

**Zion Lutheran Church
North Highlands, California**

Transition Team – 2016-2017

Executive Summary

Members of the Team: John Berchielli, Jackie Carbaugh, George Crispen, Cindy Fischer, John Foster, Jeff Haggard, Tom Hintz, Fran Kaiser, Monica McCurdy, Dan Stone, David Brauer, Jim Morrison, Rev. Philip Tesch, Pastor.

The Transition Team (TT) met from November, 2016 through May, 2017. We used the skills of wonderful TT volunteers to take notes of our conversations, observations, conclusions, and recommendations. We “voted” on nothing, but we did rank some things and reached consensus before moving on. We used a teleconference function to enable real-time remote participation and delayed playback of our meetings.

OUR HISTORY

We read the history of Zion, using the 50th Anniversary history compiled in 2004. We relied on the collective memories of TT members and annual reports for 2005 – 2016.

We noted that Zion was the first church in North Highlands, and had overcome some significant challenges in its history, including a fire which destroyed the first building under construction, and the presence and closing of McClelland AF base. Zion made a decision to remain in its current location rather than to relocate.

We believe God blessed us richly when we had a Director of Christian Education on staff.

HOW THE SIZE OF OUR CONGREGATION IMPACTS ITS FUNCTIONS

Arlin Rothauge’s research on congregation sizes clearly places Zion in the category of a “pastoral” church (as compared with Family, Program, or Corporation churches) when average weekly attendance is the measurement. In 2016, Zion’s average weekly attendance was 136. The LCMS average was

128 in 2015. During the past five years, our attendance has declined by 15 people each year.

“Pastoral churches” usually have the following characteristics:

The pastor is involved in almost everything.

People expect the pastor to be at (almost) every activity and to do most of the pastoral work.

More people are involved in decision making than the other three types.

Leadership circles determine who becomes involved and integrated.

Unless there is a significant change (upward or downward) in attendance, Zion will continue to function as a pastoral church.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE LIFE CYCLE OF A CONGREGATION

As a living organism, congregations go through a life cycle, consisting of

Growth stages: Birth > Infancy > Childhood > Adolescence > Adulthood

Aging stages: Maturity > Empty Nest > Retirement > Old Age > Death

We measured our congregational behaviors and attitudes, and came to the conclusion that we are largely in the “Empty Nest” stage, nearly into the “retired” stage. [The complete document is available at

<http://www.stpaulsgb.org/filerequest/2448> . Those who have experienced or know of couples who describe themselves as empty nesters know the typical family characteristics.

From the congregational perspective it looks like this:

* Empty Nest starts with a spirit of nostalgia. The hope exists that tomorrow will bring a return of yesterday. The stories told by long-term members of the glory years are not recognizable to newcomers as identifying the same congregation. People talk specifically about the way things used to be. Most of the dreams are of events of the past instead of visions of the future.

* Congregational members and regular attendees begin to forget that it was an empowering vision that helped them to realize their greatest potential during Adulthood. A few people who realize what is happening begin to press the leaders of the congregation to respond with greater zeal to the opportunities and challenges the congregation faces.

* Programs, or ministries, which had just finished rising to their greatest qualitative height during Maturity, now are in quantitative decline.

Soon they will experience qualitative decline. However, congregations notice the loss of numbers first. It notices that worship attendance is decreasing, as well as the attendance in various programs, ministries and activities.

* Quality drops as the same level of gifted and skilled people are not present to carry out the programs. As congregational members and attendees comment and act on the loss of quantity and quality, the loss intensifies.

* Relationships are still happening in the life of the congregation, but not at the rate that is sufficient to replace either the active people who are no longer attending, or the inactive people joining other congregations.

* The thoughts are to get back, not move forward, to the way we used to be. Whatever is not functioning to past standards must be the object of increased efforts to make it work better.

Being in the Empty Nest stage is not a death sentence, but it does indicate that without redevelopment or rebirth, Zion will continue on the normal life cycle and will experience additional decline. It is little comfort to observe that we have been going through the life cycle at a slower than normal pace. It is also possible that the retirement and old age stages could be longer than normal.

OUR CONNECTEDNESS TO THE LCMS

As a member congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, there are many ways we show the benefits of this membership.

- * Our worship services use the scripture series recommended by LCMS.
- * Our traditional services use orders of service produced by LCMS
- * We make available Portals of Prayer from Concordia Publishing House
- * Many of our Bible studies and all our confirmation use materials from CPH
- * We have historically had vicars serving at Zion
- * We are regular financial supports of our Synod and District
- * We provide annual reports to the LCMS
- * We use the Lutheran Church Extension Fund for loans and CDs
- * We have little or no participation in Lutheran Women's Missionary League, Lutheran Laymen's League, or National Youth Gatherings.

Rev. Tesch (who has experience in serving many LCMS churches) considers our connectedness to be average.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

In preparation for our study of our mission and vision, members of the TT read the book *Simple Church* (Rainer & Geiger). Without exception, TT members found the book to be stimulating and thought provoking. We recommend it to all of Zion's members, especially present and future leaders. The thesis of the book is that churches have become increasingly complex and dis-unified. The authors cite examples which support research findings which demonstrate the positive outcomes of simplifying structure and method.

Our study of our structure and our current vision statement led us to conclude that our mission is not clearly stated, and that we have a complex structure. Our mission statement is not "out front," and our vision statement, a product of our revitalization effort, is complex. Our previous experience with the Purpose Driven Church causes some confusion whether being purpose driven is our mission, vision, both, or neither.

We spent more time on mission and vision than on any other topic. TT members gathered examples of mission statements from Lutheran churches and other Christian denominations and ministries. We found many which we considered to be an improvement over our current vision/mission statements.

Mission statements are most powerful
when they describe why we are here (what we are all about)
when they are brief,
when they unify while enabling a wide range of activity,
when they echo the Gospel rather than the Law, and
when the life of the church presents many opportunities for its mention
and application.

These are some examples we found to be intriguing:

Connecting people to Christ

Love God, Love Others, Serve the World

Love God, Love people, Make Disciples

Knowing Jesus and Making Jesus Known

The TT recommends that Zion take the necessary steps to develop a new mission statement, that we use it for several years before revising our vision, and that we de-emphasize or leave behind us references to past programs or emphases which could be confusing or diluting.

OUR COMMUNICATION METHODS

No church communicates too much. The TT agreed that it is important to use a variety of communication methods if we want people to know about important things. We recognized that communication is a two-way street. No matter how earnestly we try to communicate a message, we end up relying on the receiver to do something to receive it effectively.

We evaluated 15 different ways we communicate (ranked by effectiveness).

Email (announcements, notices, general requests)

Sunday bulletin

email prayer circle

verbal announcements in church services

monthly News (mailed)

U.S. mail announcements

word of mouth

phone calls

screen projections (not used currently)

Facebook page

marquis sign

Web page

letters from Elders

posters on easels, walls

directional sign on Watt

We recognized that information becomes invisible when it retains its same appearance or content for extended periods.

THE SPECIAL QUALITIES DESIRED IN OUR NEW PASTOR

In view of the Transition Team's extended study and discussions, we believe there is a special need for our new pastor-elect to have certain God-given gifts or who has developed a high level of pastoral skills in certain areas of service.

We believe that the following pastoral obligations are critical at this time. It will be a special blessing for the pastor-elect to be especially strong in dealing with these obligations:

To demonstrate the mind and spirit of Christ as you serve the members of the congregation and equip them for Christ's mission to seek and save the lost;

To equip and enable the members of the congregation to serve one another and those outside the fellowship of the congregation;

To perform the functions of a pastor in an evangelical manner; to aid, counsel, and guide members of all ages and social conditions; to visit the sick and the dying; to admonish the indifferent and the erring; to support the members of the congregation as they extend that evangelical ministry to others;

We believe Zion has an above-average need for personal gifts or acquired skills in carrying out the following obligations:

To administer to us the Word of God in its full truth and purity as contained in the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as set forth in the confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as found in the Book of Concord;

To guard and promote faithfully the spiritual welfare of the members of this congregation, in particular to see to the instruction of the catechumens, both children and adults, in the Word and thus prepare them for communicant membership in the church;

To promote and guide the mission activity of the congregation as it is related to the local community and to endeavors of the Synod and its Districts, in particular to train workers and guide them in evangelism and to enlist the support of the congregation for mission work;

To serve the congregation as an example of Christian conduct; to endeavor earnestly to live in Christian unity with the members of the congregation, fellow workers, and sister congregations in the Synod; and by the grace of God to do everything possible for the edification of the congregation and the upbuilding of the church in Christ.