

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church **Mission Planning**

Final Report

Background

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church has undertaken a planning process to guide the activities of the church into the next decade. In the first phase (August 2016 through January 2017), more than two-dozen leaders of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC) prayerfully developed a Purpose Statement and Guiding Principles for the congregation. After receiving feedback from members, the Purpose Statement and Guiding Principles were overwhelmingly approved at a general meeting of the BELC membership in January 2017.

The next step in this process involved conducting small group listening sessions among members of the congregation to identify strengths of BELC, aspects of congregational life that could be enhanced, and opportunities for growth and change. Between April 23 and June 12, 2017, eleven (11) small group listening sessions, lasting less than an hour each, were conducted by teams of two facilitators at the church. The listening sessions yielded a broad range of opinions about the value of church membership for members, areas of church life that can be enhanced, directions God is pushing us, and areas in which God is at work in the community.

Following the small group sessions, leaders of Bethlehem conducted planned conversations with individual officials and community leaders and residents to identify the resources and needs of our community. In addition, they represented Bethlehem at three community meetings. This process, yielded insights into the impact BELC is having in the local community and potential areas for more direct involvement by the congregation.

The next step was to take all of this information and filter it through the Purpose Statement and Guiding Principles to create five-year mission priorities for the congregation and one and three-year action plans. This is a progress report of that activity.

Process

A group of thirteen (13) members of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church (see Appendix A), selected to be broadly representative of the congregation, met between February 22 and July 17, 2018. After engaging in a broad-ranging brainstorming session (see Appendix B), the group identified five (5) areas of focus for the five-year plan: being Christ-centered/cross centered, caring for our faith community, youth ministry, community ministry, and evangelism. The group developed goal statements for each of these five (5) areas and action plans for each.

This report represents the final recommendations of the planning group. As a group, we support these recommendations for the direction of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran over the next three to five years. We would be glad to answer any questions about these recommendations.

Priority areas of ministry in which BELC should place greatest emphasis over the next 5 years:

Being Christ-Centered

Goal: Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church will be a Christ-centered, joyful community of believers who embrace the seven Marks of Discipleship. We will do this by:

- Following biblical teachings
- Connecting Christ's story to our stories
- Continued learning and growth of spiritual life
- Striving to live as God would have us live
- Giving life to the Marks of Discipleship
- Serving selflessly, with humility and gratitude

Recommended Actions:

- 1) Because Christ welcomes all, the faith community will encourage discussions and education surrounding issues of inclusivity, including forums addressing race, socio-economic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity, and others.
- 2) The faith community will identify ways that we can be more Christ/Cross-Centered, both individually and as a community of believers.
- 3) The faith community will make the life of Christ meaningful in contemporary life through bible studies, educational forums, midweek sessions, etc., and will seek other settings to have Bible study in the community and ways to have more inclusive Bible study groups.
- 4) Bethlehem will actively promote all activities of the faith community within the congregation and in the community at large.

Caring for our faith community

Goal: At Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church, we will invite, accept, and support all people, as we build attentive, respectful relationships. We will do this by:

- Welcoming, accepting, and encouraging all people to participate in our faith community
- Attending to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of all
- Strengthening relationships among all in our faith community
- Equipping all in our faith community to live out the Marks of Discipleship

Recommended Actions:

- 1) Because Christ welcomes all, the faith community will encourage discussions and education surrounding issues of inclusivity, including forums addressing race, socio-economic differences, sexual orientation and gender identity, and others.
- 2) The faith community will encourage all to engage in worship service roles. A survey process will identify those who are interested. Training and assistance will be provided.
- 3) The BELC website will include a prayer page where needs, concerns, or praises can be posted for others to lift in prayer. The website and newsletter will also include a “needs” page that allows people to submit requests for help with household tasks, transportation, etc.
- 4) BELC will investigate the feasibility of introducing a Parish Counselor and a Parish Nurse.
- 5) BELC will develop a new attendee mentor program. Mentors will help new attendees with information on worship and special events, address questions or concerns and identify ministries of interest.
- 6) BELC will develop small Bible groups to encourage regular fellowship and prayer to empower our faith community to live out the Marks of Discipleship.
- 7) BELC will maintain a secure online directory of attendees, to include available photos. Periodic printed directories will be made available.

Youth Ministry

Goal: Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church will nurture, develop, and support all young people, while engaging them in the faith community. We will help young people grow in their discipleship by:

- Providing engaging educational programs
- Participation in camping ministries and synod and national youth gatherings
- Creating family and multigenerational opportunities for young people to engage with others in the faith community

Recommended Actions:

- 1) The faith community will research alternative approaches to educational programming by using ELCA and other resources, surveying other churches, and identifying educational trends to enhance programming.
- 2) The faith community will develop a non-Sunday event for family engagement that includes multigenerational opportunities for fellowship and Bible study.
- 3) The faith community will support the camping ministries and the local and national youth gatherings by encouraging enrollment in these opportunities. In addition, the faith community will identify barriers, financial or otherwise, that discourage participation in order to work toward minimizing those barriers. Furthermore, attendees will be presented with ways to share their experiences during and after these events through social media and other forums.
- 4) The faith community will work to incorporate youth into its total life, including mission and service projects, assisting in worship, Bible study, and fellowship activities.

Community Ministry

Goal: Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church will actively seek and develop community connections with residents, faith communities, schools, and other organizations and will be a resource for community activity. We will do this by:

- Expanding the use of the church building for community activities
- Emphasizing ministries addressing basic needs
- Working collaboratively with neighborhood organizations
- Encouraging members to increase engagement with neighborhood residents and our community

Recommended Actions:

- 1) The faith community will actively seek projects to lend support to the organizations within the surrounding area. To identify and support these projects, the faith community will establish and nurture collaborative relationships with organizations, such as neighborhood associations, other faith communities, and schools. Projects could include backpack programs, tutoring support, neighborhood clean ups, sponsoring a class field trip, and others.
- 2) The faith community will support programs that provide for the basic needs of the people in our neighboring communities. We will do this through support of programs that provide food and meals, shelter, money management education, and forums highlighting available services.
- 3) The faith community will advertise and encourage the use of BELC facilities to support community programs and organizations. The building use policy and scheduling process will be revised to manage and optimize use of church facilities and resources.

Evangelism

Goal: Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church will actively seek opportunities to spread God's Word and welcome all people to the community of faith. We will do this by:

- Spreading God's Word in a way that helps people in practical ways
- Telling the story of what God is doing through the mission and ministry of Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church and its people
- Inviting and welcoming all people to participate in our faith community
- Adapting the experience at Bethlehem in an effort to help meet diverse needs
- Challenging our comfort zones and helping our faith community to be more "evangelical"

Recommended Actions:

- 1) The faith community will seek opportunities to represent and highlight the Word at area events, including those at BELC and elsewhere. Examples include, a prayer booth, sharing of faith stories, brochures/posters promoting worship times, BELC branded items, Bible verse handouts, Christian music, etc.
- 2) BELC will maintain of a social media presence and a user-friendly website that contain up-to-date church information. Examples include sermon recordings, photographs of current happenings, social media links, faith stories, and information regarding activities and events.
- 3) BELC will gather faith stories to be shared as testimonies to the importance of Christ in our everyday lives and being part of the BELC community of faith.
- 4) The faith community will regularly assess how people are engaging with worship, education, service, and outreach. Information will be gathered to guide decisions regarding future directions in ministry.

Appendix A

Members of the Goal Planning Committee

Tom Armstrong
Sherry Bass-Pohl
Kris Burow
Neal Hammer
Susan Mahoney
Judy Pardee
Debbie Quinn
Don Romain
Amanda Schneider
Dan Smith
Pastor Matt Smith
Steve Viele
Jim Whitman

Bob Meeker, Facilitator

Appendix B

In what areas of ministry do you think BELC should be placing greatest emphasis over the next 5 years?

Complete Brainstorming List

1. Outreach to show God's love: Faith Family Fun Day, food bank, etc.
2. Be more visible in the community & better known; people recognize they can come here.
3. Taking care of those who have taken care of us, i.e., elderly members.
4. Youth
5. Family ministry
6. Increasing attendance and members, esp. youth.
7. Ministry of counter culture
8. Develop member involvement
9. Bible study
10. Innovative and inclusive worship
11. "In-reach": members feel welcome, loved and safe
12. Evangelism: bringing in new members
13. Supporting lay leaders, esp. Board members
14. Interaction between youth and older members; work as one
15. Young adults
16. Member engagement
17. Diversity in attendees
18. Christ-centered/cross centered
19. Identify and develop future leaders
20. Mission work
21. Community ministry; joining with other organizations in this area
22. Create ongoing, living stewardship message
23. Tolerance and understanding
24. Energize members to attend church and volunteer
25. Promote active music ministry
26. Strengthen church unit and tap into skills and experiences of members
27. Telling the story: a) who God is and 2) who we are
28. Spreading God's word in a way that helps people in practical ways
29. Keeping youth connected to their church home after graduation
30. Joining in social activism; being a voice for the powerless
31. Continued & expanded use of our building for neighborhood groups
32. Stewardship of everything God has given us; more than just money
33. Increasing involvement in projects
34. Helping young adults understand the importance of finding a faith home when they leave home
35. Helping long-term Lutherans be more welcoming; challenging our comfort zones
36. Focus on youth to keep them engaged
37. Finding God in non-traditional places
38. Working with other ELCA churches