

# MANUAL FOR CONGREGATIONAL MISSION PLANNING

## *Discerning God's Mission For Our Congregation*

**Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

*As we are on the road together with Christ Jesus*



**"Road to Emmaus" Illustration with permission from The NEWSLETTER Newsletter**

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Special thanks is given to The Rev. Martha Clementson, former Bishop Assistant in the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod for her work on the original document from 2004 upon which this resource is based. Also, The Rev. Stanley Meyer, D. Min who serves as Bishop Assistant in the Northern Texas- Northern Louisiana Synod. Pastor Meyer wrote the original “A Model For Thinking About Mission” revised in this version and portions of the Bible Study included in this manual.

This document is available for download on the synod website: [www.swpasynod.org](http://www.swpasynod.org).

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# PART I: INTRODUCTION



## Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Dear Friends in Christ,

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

“Faith comes from what is heard,” St. Paul declares in Romans 10:17, and in this compact phrase, he lifts up for the Church how essential our ears are to the faith into which we have been called through Holy Baptism. Our first encounter with the good news of Jesus was most likely a listening event, when a family member or Sunday School teacher told us a story of our savior. It is just as likely that our most recent experiences of being renewed in faith came from listening to someone open the scriptures to us, or from listening to a neighbor share his or her own faith story with us. Faith comes from what is heard.

This is a resource to help the congregations of our synod develop a mission plan, or renew their existing mission plan, by attending to a three-fold listening:

- **We listen first to God**, especially through the witness of Holy Scripture, to hear again or to hear more clearly what our faith identity is as a congregation of Jesus’ disciples.
- **We listen to our neighbors**, to those in recognizable leadership roles, and to those whose knowledge of the community is not as immediately visible, to learn about the context of our congregation’s life.
- **We listen to each other** so that as a congregation we may bring our identity and our context together in a clearly stated purpose.

Congregations across our whole church are engaged in this great work of listening. I am convinced that the faith that we share will grow and be renewed through this discipline, and I am eager to hear how your congregation has put that faith into practice!

With you in Christ,

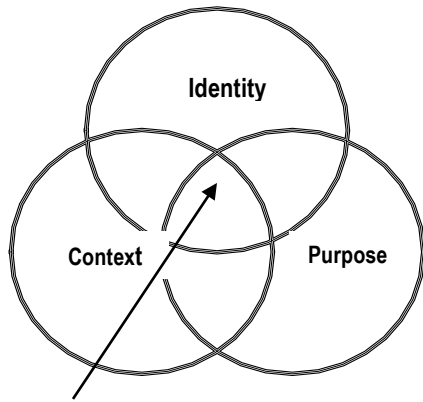
Kurt F. Kusserow, Bishop  
Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod

## OUR CONGREGATION’S TIME LINE

STEPS	GOAL DATE	DATE COMPLETED
Congregation Council discusses Bishop’s Letter, A Model for Thinking About Mission and looks over “Our Congregation’s Time Line.” Council appoints who will serve on the team to oversee this process (4-12 people – based on congregation’s size – with a member or two of council included; a leader should be appointed); Sets a date for the team’s commissioning in worship (See Leader’s Guide for suggested Order of Worship).		
First Meeting: The Planning Team. Discusses the planning process using “A Model for Thinking About Mission” and “Our Congregation’s Time Line”; Develops a schedule for the process. Decides if arrangements to work with another local congregation(s) would be helpful.		
Second Meeting: First Bible Study; Determine the community leaders with whom we will converse and the process we will follow; Encourage additional contexts where the Bible studies could be used.		
Third Meeting: Second Bible Study; Update the planning for the community leader meeting; Hold Community Leader meeting between this and Fourth Meeting.		
Fourth Meeting: Third Bible Study; Discuss what we learned from the meeting with the community leaders.		
Multiple Meetings as needed: Begin designing the Mission Plan, based out of the Three Listenings, if a current plan is not in place; If a Mission Plan is in place, review and revise it in the light of what we’ve learned in the Three Listenings.		
Report to council and reshape plan as needed.		
Share the mission plan with the congregation then re-look at it in light of feedback		
Once the congregation has positively received the plan, submit synod report.		
Carry out the plan to further God’s mission.		

**A MODEL FOR THINKING ABOUT MISSION:**  
*Pursuing the Three Listenings*

**Discerning God's Mission for Us**



**Mission**

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***Guided by and Rooted in the Spirit***

To know your mission is to know your purpose and calling. But how do we discern what our true mission is? How does a congregation identify the “main thing” that God is asking of them? The diagram at left suggests a way to begin to zero in on an answer.

Discerning your congregation’s mission can be described as prayerfully pursuing three listenings. Each listening is essential: listening to God in scripture, prayer and discernment; listening to our neighbors in our communities; and listening to each other and our partners throughout the Church discerning the gifts and assets God has provided for us to be about mission.

Listening to God in scripture, prayer and discernment reveals our Identity (who and whose we are). Listening to our neighbors in our communities reveals our Context (the Holy Spirit helps us to hear both the challenges and goals of those around us). Listening to each other within our congregations – and our partners through the Church – reveals our Purpose in mission (how our gifts and assets might enable us to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and action with our neighbors).

Then, grounding ourselves in prayer and reflection both privately and in the group, we can stay fixed on what God is saying to us. We can then ask the specific questions about our congregation’s mission and discover the specific steps to which we are being called to live out that mission in our community.

## **An Order of Worship for A Time of Prayerful Discernment and Commissioning of Mission Planning Team**

*The congregation is seated*

Today we dedicate ourselves as the people of God in this place to a time of prayerful discernment of the call we have received to be engaged in God's mission for the life of this particular community and the world, as we recognize those who have offered themselves for service to God through the ministry of serving on our mission planning team.

*The leader announces the names of those to be commissioned and invites them to come forward.*

A reading from Acts:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Acts 1:6-14, (NRSV)

L: In Holy Baptism, we are called to a life of faithful service and witness here and to the ends of the earth. We seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit through prayer and the study of God's Word together, as the people of God in this place as we begin this intentional time of discernment, seeking clarification of our purpose in God's mission of redemption, healing and wholeness in the world.

Our congregation has appointed a Mission Planning Team to facilitate this time of listening and prayer; visioning and strategic planning.

(Names of Mission Planning Team), You have been asked to serve this congregation as members of the Mission Planning Team. Will you give yourself joyfully to this responsibility, dedicating yourself to prayer and the study of God's Word open to receiving the quiet guiding voice of the Holy Spirit?

*Response:* I will, with God's help.

L: You have been given many gifts to build up the body of Christ.  
Will you be open to receive the witness of others and to walk with them in this journey of faith?

*Response:* I will, with God's help.

L: May God, who has chosen you for this task, graciously dwell in you and give you the strength and compassion to fulfill it.

*The congregation stands*  
*The leader then addresses the congregation.*

L: Will you, as people of God, dedicate yourself to daily praying for this congregation, that each of us might learn how we are called together to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ in this time and place?

**C: We will**

L: Will you support and encourage these members of the Mission Planning Team, remembering them in prayer and accepting them as partners in the gospel?

**C: We will.**

L: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you**

L: Let us pray,  
Direct us and guide us Lord God, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and extend to us your continual help; that in all our works, begun, continues and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.  
(ELW pg. 86)

*The Prayers of the Church may be placed here*

*The peace is shared.*

L: The peace of the Lord be with you all

**C: And also with you.**

# PART II – *Listening to God*: Bible Studies

## First Study: Discipleship – We Follow Jesus

### Opening the Book of Faith: Luke 5:1-11

*Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. (NRSV)*

### Asking Questions

- Did this crowd seem to fill in from the front or from the back? Why might that be?
- From all we know who had more practical fishing experience – the fishermen or Jesus?
- What did the big catch reveal to Simon Peter and the others?
- Was there a connection between their old life and the new one to which Jesus called?
- Who were they now following and how would that be lived out?
- Who do you follow and how does that get lived out?
- Who does your congregation follow and how does that get lived out?



## Food for Thought

Often being a disciple is thought of as subscribing to a set of beliefs or following a set of behaviors and practices. But being a disciple might more accurately be thought of as having entered into *a way of being that then results in a way of doing* – fishers for fish become fishers for people. Discipleship – following Jesus - is becoming a new self or a different self because ones whole orientation to the world has changed. How one views people, purpose, future, urgency, values, and commitment changes. The disciple is a person with a new vision; he or she is a new creation. The calling of Jesus, the power of the Good News, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and community life in the experience of the early Christians made them natural and urgent witnesses to the good things they had discovered. Do you think of yourself as a disciple of Jesus Christ involved in the community of a local church to proclaim the Gospel in words and actions, or do you think of yourself as a member of a local church with the duty of seeing to its survival by getting new members to help meet the budget? We are moving toward mission when the former thinking is understood by more and more people in the life of the congregation.

## Moving Toward Mission

Are you energized to be a witness of the life that you have as a disciple of Jesus? Or, does the whole idea of evangelism in any form bring up a certain anxiety or nervousness within. It is often hard to find people to be involved with a church's Evangelism Committee or Team. Yet, witnessing can be a natural expression of your faith.

Witnessing is:

- highly relational; it is one person sharing with another – friend to friend, parent to child and child to parent, worker to co-worker.
- highly reflective; it is conversation about the transformation that occurs in one's worldview, values, and commitments because of Jesus.
- highly immediate; it is dialog about the experience of life and conviction in that moment; it is sharing ones own spiritual journey.
- highly incarnational; your interaction with this person or these people, through the work of the Holy Spirit, becomes an encounter with Jesus for them and you.

Witnessing is a mentoring activity in which there is freedom to explore, question, and share. It accepts people where they are, but it also seeks to help people take a next step in their spiritual life. Witnessing is a teaching activity which should not be confused with what happens in the worship hour, for worship is about adoration. To limit ones spiritual feeding to adoration (worship) without coupling it with learning (discipling) is to miss the opportunity to have balance in ones growth as a disciple and a witness for Christ.

Think of someone in your circle of friends and acquaintances who is “unchurched.” You have the opportunity to be a part of God's mission of grace and love to that person. Together with the others in this team, make the commitment to begin praying for one specific person to come to know or grow deeper in their life journeys with Jesus. As you faithfully pray for that person, begin to look for opportunities in word and action to share the love of Christ. This is not about getting them to “church.” This is about

leading them into a closer journey with our Savior – and theirs. Be ready to share in the coming weeks how God is at work in this relationship.

### **Digging Deeper**

Read John chapter 4 and the story of the Woman at the Well. What can you learn from that witnessing conversation that Jesus has with the woman? What can you learn from the woman’s witnessing to her village?

### **Prayer Time**

*O God, we are children of your presence and your promises. We are shaped by your love and filled with your grace. Make of us what you will, that we may be your people in this world, bearing witness to your goodness and salvation. May those around us be touched by your Holy Spirit because of our words and deeds, for the sake of Christ, our Lord. Amen*

While it is possible to just use the prayer above to close your study, it could also be an opening or closing prayer to a more expanded time of prayer. One possibility would be to stand and gather the group in a circle, holding each others’ hands. Each person could be asked to pray for one hope that they have for the growth in mission of your congregation. When done with their petition they squeeze the hand of the next person to indicate it is now that person’s turn to pray. This could start to the left of the leader. If a person did not have something they felt ready to pray they could just squeeze the hand of the next person and the prayer circle moves on.

It would also be possible to stay seated and ask someone to open the prayer time. The leader allows time for others to pray as they feel led to do so. When a significant time of quiet comes, the leader can close the prayer time.

## **Second Study: Who is the “Church?”**

### **Opening the Book of Faith: Acts 2:1-4, 38-47**

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability...Peter said to [the crowd], “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.*

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (NRSV)*

### **Asking Questions**

- What were the key beginning points for the forming of the Church?
- Who is the promise of the gospel for?
- What was the shape of life in the early Christian community?
- How can this guide the shape of our life together as the Church today?
- What was the ongoing result?

### **Food for Thought**

The early church centered its life around:

Learning how to live out the gospel through the teaching of the apostles  
Gathering for fellowship  
Sharing in the Supper and prayers  
Helping all in any need  
Increasing in numbers

The early church was formed through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. We become the church through water and the Word through the Holy Spirit in Baptism. In the affirmation of faith/confirmation we recall our baptismal covenant:

*The pastor addresses those making affirmation:*

You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in Holy Baptism: to live among God's faithful people, to hear his Word and share in his supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

*And the response is:* I do, and I ask God to help and guide me. (ELW, 236)

What similarities do you find with this description of faithful baptismal living and the life of the early church?

The church is those that are gathered for:

- Worship (Word, Sacrament, prayer)
- Discipleship (teaching, learning and living the Gospel)
- Fellowship (coming together, common meals)
- Ministry (Helping others, service)
- Evangelism (Sharing the good news, adding others)

### **Moving Toward Mission**

As a group identify and list all the current ministries/groups/activities of your congregation in each of the above areas. Record them on a white board or flip chart paper. Step back and analyze the result. Is there any area that you concentrate on? Anywhere you are currently minimally involved or not at all? Keep this for further reference.

### **Digging Deeper**

Read John 17 and Ephesians 4:11-16. Circle the words that have to do with worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship and ministry.

### **Prayer Time**

*“God our creator, the resurrection of your Son offers life to all the peoples of the earth. By your Holy Spirit, kindle in us the fire of your love, empowering our lives for service and our tongues for praise, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.”* Prayer of the Day, Day of Pentecost Year C

While it is possible to just use the prayer above to close your study, it could also be an opening or closing prayer to a more expanded time of prayer. One possibility would be to stand and gather the group in a circle, holding each others' hands. Each person could be asked to pray for one hope that they have for the growth in mission of your congregation. When done with their petition they squeeze the hand of the next person to indicate it is now that person's turn to pray. This could start to the left of the leader. If a person did not have something they felt ready to pray they could just squeeze the hand of the next person and the prayer circle moves on.

It would also be possible to stay seated and ask someone to open the prayer time. The leader allows time for others to pray as they feel led to do so. When a significant time of quiet comes, the leader can close the prayer time.

#### **Resources:**

*Leading on Purpose, Intentionality and Teaming in Congregational Life* by Eric Burtness. Chapter 2. Part of the “Lutheran Voices” Series, Augsburg Fortress, 2004  
*Living Lutheran, Renewing your Congregation*, by Dave Daubert Chapter 3. Part of the “Lutheran Voices” Series, Augsburg Fortress, 2007

# Third Study - Understanding Mission

## Opening the Book of Faith: Luke 4:16-30

*When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring good news  
to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'*

*And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." ' And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.' [NRSV]*

### Asking Questions

- How does this passage specifically express Jesus' understanding of the purpose of his ministry?
- How is this purpose statement of Jesus connected to the wider mission of God in and for the world as revealed elsewhere in scripture?
- Can you think of ways that Jesus worked to fulfill these purposes?
- When did Jesus refer to this purpose statement during the course of his ministry? Why and to what purpose? (See Luke 7:18-23)

- How does Jesus' purpose help us, as the body of Christ in the world today, to form a "purpose for mission" today?
- The people in Nazareth rejected Jesus and his message. Why? Does that stop Jesus?
- Discuss ways that seeking to actively participate in God's mission might disturb/anger members of a congregation today. Does that stop Jesus?

### **Food For Thought**

Share and discuss together the following quotes, especially in the context of the above passage and the life of your congregation:

"Life changing ministry begins when we help people to hunger for what God is up to rather than simply settling for getting by with what we can do. It is God's mission that sparks everything else, even for those of us who have been in the church for a long time." (Daubert, 30)

"Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism- "God's kingdom will come without our praying for it...but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us." He expresses our Lutheran understanding that God is in charge and it is all about God's work, but he also ended this section with the importance that we connect what God is up to with our lives.

"[Dietrich Bonhoeffer] dreamed of a church that did not exist primarily to serve its members but to stand as Christ's body, committed to being a part of manifesting God's dream...[He] wrote, 'the church is the church only when it exist for others.'" (Letters and Papers from Prison) (Daubert, 34, 35)

"All Christian mission is grounded in the mission of God. In fact it must be remembered that it is God's mission, not ours. Claimed as the body of Christ for the world, the church is sent forth as instruments of this mission. Each ministry must own the mission of God in its own context." (Daubert, 46)

### **Moving Toward Mission**

Give everyone in the group three 3x5 cards or large post it notes. Pause for a time of prayer, asking God to open your eyes to what God is doing and for the faith to follow even when one is unsure where that will lead. Pause for a moment of silence, and conclude with the Lord's Prayer. Ask each respond to the following question with three specific ideas:

**"If God has God's way with our congregation for five years,  
what do you see in our future?" (Daubert 48)**

After sufficient time, have each person share his or her thoughts and ideas. Group similar notes into clusters and label the clusters. Discuss how these ideas could be part of what God is up to in the world and in your specific context. How could it change the dynamics and ministry of your congregation? How can these visions of the possible guide your congregation's ministry?

### **Digging Deeper**

Read Deuteronomy 10:17-22; 15:11; Isaiah 58:6; 61:1-2 Amos 8; Micah 6:8; Luke 1:39-46; Luke 6:17-49 and Romans 8:19-20. Or search scriptures for references to the poor or justice. Is there an overall theme to God's dream for the world?

## **Prayer Time**

*“Sovereign God, ruler of all hearts, you call us to obey you, and you favor us with true freedom. Keep us faithful to the ways of your Son, that, leaving behind all that hinders us, we may steadfastly follow your paths, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.”* Prayer of the Day, Fifth Sunday After Pentecost Year C

While it is possible to just use the prayer above to close your study, it could also be an opening or closing prayer to a more expanded time of prayer. One possibility would be to stand and gather the group in a circle, holding each others' hands. Each person could be asked to pray for one hope that they have for the growth in mission of your congregation. When done with their petition they squeeze the hand of the next person to indicate it is now that person's turn to pray. This could start to the left of the leader. If a person did not have something they felt ready to pray they could just squeeze the hand of the next person and the prayer circle moves on.

It would also be possible to stay seated and ask someone to open the prayer time. The leader allows time for others to pray as they feel led to do so. When a significant time of quiet comes, the leader can close the prayer time.

### **Resources:**

*Living Lutheran: Renewing your Congregation*, by Dave Daubert, Chapter 4.  
Part of the “Lutheran Voices” Series, Augsburg Fortress, 2007

## **PART III – LISTENING TO OUR NEIGHBORS: A Conversation with Community Leaders**

We are living in the context of community. Before starting a mission, a congregation should look at its context. (Context = the area around the church where members live and work. Context is also global.)

**One way to discover more about our neighborhood is to make contacts within the community. This may be done in a number of ways:**

- 1. Individual contacts: take a community leader to lunch, or make an appointment to meet them in their office.**
- 2. Group conversation: bring a number of community leaders together for lunch or an evening meeting.**

**Who are the leaders in your community?** Here is a partial list of leaders who have valuable insights and information about the community. You will want to select a few of these leaders from your community. Working together with other congregations may provide opportunities for a greater number of conversations.

Chief of Police	Fire Chief	Mayor
Township Supervisor	Teachers	School board
City Council	PTO's/ PTA's	Civic Groups
Chamber of Commerce	Bankers	School Officials
Congressional Representatives		Boy/Girl Scouts

Before making contacts in the community, decide whether it might be more helpful to join in these conversations with other Lutherans or your local ecumenical ministerium. **The goal is to gain a better understanding of community needs and opportunities.** You will also want to learn how the church is viewed by the community.

**It will be helpful to prepare a list of questions before meeting with the community leaders.** Always start off on a positive note. Be realistic about how much you can discuss in the time period agreed upon. Here are some questions to start your thinking:

1. What are the strengths of our community?
2. What are the population trends?
3. Do you see “fears” that people have?
4. What would you consider to be three major problems in this community?
5. List strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats.
6. Where have you seen churches helpful in addressing community needs?
7. Where can the church help today?
8. Do you have an impression of our congregation?

Listen carefully and with an open mind. Ask questions to clarify. Take notes to refer to later. List things that you learned about your community that are important to ministry planning.

A resource to consult for additional information and options would be:

**Our Context—Exploring Our Congregation and Community, Mark D. Johns, the Congregational LEADER Series, Augsburg Fortress, 2002**



# **PART IV – *Listening to Each Other:***

## ***Developing A Mission Plan***

### **The Mission Plan Itself: A Guide**

Once we have grounded ourselves in prayer and Scripture, we can truly explore what it means to be the people of God in a particular location. Hearing from local community leaders adds insight into the specific needs and opportunities that are present in our context. Now it is time to ask ourselves what God is calling us to be about in this place, at this time.

#### **STEP ONE: The Beginning Plan Discussions**

We know that as Christians we are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ – embraced as simply as being ones who obediently respond to our Lord’s call, *Follow me*. And yet, the Affirmation of Baptism liturgy reminds us that the covenant God made with us in Holy Baptism calls us to: *live among God’s faithful people, hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and strive for justice and peace in all the earth*. The model ELCA constitution for congregations in Section C4-02.e. states: *To participate in God’s mission, this congregation as a part of the Church shall: ... Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian Calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world*. These provide helpful background as we consider some important questions regarding mission.

Three key areas of ministry for every congregation would be worship life, the nurturing of the faith of the congregation and outreach into the local community and the world beyond in the name of Christ. It could be helpful here to have a brief discussion around these areas that could lead into the next activity.

- How is the worship life of our congregation?
  - Are there ways we could strengthen what we have in place?
  - Would there be something new that we could add that could strengthen it?
- How do we nurture the faith of the people of our congregation?
  - How could we enhance the opportunities for young and old alike to learn more about the Bible and grow in a faithful relationship with our Lord?
  - In what ways could we strengthen our fellowship experiences?
  - In what ways could we strengthen our stewardship education?
- How do we reach out beyond our congregation to the challenges and needs of our neighbors?
  - What have we learned about the needs of people in our community? Are there people with needs that are not being met by others?
  - How are we showing Christ’s love through our presence here in this community?
  - How are we participating in service and witness to people who are not in our immediate neighborhood – including our support of ministry through our synod and the churchwide organization?

You may feel that the above discussion helped to get you started toward some goals. Or, you may choose to do more evaluating using STEP TWO.

## **STEP TWO: Going Deeper Using SWOT or SOAR**

Some congregations have found it helpful at this point to look at their ministry and their context from the standpoint of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis. This is a process that takes a small group of people, knowledgeable about the congregation and its context, into an examination of the Strengths and Weaknesses they see in the ministries of the congregation. Then, they take a look at the context and see the Opportunities and Threats that are a part of the larger neighborhood that they serve.

This can be done by focusing on one letter or category at a time. (*What are the strengths that we see of the ministry of Faith Lutheran Church? What are the weaknesses that we see in our ministry? What are the Opportunities that we have with the community around us and beyond? What are the threats that we experience from our community around us and beyond?*) The group can just call out examples to someone writing on poster paper (this way the answers can be saved as opposed to a chalk or white board). An alternative is to make Post-it notes available to everyone and they write their examples on the notes and then they are put up on the wall of the room. The advantage of the Post-it note technique is that the more quiet members of the group also have the opportunity to have input.

An alternative to SWOT is SOAR. SOAR is a resource that has been built out of the traditional SWOT process. The S and O still stand for Strengths and Opportunities. The A stands for Aspirations and the R stands for Results. (This comes from the book [The Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths-Based Strategy](#), Jacqueline M. Stavros and Gina Hinrichs, Thin Book Publishing, 2009 – [www.thinbook.com](http://www.thinbook.com)). The S and O process is still the same. Aspirations then pursues the questions around what the congregation cares most deeply about. What are its or their passions? Results then makes sure that a way of measuring success is provided. How might we be able to measure how that we are meeting our goals? SOAR is a more positive focus for this discussion and worth exploring and even purchasing the booklet that provides insight into the process.

## **STEP THREE: Discussing a Mission/Purpose Statement & Guiding Principles**

**A. If your congregation has a Mission/Purpose Statement**, review it. Make changes, if necessary, based on your previous discussions. You can evaluate by asking:

- Does our Mission/Purpose Statement helpfully describe the mission of our congregation in a concise manner? Does it capture the current mission to which you are being called?
  - In [Living Lutheran](#) (P. 49) Dave Daubert states: *The primary reason to have a purpose statement is not to communicate memorably with the world. The primary reason is to remind ourselves of what we are here for. We clarify and focus on our purpose so our ministry can stay centered on what we believe God wants us to center on. When we lose our center we struggle in our ministry.*

- Have we developed some Guiding Principles for the work of our ministry?
  - Again, in Living Lutheran (p.90) Daubert states: *Guiding principles are the central things that are to be held to in all circumstances. They are the non-negotiable. By discerning them and articulating them ahead of time, they become useful in the midst of difficult decisions. It is vital to be clear about them and to agree to them, not out of a sense of legalism, but out of a desire to attain the vision that God has for us.*
  - He continues: *Guiding principles are:*
    1. *Directly related to the biblical values of Jesus and God's vision for the church in mission.*
    2. *Only meaningful in the context of God's purpose.*
    3. *Articulated in ways that will be helpful in making decisions on the journey.*
    4. *Clear enough and few enough to be helpful.*
    5. *Ideals to which the community agrees to be held accountable. They may conflict with current practices.*
  - Guiding Principles are not required, but could be just the resource for your congregation as you deal with important planning decisions now and in the future. You may want to pray about whether it is time for your congregation to make use of some Guiding Principles.
  
- Do we still have room to work in meeting our previous goals and do they still make sense in light of what we've learned in our conversations with community leaders?
  
- Are those goals in line with the call that we've heard through participating in prayer and Bible Study?
  
- Have we accomplished some of the Mission Plan's goals, but find that there are still some goals that have not been met and that could still be focused upon in the future?
  
- If so, would it be helpful to just discuss some additional goals that would extend our plan for a year or two – using the work that we did to develop the current plan?
  
- **If you find that more work needs to be done, portions or all of the following should be helpful to you.**

**B. If your congregation has no mission plan in place,** you are ready to write one!

Begin by keeping in mind the three listenings introduced in the beginning of this booklet: Listening to God (Our Identity), Listening to our Neighbors (Our Context) and Listening to Each Other (Our Purpose). Mission planning happens when these components are considered in relationship to one another.

**If you do not have a Purpose/Mission Statement or Guiding Principles,** this would be an important time to develop those resources for your congregation before proceeding any further. See the resources in the Leader's Guide under **Digging Deeper**. Living Lutheran by Dave Daubert is particularly designed to help a congregation develop a Purpose Statement and Guiding Principles.

**If you have a functioning Purpose/Mission Statement and Guiding Principles** keep them in mind as you work on this plan. Keep in mind the answers developed in your Third Bible Study and your work with the SWOT or SOAR analysis, if you chose to try it.

Be sure to pray as you step into this process and in important moments throughout the process. We are seeking God’s guidance – the leading of the Holy Spirit – as we look to plan the immediate future of our congregation.

Start your work by developing a basic goal statement for your group to complete. It would be an uncompleted statement like the following: In 4 years \_\_\_\_ Lutheran Church will be a stronger, more effective congregation because we are \_\_\_\_\_. You can adjust the words of this basic statement to suit your sense of describing a strengthened congregation. Four years is chosen because experience has shown that a 2-3 year period for a plan works well. It is long enough to work with before creating the next plan, but short enough to realistically see into the future.

Provide the group with a stack of Post-it notes and dark making pens like Sharpies (easier to see these when posted on the wall). Ask them to write short, descriptive phrases that complete that sentence and describe positive ministry taking place in your congregation. They should think about all of the areas of ministry of your congregation and what could be strengthened in the coming years. It is helpful to be specific and even include numbers or percentages when appropriate. Each Post-it should have a different idea. They can write as many as they can, but it is important to get a good amount from each person. Depending on the size of your group, you can determine what that might be. Probably at least 5 or 5-10 will be necessary.

Have a large open space on one wall in the room where you are meeting. It may be helpful to cover the wall with some poster paper because your group will be sticking their ideas on the wall. Post-its sometimes do not stick well to some paint or surfaces.

Once they have filled in their Post-it’s have them stick them up on the wall in no particular order.

Now the real fun begins!

Without any talking, have the group look over all of the ideas on the wall and move them together into columns of connected ideas. If someone keeps moving a particular item back and forth between two groups, create an additional Post-it with that idea so that it can be in both columns.

Once columns of common ideas have been established, get back together and start talking. Work together to develop a short title statement for each column. The titles should be short, yet seek to summarize the items in the column. These title statements can then be written on a Post-it and placed at the top of each column as “Headers”. There should be “goal language” in the title statement or header. It should not just say something like “Worship” or “Fellowship.” It should say something more like “BECOMING A MORE INVITING AND VISIBLE CONGREGATION” or “WE WILL GROW IN FAITH THROUGH BIBLE STUDY.”

These Headers and the ideas below them become the key resources for the development of your Mission Plan.

## **STEP FOUR: The Congregational Event**

This can now be the time to enable your congregation to have a better sense of the work that your planning team has been doing.

Invite all interested members of the congregation to a special planning event. It usually works best by being built around a meal.

Create posters to share each Header area with a ministry goal and the ideas underneath them. Have these displayed around your Fellowship Hall as people gather for the dinner so that there are ministry goal stations around the room. (It could be an evening activity built around desserts or a Sunday activity after worship built around a luncheon). Have a representative at each ministry station ready to answer questions about that particular ministry area.

Enjoy the food.

Have a presenter share in a brief presentation what has taken place to get the ministry and then what each goal entails. The presenter asks everyone to provide additional suggestions for any of the goals. Provide idea cards with a different color for each ministry goal station on the tables where people are eating or at each station. Explain that after this event, the planning team will take all of the ideas and develop a Three Year Plan for ministry from what has been assembled.

## **STEP FIVE: The Three-Year Mission Plan**

Then, your planning team will meet to take all of these different goals and their ideas and create a 2-3 year plan for mission for your congregation.

Trying to do every idea that arises will not be realistic, so depending on the size and energy level of your congregation, you will need to select a few specific ministries on which to focus for each year of the plan.

This is an important time for specific prayer. It is easy to get caught up in the process and lose track of the fact that this is an experience of spiritual discernment. Pray specifically about each area – seeking the leading of the Holy Spirit in the following discussion of prioritizing.

As you create each goal keep in mind the acronym SMART. This means that the goals should try to be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely.

Finally, it is also important to agree upon who will be responsible for seeing that each priority gets put into action. This could be a helpful discussion with the Congregation Council as the plan is being considered. Together with the council, the planning team could work out what person, team or committee might take responsibility for a particular goal. Keep your Congregation Council updated on the work that has been accomplished. Submitting the final plan to council for approval needs to take place. Then, sharing the plan widely through the congregation will build further ownership and excitement among more people.

An outline something like you see below may be helpful.

## THREE YEAR PLAN FOR MISSION

	<u>WORSHIP</u>	<u>NURTURE</u>	<u>OUTREACH</u>
<b>YEAR ONE</b>	•	•	•
<b>YEAR TWO</b>	•	•	•
<b>YEAR THREE</b>	•	•	•

## **Digging Deeper**

**This isn't our mission, it is Christ's mission. We are the hands and feet of Christ at work in the world. What is the mission that can best serve Christ in our context? Here are some additional tools to help in discerning this mission and developing a plan of action for the next two to three years.**

The development of a Purpose (or Mission) Statement and Guiding Principles has been a helpful process for many congregations. There are a number of books that can lead a Mission Planning Team through this process. Here are a few (some will actually provide a guide for the entire mission planning process, as well). They are available for you to examine through the Resource Center at the Synod Office:

**Living Lutheran: Renewing your Congregation, Dave Daubert, Augsburg Fortress, 2007.** Dave Daubert provides a practical how-to guide that will enable church leaders to help individual congregations walk through the renewal process for themselves. Creative and informative, the book provides a straightforward approach that helps congregations reclaim Lutheran tradition for the 21st century. It particularly focuses upon the development of a Purpose Statement and Guiding Principles and includes questions for individual or group reflection and an additional resources section.

**Reclaiming the "L" Word: Renewing the Church from Its Lutheran Core, Kelly A. Fryer, Augsburg Fortress.** This is a book about renewing congregations by recognizing and living out the core teachings of the Lutheran faith. In the introduction, the author states: "I hope that people of every denomination will find this book helpful as they wrestle with these important issues within their own traditions. But this little book is primarily written for those who call themselves Lutheran and, specifically, those who are members of ELCA congregations, and it is intended to help us answer central questions: Who are we? What DOES it mean to be a Lutheran today, anyway? And, why does it matter?"

**A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation, Rick Rouse and Craig Van Gelder, Augsburg Fortress, 2008.** A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation reveals seven transformational keys, using real-life case studies to illustrate each key. A reflective milestone framework, including discovery questions for each chapter, ground the book in a practical process.

**Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations: Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, The Alban Institute, 2003.**

Gil Rendle and Alice Mann cast planning as a "holy conversation," a congregational discernment process about three critical questions: Who are we? What has God called us to do or be? Who is our neighbor? They equip congregational leaders with a broad and creative range of ideas, pathways, processes, and tools for planning. By choosing the resources that best suit their needs and context, congregations will shape their own strengthening, transforming, holy conversation. They will find a path that is faithful to their identity and their relationship with God.

**Pathway to Renewal: Practical Steps for Congregations, Daniel P. Smith and Mary K. Sellon, The Alban Institute, 2008.** No pastor can lead a congregation to renewal alone. it requires a complete change of heart for the whole congregation. Congregational renewal occurs when people engage communally in a transition in their very understanding of the nature and purpose of their church. This goes far beyond a simple retooling of the mission statement or addition of a few programs. Authors Mary Sellon and Daniel Smith lead congregations through this process of renewal, breaking down into understandable components what is happening in the people themselves that makes renewal efforts successful.

**Our Mission—Discovering God's Call to Us, Robin and John McCullough-Bade, the Congregational LEADER Series, Augsburg Fortress, 2002.** This book assists congregations in writing a

mission statement, establishing goals, and creating action plans to carry out those goals. The four strategic planning steps to help your congregation fulfill its mission: STOP to pray and discern if your congregation is fulfilling the will of God LOOK at God's word to make sure it is at the heart of your mission LISTEN to the mission mandate of Christ to establish goals for the congregation GO to implement your action plans with confidence and hope in God's blessings.

**Blueprint For Change: A Manual for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Congregation, Pastor Neal R. Boese, Seven Steps Ministries, P.O. Box 18036, Erlanger, KY 41018 ([www.nealboese.com](http://www.nealboese.com))** This 10 chapter manual is designed to help congregations focus on their Biblical mandate and reach out to those who do not know Jesus and His love for them. Church leadership is encouraged to use the questions at the end of each chapter to find ways to bring about change without creating conflict within the congregation.

**Some additional resources for approaching this mission planning in a different way could be:**

**Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism, Martha Grace Reese, Chalice Press, 2008 (Website: [www.Gracenet.info](http://www.Gracenet.info))**

Martha Grace Reese provides a study resource specifically geared to main-line congregations to help a pastor and congregational leaders work through the challenge of being better witnesses of the Gospel. Questions are provided for discussion at the end of each chapter. It also includes a 40-day Prayer Journal as part of the process.

**Natural Church Development – A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches**  
**Christian A. Schwarz, Church Smart Resources, 4<sup>th</sup> edition 2000**

Christian Schwartz cites research from around the world that demonstrates eight characteristics essential to growth in congregations. The book helps readers to see how they might apply the principles in their local setting. Our synod's Outreach Committee has trained coaches that can help your congregation work through the NCD process.

## **PEOPLE ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU**

As you process the information that you learned from community leaders and put together your mission plan, you might find it helpful to have a person to meet with you and coach you through some of the steps. If so, there are people available. Please call our Director for Evangelical Mission, Pastor Blair Morgan, at the Synod Office (412-367-8222) or e-mail him at [blair.morgan@elca.org](mailto:blair.morgan@elca.org) and he will help to connect you with a facilitator.