Taking (for the sake of Mission), Boldness, Humility, Forgiveness, Wholistic Stewardship, and Creation.

And finally, we live out our Mission, Purpose, & Values in our practicing of the *Marks of Discipleship (PoWER Gifts)*:

As we live out of faith as baptized children of God, we know that Jesus expects us to...

PRAY fervently (Luke 11:9-10 & Matthew 26:41)

WORSHIP faithfully (Matthew 4:10 & John 4:24)

ENCOURAGE one another (Luke 22:32 & John 13:34)

READ the Scriptures daily (Luke 11:28 & Matthew 4:4)

GIVE freely of the gifts we have received from God (Mark 12:17 & Luke 6:38)

INVITE others to know God (Matthew 22:9 & Matthew 28:19-20), and

SERVE all people (Matthew 20:27 & Matthew 25:40)

...and where we fall short of God's expectations, Jesus always offers us his love and forgiveness!

- Revitalization Plan -

As we think about revitalization the operative question is, “What would bring God the most glory?” We need our members to be excited, focused, and sacrificially committed to the goal of revitalization and reaching our community with the gospel for the long haul. Another way for us to think about revitalization is, “What are we doing to make much of Jesus?” This whole process is about identifying where God is already active in our community and asking how we can be a part of it. The right question for revitalization is not, “How can we save this church?” but rather, “How can God get the most glory from our congregation right now?”

1. Pray - We have formed a prayer team of dedicated prayer warriors who will ensure that our revitalization and staff is prayed for every day. We have also created a process for members to sign up for prayer times throughout the day. As of this publishing date (9/18/22) every half hour from 6:30 am until 10:00 pm has been filled by at least one person! This is just the first of many signs of revitalization yet to come.
2. Invite inactive members to return to Bethlehem and practice the Marks of Discipleship, fully participating in the mission and ministry of Bethlehem, because their faith matters. A gracious letter of invitation will be sent out in sets of 20 or so, starting with people who have become inactive the most recently, and I will then call them the week after. The list of the order of mailing has been compiled by David Westover with input from Jim Whitman, Pastor John, Pastor Matt, Susan Mahoney, and Sue Nelson. When I talk with folks, I will listen for who might be the next best person to contact them. If I leave two messages with no return call that person will be passed on to one of our lay leaders to make a call.
3. Bible Study and Fellowship for all generations (Re-engaging the seven Marks of Discipleship or *Spiritual Practices*).
 - a. Forming a young adult Fellowship/Bible Study (20s and 30s). This is part of knowing our congregation. Michelle and I are developing this (perhaps Theology on Tap, or something like that).
 - b. Creating fellowship opportunities for the entire congregation.
 - c. Mentoring younger couples.
 - d. Leading a study of the seven Marks of Discipleship that will include the entire congregation.
 - e. And other items with the input of Congregation Council.
4. We have invited other Lutherans by sending a letter inviting former members of Calvary and St. Stephen to join us in *practicing* The Marks of Discipleship or finding a home with one of the two other remaining ELCA churches in Lansing. This is about strengthening our congregation and attending to the life of faith of Lutherans in the Lansing area.
5. Begin regular, systematic outreach to our community (x mile radius, yet to be determined), inviting people and asking how we can pray for them. Outreach is key. This could be done by using the Pray & Go model from Church Answers. The cost for this program is \$99. “With Pray & Go, you can create a prayer-centered culture in your church that leads to outward focus and community impact. The complete toolkit walks you through all the steps you need to make prayer a core component of your church’s outreach strategy.” This is about knowing our community, knowing the people whom we are called to serve.

6. Complete the Know Yourself, Know Your Community, & Know Your Church Reports. These reports are often bundled at a cheaper rate.

a. *Know Yourself Report (\$19)*

Through the Know Yourself assessment tool, Church Answers provides a description of the pastor's wiring as it relates to pastoral leadership. This personal assessment will help me understand my own strengths and weaknesses and how I can grow as a leader. Coaching is also recommended.

b. *Know Your Church Report (\$300)*

This 160-question tool is a perception survey for a sampling of members to complete that looks at Fellowship, Discipleship, Evangelism, Worship, Ministry, and Prayer. It is designed to help us identify our strengths we can leverage to address the areas that are growing edges and meet the needs of our community. It takes 15-20 minutes to complete and is anonymous, so the pastor never knows who said what. This will be a way for our members to influence the future direction of Bethlehem. (Some have questioned the cost and length of this survey, so I am investigating a much shorter, free resource from the ELCA.)

c. *Know Your Community Report (\$175)*

This demographic and psychographic report of your community is *key* for our outreach ministry to the community. It will tell us not only who lives in our community (demographics), but also what they prefer (psychographics). It is a definitive, custom 35-page report (x mile radius) that will help us reach and attract our local community.

Plan Notes

1. One distinct possibility given our neighborhood and the physical resources of Bethlehem could be the formation of a basketball program using Upward Sports or a similar model. Coaches for teams would be recruited from the parents/families of children who register for the program. Upward Sports involves Bible Study and faith formation for entire families.
2. *Other needs we may identify in the community could be Divorce Care or Grief Care...*
3. Also, as we revisit and recommit to practicing the Marks of Discipleship, I am envisioning seven paintings, one for each Mark, that people could sign as they commit to living each Mark:



(I am not married to this idea or the color scheme. It just came to me in a moment of inspiration. I am picturing a background of stained-glass windows and the figures acting out each Mark. Our current members will be encouraged to sign each Mark as they commit to practicing that Mark, and then new members can sign as well as we will focus on each Mark in our Discovering Discipleship (new member) Class. I was originally picturing them on the walls of the sanctuary under the corresponding banner, but there may be a better place.)