

## CHRIST'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH UMBRELLA STRATEGY

### **Purpose:**

Growing as Christ's forgiven & faithful people - serving the church and community with love.

### **Guiding Principles:**

When we are at our best you will see us:

*Following faithfully* where Christ leads us.

*Growing spiritually* to be more like Jesus.

*Loving one another* with the love of Christ.

*Working in the community* to improve the quality of life.

*Reaching out* to share Christ's love with our neighbors.

*Welcoming all* people into fellowship

### **Strategic Priorities:**

We are called to focus resources and energy in order to:

Help people develop vibrant and faithful lives at all stages of life.

Help people experience the presence of the risen Christ within the faith community as it gathers in worship.

Strengthen opportunities for fellowship and meaningful relationship building within the life of the congregation.

Improve communication to increase the involvement within the congregation and also from the surrounding community.

Partner with others in the area in order to give attention to a changing population and people in need.

Create supports for youth and families in the church and community.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGY

Use of an Umbrella Strategy allows for several benefits. Among these are clear and simple elements that allow for the congregation to develop clear and helpful language about the things that matter most. Second, the strategy is clear and concise enough to be easily accessed by anyone. By fitting on one page, the strategy can be enlarged to poster size and hung on the walls in the building, posted as a single page on the web site, passed out for use at meetings, and in a variety of other ways. Third, while the strategy defines the framework for focusing the work, it does so without limiting how the work happens. Any good idea that fulfills the purpose, embodies the principles and furthers one or more of the priorities is already helpful by definition. Therefore, while the strategy provides focus for the resources and energy of the congregation's work, it also provides freedom for creativity and the use of people's gifts and talents.

The **Purpose** should help the congregation make decisions about what to do and why to do it. This is the "why are we here?" focus of the work. In this work, the process supported maintaining the current tag line as it was deemed to be well known and helpful in its current form.

The **Guiding Principles** are values that are central to the congregation and should find ways to permeate all the work of the congregation. These help us remember, "How are we to work?" as the congregation does whatever it is that they are doing. Any work can be improved upon by matching how the work is being done to the principles discerned by the congregation as it thought about its identity.

Finally, **Priorities** give focus to the work that will get the most attention in the congregation's next chapter. They help leaders to focus on those areas where we have discerned that God is calling for the congregation to make significant impact in the coming years. The best way to focus people for future ideas is to use the priorities as a doorway to creativity, thereby allowing energy to be expended in the places that need it most. While not exclusive, they do call for the congregation to focus time, energy and resources in these areas as they carry out God's work.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Affirmations First!*

First, before we get to what needs to be given attention, it is important to affirm many things. Worship attendance is good, pastoral and lay leadership are strong and committed, resources are available for the congregation to do its work, there is a good youth group, and many people are doing good things in the life of the church. In addition, the facility is in excellent condition and generally a good resource for the congregation's programming and a potentially good resource if use is expanded into more use by and with the surrounding community.

An additional resource doing good work on its own but with the potential for increased partnership is the preschool. With a steady connection to families with young children, the preschool provides a safe and valued place for early education within the surrounding community. It is one of the things that people who are not part of the congregation do know about. This report will address ways to strengthen ties between the preschool and the congregation, but by itself it is a good thing and worthy of noting.

Also, the congregation and its leadership understand themselves to be more than an isolated congregation – they are a part of the ELCA and committed to staying connected in the life of the church beyond their own local expression. In addition, Pastor Henderson embodies this commitment in his role as the dean of the conference, a position in which he helps congregations within the conference go through pastoral transitions as well as provides leadership for the conference.

While this report will do much to offer ways to work on things, improve things and consider changes, it is important to hear all of this first. The congregation is strong and has what it needs to do the things called for below. ***Be sure to give thanks to God for this before moving on!***

Having said this, the world is changing rapidly and the role of the church in society is very different than it was in the not too distant past. Also, the future seems to be coming at an increasingly fast pace. Congregations that are not nimble risk being surprised by things they then have to deal with while being off balance. In order to be ready, all congregations in today's world need to be alert and proactive about their ministry and willing to make changes as needed to do what God is calling them to do.

## MINISTRY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When it was larger (250+ each week in worship), the congregation was staffed to shrink and not surprisingly when combined with the changing role of religion in culture already, that is what happened. A growing congregation usually has one pastor for up to 150 attendees per week and an additional full time person doing direct program work with people for every additional 100 people per week. So a pastor and a full time Faith Formation Coordinator could be enough; but the work would have to be well structured with a heavy portion of the faith formation work oriented toward adults, since that is the majority of those who participate in the life of the church. While youth work is important, it often gets more time devoted to it than the percentage of participants who actually are youth. Music, support staff and janitorial staff are separate from the program staff numbers and their role is different. A key change in the church world is that having significant staffing focused on youth skews the staff attention to younger people at a time when the congregation is aging. So adult faith formation, fellowship and service engagement for older members is a key focus that often gets overlooked. That seems to be true here as well.

In addition, there is a core that is devoted and faithful in its work within the life of the church. But, like many congregations, that core is smaller than is desirable. Many people with interest in the church and skills and gifts that would be well suited for being active in the church are on the sidelines more than necessary. Moving people from pews to active involvement and leadership is a key goal for the next chapter of ministry together.

Additionally, there is a connection to the surrounding community that is not as strong as it could be. This connection could be stronger, both with the campus life at Bucknell University and also with the civic life in the surrounding communities. These connections are necessary for the relevance of the congregation in the Lewisburg area. It is also the lifeblood for vibrancy if new people are to get involved. People do not seek out religious involvement as they once did. Congregations that do good work internally but wait for visitors to come, almost always decline. Only engagement in the world around them permits an encouraging and steady source of relationships that lead to possible involvement in the life and work of the church

### The Preschool

The preschool is an excellent resource for the community and holds much promise for an increased ministry presence for the congregation. A key question is, "How can the church take advantage of the preschool as a resource/partner for families with young children?" Some ideas to consider include:

The pastor and other leaders should greet parents at least once a week as they bring/pick up children.

Adding story time with the pastor or some other relational connection as a weekly feature at the school. Consider creating a Sunday(s) where there are specific connections, especially related to holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter.

Scholarships for low-income families can be a bridge to this becoming more diverse and helping some people be more connected, aware and grateful for the congregation's

presence.

The congregation has good musical gifts - can music be a bridge to get in as well?

Conversations with the board of the preschool about forging an increased working connection between the congregation and the ministry of the preschool have already been started. The preschool leadership seems open to the idea and the director, Carole Bollinger, is on the Facilitation Team for this report.

### Youth and Family Ministry

There is a basic framework for youth and family ministry present within the current structure, with youth work as well as faith formation work already being done to some degree. At the same time, there is a clear need and a strong desire on the part of the congregation to increase its work with people of parenting age and the children and youth they are raising.

There are some options that may enhance ways of working in this area:

Can youth and family work be improved with some outside program like Young Life?

The Presbyterian Church in Lewisburg has a Young Life connection and discussing a partnership with them may be fruitful.

Conference activity seems like a good vehicle to consider – the Detroit Youth Gathering pointed to this as a possibility and with Pastor Henderson serving as dean, the conference connections are already strong.

Are multidenominational options available and, if so, what other partners are available?

Change the way youth and family work is being done. Effective youth and family staff spend less time working directly with kids and more time working in partnership with other adults to work with kids. This way of working with adults and youth is an essential paradigm change in today's world. It may also be one that requires additional training for staff and lay leaders to move beyond old patterns in order to involve more people in new ways.

### Communications

The initial impression that many new people have of the congregation is through communication, either by phone or in person, with the Church office. It is extremely important that the tone of this interaction with members or visitors be positive. It sets the tone for communicating the life and work of the church and requires constant review.

In addition, when looking at the web site – there is currently no reason for visitors to return. The site basically functions to publish information for members and otherwise serves as an online Yellow Pages ad. While many congregations have web sites today, only those whose sites are active create traffic and interest. Those that function like a Yellow Pages ad get read once and are not returned to – providing no long term benefit. (When was the last time you went back to read a Yellow Pages ad a second time?) The information is relatively static for outsiders and related to newsletter types of information for insiders.

Because of Bucknell University, many people in Lewisburg are well educated. There is a huge need to stay on top of current methods of communicating. New professors and staff, incoming students, etc. will all have increasing abilities and expectations with regard to how communications are done and how savvy the congregation seems to be in this area. If the congregation wants to put the best face on reaching students who want to worship in a local congregation or attracting university staff to consider attending, then this area is a mandatory area for competence.

The congregation needs a weekly blog and regular email notices of blog postings as well as Twitter and Facebook posts to drive traffic to the site. The goal is to get helpful thoughts to people within the congregation's membership but to also do it in a way that gets the word out to people outside the membership. Connecting web site activity with social media is an essential and helpful way to do this. Podcasts of sermons may also provide a similar vehicle to get content out to a wider audience while also helping members access the material.

Also, the site desperately needs pictures, as it is very text heavy. All program and support staff should have pictures on the web site and brief bio/job description. For example, at the time of this report, there is no job or biographical information by the pastor's name and photos are not present for any of the staff. A visitor would find little on the staff page to warrant further exploration or any information that would make them want to actually meet any of the staff. Changing this and other similar things about the web site can only help.

### *Involving People*

Involving people takes more than web sites, sign-up sheets, or printed and oral announcements. There needs to be a person/people who are charged with working interpersonally to recruit and support getting people involved. Most effective work that will result in involvement requires personal attention and not just blanket methods. Multiple formats for info sharing also helps (paper, web, Facebook, email, Twitter, phone, etc.).

I will refer to this later in a section on staff recommendations near the end of this report, but this may be a wise place to consider adding part time staffing, especially since the goal of communication in this strategy is to increase involvement. That will mean devoting time to conversations, one-to-one relationships, and learning how people's gifts and passions can be connected to meaningful involvement in the life of the congregation – both for member and non-members alike.

Currently, many people are involved when they are tied to it due to duty (kids, etc.). When they have done their part, they often don't stay involved beyond that dutiful involvement. The congregation needs to help people connect and care about the long term, not just getting their part done and leaving it for someone else. This will mean helping people derive more meaning from the work they do and developing a passion for ministry not just a desire to do their part.

In addition, as times have changed, there is a need to provide more short term chances to do things. People who volunteer for a year or more have done many things in the church and been a

primary source of labor. Rethinking how things happen and how roles are defined can provide more ways to be involved but for shorter periods of time. For example, teaching a unit instead of a year can expand the teacher base. Likewise, providing an event approach to some involvement can mobilize a lot of people for some focused effort in a one-time way. Staff and lay leaders need to keep this in mind as we work moving forward.

In addition, getting new members involved is an important way to help them find ministry, connect with other people, and leads to higher activity and retention rates. Mentors for new members have been discussed as a way to help build connections and ease the transition from non-member to member. It will not be enough to assign people to mentor as new members join. Mentors will need to be trained in order to know what to do and do it well.

### Community Involvement

Target some key people/organizations in the community and begin to work on poverty, diversity and related social issues. Be a leader and be assertive in this. The interview process showed a deep need for congregations that will invest time and energy in the community and revealed a significant subculture of needy people in the community. Since Lewisburg has an image as a relatively affluent college town, this is not a prominent theme in the community's self-identity. But it appears to be a very important reality nonetheless.

Following up on some key insights and partnerships from the interviews is key here. Finding a chance to go to the people who shared this information with the congregation is a chance to deepen those relationships, show gratitude for their sharing, and demonstrate that the congregation was serious about what it heard in the interviews. It is also a chance to be strategic about the next steps. Going back to community leaders who shared ideas with a willingness to partner with them and support their work is a chance for good will and good results.

A key result of the work done to prepare for this report is the need to enhance relationships with the surrounding community, be more visible and develop more fruitful partnerships with others. The focus of this was a strong call to help people in need. Current programs for needy people can be ramped up – and should be. But a real impact will best be felt if the congregation takes on helping people in need and does so in both charitable and empowering ways. Interviews revealed that there is much work to be done in this area and not many churches involved in doing it. The congregation could make a mark for itself in this area.

The congregation would benefit from someone or a team of people specifically working with the connections between the congregation and the community.

### Congregational Life and Faith Formation

There is a need for deeper fellowship, more attention to relationships among people (especially older ones), in ways that encourage more than just chitchat. People report that they long for deeper relationships and that they hope these move to a level that instills more care and compassion for others. In the ministry paradigms being used in today's church, relationships and faith formation are intimately linked.

In order to do this, a few things will need to be done.

Begin to rethink how fellowship happens. What are people talking about currently and how can that be an entry point to deeper relationships?

Connecting conversation to faith stories is an essential part of helping people to know each other at a new level. How can sermons, existing small groups, potluck luncheons, etc. be used to “change the subject” toward this kind of faith conversation?

There is a need for new ways of getting people together and a particular need to engage younger adults and parents in meaningful relationships that are grounded in faithful living. How can new ways of relating to young adults, new parents, etc. be an avenue for this kind of new work?

Faith formation and equipping adults for lives of faith needs to be given to someone as a particular charge. In today’s world, this is the venue by which many relationships in the church are deepened. This touches on vocation, service and questions of purpose and meaning in peoples’ lives. Without this aspect of relationship building, the church will struggle to bring in new people – especially younger ones who find this aspect of church life mandatory in many cases. It likely will include a multi-faceted approach that includes small groups, classes, on line formats, etc. to weave this work into the ongoing life of the congregation.

Develop a system that helps people notice when people aren’t there. Use it to provide follow up when people miss more than one week in a row without some explanation.

They may be sick, angry or have something going on where a contact may be helpful. Be intentional about this and attendance is likely to increase. Where people stop coming and are not missed, they are unlikely to return after very much time has passed.

Hospitality is a big part of the way new people enter into the fellowship of the church.

The congregation has a reserved style and people are often nervous about approaching a new person. Congregations that do this well train people to approach those they don’t know, introduce themselves and start conversations. Simple training and an articulated importance to this work can dramatically improve a congregation’s ability to be hospitable and more proactive.



### Worship

Worship is a centerpiece at Christ's Church and this was evidenced in the work we did in this visioning process. The people of the congregation clearly value worship and the pastor also sees it as a priority in his ministry as well.

Currently the congregation offers multiple worship times. This is generally a good idea as it allows people to have a sense of choice. Congregations that have multiple services tend to have higher attendance and offerings than congregations that have only one worship time. Likewise, congregations that reduce the number of services tend to see a reduction in attendance and income. This means the congregation's current worship schedule is probably an asset.

In general, rotating styles during the same time is not as helpful as having a more consistent style pattern. This means that the current worship rotation with the contemporary style once a month is something to explore critically. While it may work in this setting, in many locations either people like the more contemporary setting and wish it was every week or they don't like it and are unhappy that it happens at all. It is generally better to create consistent formats and provide for diversity within different services within that. This is not a recommendation as much as a rule of thumb for leadership to discuss and explore as a way to impact worship in ways to help boost attendance. Include this as a point for ongoing conversation and reflection and continuing review.

Already, in a desire to have a good handle on worship styles, leaders are visiting other congregations to see what worship looks like in other traditions, especially in those congregations and traditions that seem to be reaching people effectively. This is a good chance to let imaginations be stretched and to see and experience new ideas.

A key to worship in today's world is the need for things to be experienced and expressed in the present tense. Preaching and other language needs to help people see and learn about what God is doing, not just hear about what God did in a previous time. This helps people understand God as present as active and increases both relevance of the material and the desire in the hearer to encounter this present and active God. Clearly connecting this presence to the sacraments, especially the weekly celebration of Christ's presence in communion, can be life giving and important in today's environment.

At the same time, leaders should be conscious about the core of our Lutheran identity and reflect on what other worship traditions can offer in ways that we can easily incorporate into our worship patterns and which things may not be compatible with core beliefs or practices in our word and sacrament tradition.

### Staffing Considerations

It is important to remember that in a congregation the size of Christ's Evangelical Lutheran Church, nothing happens without staff attention. At the same time, nothing significant will succeed if it is only assigned to staff. Therefore, all staffing needs to have both paid and volunteer components.

It is also important to remember that there are priorities in this strategy that were deemed important. However, saying they are important and doing something about that are not the same thing. No priority will succeed without staff being given both the charge and the time within their work to do it. Likewise, no priority will succeed if there is not a key layperson or team working on it as well.

Having said this, the following staff concerns should be considered. It may not be possible to do all of these, but they serve as a pathway for considering how to strengthen the staff and to advance the work of the church.

The pastor's role should be considered first. One thing that should be added to Pastor Henderson's role is a weekly blog of 3-4 paragraphs that can be posted on the web site and also posted on Twitter, Facebook, etc. This will allow his voice to be more public and allow the Internet presence for the congregation to be more dynamic. Additional questions are:

What part will the pastor play in each of the aspects of the strategy?

What things will the pastor cease to do or do less of from current work to make that new work possible?

Who will take on those things that the pastor stops doing or will they simply be stopped?

Pastor Henderson took the lead to initiate this process out of a desire to advance the work of the congregation and has expressed enthusiasm at the possibilities that have surfaced in the visioning work. Taking advantage of this would be good for everyone.

Second, the role of the Faith Formation Coordinator should be explored next. Her current role is more heavily weighted toward youth and children. If the congregation is to advance in this area, more attention to parent-aged and older adults is mandatory. How can she be helped to redesign her work to expand her role with adults? This may include young adults including a connection to students and graduate students at Bucknell as well as young adults in the life of the congregation. It must relate to older adults in new ways as this group makes up the largest percentage of the congregation. To do this, how can lay people be brought into more volunteer partnership to relieve the time devoted to youth and children in order to strengthen that work while also freeing up time for working with new adult populations in new ways?

As noted earlier, the office staff manifests the tone for the mission of the Church to members and visitors and must provide the positive and dynamic presence to move forward. New hardware should help a bit in the efficiency of the work, but most of the issues moving forward will be skill set and gifts related. How can communications be given a fresh and current look? How can the web site be updated and become more dynamic to the outsider? How can Facebook and Twitter be used to communicate and provide dynamic messaging? Should Instagram and other tools/sites be used as well? This will require staff support and skills that may mean significant continuing education and new training for current staff.

In addition, depending on the pieces of the work that are dealt with in the current program and office staff, the congregation should consider adding some part time staff to expand its capacity.

It seems unlikely that the current staff is large enough or diverse enough to do all that is called for in this setting. Consider the following part time lay staffing options:

A ministry coordinator to relate to people with a goal of helping them understand their gifts and skills and finding ways to use them in the work of the church or surrounding community.

A community relationship coordinator to devote time meeting with community leaders, participating in community boards, events, etc. with a primary outcome of involving the congregation and its people in the public life in Lewisburg and the surrounding communities.

A small group/faith formation coordinator to expand the faith formation and relational work that is needed for college age and young adults, parents, and older adults.

As additional and more effective means of communication; i.e., web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. are implemented, the resultant task load may become too burdensome utilizing the existing office staffing patterns.

### *The Role of Council*

There are at least two distinct ways for the congregation Council to provide leadership and support for this work. It will be important for the Council to reflect on these and be clear about the approach to leadership that it thinks is best for the congregation.

The first option is to provide oversight directly. In this approach the Council will be directly involved in the work. The Council will take the lead on recruiting leaders, supporting teams and committees as they work on the strategy and recommendation in this report, and devote a significant amount of their time and energy to moving forward. Councils that take this approach will need to devote a large part of their agenda to this strategy in a clear and direct way.

A second option to consider is setting up an Implementation Team to take on the work of overseeing the strategy. In this approach, a team will be set apart specifically for the work of implementing the strategy and recommendations in this report. If this approach is taken, the Council can devote more time to the ongoing work that it has been doing and the Implementation Team can take on the more direct work. Here, it will be important to have regular reporting between the Implementation Team and the Council and to also be clear on what authority is and isn't granted to the team as it does its work.

In either option, the key to moving forward will be to set up clear leadership for the work. I like to say, "Every what needs a who." In other words, anything that is important needs to have someone accept responsibility for getting it done. A goal or priority without a responsible party is not going to happen. Only people who accept responsibility and who have gifts and passions for the work are likely to get the work done. Therefore, any area in the recommendations getting attention should have a person or team assigned to do the work. This may be an existing committee or team or a special task force set up for the purpose of implementation. Each priority in the Umbrellas Strategy also needs to be assigned to a person or group to oversee the work. In many cases, this will be an existing committee or team. In some cases, a special task force or

new committee may be needed.

Whether the Congregation Council or an Implementation Team is used, a key to moving ahead is to help the people understand clear goals and outcomes. At the same time, leadership will do well to set people free to work using gifts, relationships, etc. This will allow mobilizing lay people and leaders more! Once a person or group of people accept the calling to take on a part of this work, supporting them as they use their gifts, talents and relationships to determine how to do it will be essential to working in ways that keep people engaged and in this for the long haul. No one wants to spend a lot of time working on someone else's dream. Be sure the freedom to do this work in more than one way is included in the request to take tasks on!

Likewise, the pastor's role in partnership with the Council is to model and carry out shared leadership. There is too much in this report to be done by one person and even if it were possible, it would be undesirable and unhealthy. Mutuality between pastor and lay leadership will be important. Including the pastor and lay leaders in the oversight and carrying out of this work will provide a broad base for the congregation to move forward.

## CONCLUSION

Like many congregations in today's world, Christ's Evangelical Lutheran Church is at a crossroads. In today's world, there will be anxiety about the future and hope for what is to come – these will live in tension for the next several months as this process unfolds. The leaders and members will do well to remember that this is normal and to support and pray for each other as they move into the next phase of their life as a congregation.

It is important to remember that Christ's Evangelical Lutheran Church has a rich and important past and has been a vibrant ministry in the Lewisburg area for a long time. Reflections by leaders and members alike show good feelings about the congregation and a deep appreciation for the congregation and its assets. They have been blessed with good leadership and good resources for ministry.

In addition, the current leadership has been proactive about this visioning process. Unlike leaders in some settings, they have not put off for the next people to figure this out from scratch. Instead, leaders have committed to being proactive and are better prepared to identify key issues the congregation will be working on and the kind of pastor(s) and other staff they are searching for. Good job! This will likely serve you well in attracting the next leaders and also allow you to do things that you are clear matter. Pursuing these is important.

A word of caution is in order. Because the congregation is getting by with the current configuration, it will be tempting to take the easy way out and try to do a minimalist approach to things. Some will naturally be concerned about adding staff and the risk/cost associated with that. This is natural and overextending is always a fear. But the congregation is currently too disconnected from the community and the current staff is too stretched to do anything about that.

Perpetuating this for the next chapter will mean increasing disconnections from the community and a congregation that begins to age into a point of weakness. While an intelligent plan for adding staff is needed, not doing anything in this window of opportunity would be, in my mind, a missed opportunity and even riskier in the long term. The congregation has a chance to seize the moment now or the opportunity will soon be gone again.

In the end, Christ's Evangelical Lutheran Church is blessed with what it needs to make the next chapter exciting. The key will be always remembering to ask, "What does God want to happen here?" and the accompanying, "How can we at CELC help make that happen?" Keeping these at the center of congregational life and planning will ensure that God's will is foremost in the minds of the leaders. Where that happens, people are usually surprised by good things and have much for which to be thankful.